



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

IN REPLY REFER TO:

ARW/MBHP

SEP 24 1998

Mr. Craig Harrison  
Vice Chair for Conservation  
Pacific Seabird Group  
4001 North Ninth Street #1801  
Arlington, Virginia 22203

Dear Mr. Harrison:

Thank you for forwarding a copy of your correspondence to the Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Director, Ms. Jamie Clark, dated April 2, 1998. Please accept our apologies for the Service's delay in responding and our reassurance that the issue of seabird bycatch is a priority for the Service on a regional, national, and international scale. We share many of the concerns articulated in your letter and take this opportunity to describe our progress and priorities for the continued development of responsive and conservation oriented fisheries.

Obligations stemming from Endangered Species Act (ESA), Marine Mammal Act (MMA) and Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) provide the authorities and tools for initiating seabird bycatch reduction efforts. The Service recently focused bycatch reduction coordination efforts in the waters of Puget Sound, Washington, an area characterized by seabird concentrations, listed species occurrences, and overlapping commercial fisheries. This resulted in a series of coordination meetings with stakeholders including the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC), Native American tribes, and the commercial fishing industry. Our objective was to cooperatively develop seabird bycatch reduction measures for the primary Puget Sound fisheries of concern. In accordance with direction from the Secretary of Interior and Service policy, conservation measures resulting from section 7 consultations under ESA for Marbled Murrelet bycatch were first implemented in non-treaty fisheries. The broader issues of seabird bycatch relative to the MBTA are also being addressed in a manner consistent with these policies.

These cooperative efforts resulted in observer programs to document levels of bycatch, research to identify effective bycatch reduction options, and the implementation of seabird bycatch reduction regulations (net-modifications) in the 1998 non-treaty sockeye salmon season. As noted in your letter, implementing regulations was an important step in integrating seabird conservation with commercial fishery management. While this is a significant milestone, we recognize this represents only the first step in responsibly managing fisheries and conserving seabirds at the appropriate, and necessary, ecosystem scale.

With the implementation of seabird bycatch reduction measures in the non-treaty fishery underway, the Service promptly reinitiated contacts with the appropriate Native American tribes through the NWIFC. Following a technical, staff-level meeting to reinitiate dialogue on this issue, we are now coordinating a policy level session to discuss tribal participation in seabird conservation measures. We are optimistic that tribes will join the WDFW and non-treaty gillnetters in recognizing the need and value of implementing responsible conservation measures in shared waters and fisheries in the Puget Sound in 1999. The enclosed correspondence provides a summary of our recent contacts with the NWIFC.

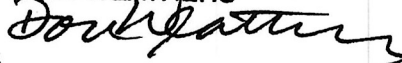
In recognition of the need to coordinate seabird bycatch reduction measures at the ecosystem and international scale, the Service requested international coordination of seabird bycatch reduction efforts with Canada at the recent meeting of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Trilateral Committee's, Migratory Bird Working Table. Specifically, the Service proposed a meeting with Canada in 1998 to coordinate on a seabird bycatch observer program, including standardization of methods and data reporting, as a starting point for developing collaborative strategies to reduce seabird bycatch in shared waters and fisheries. The request was positively received and representatives of the Canadian Wildlife Service are working with Service biologists to coordinate a bycatch working meeting in November.

In addition to efforts in Washington fisheries, the Service is also working with NMFS and the State of Alaska to initiate a seabird bycatch observer program in selected Alaska gillnet fisheries in 1999. Furthermore, the Service is actively working to reduce seabird bycatch in longline fisheries, particularly in Hawaii and Alaska. Internationally, along with several nongovernmental organizations including the Pacific Seabird Group, the Service has been an active participant in the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) technical Consultation on seabird bycatch in longline fisheries of the world. This worldwide Consultation on seabird bycatch was initiated at the request of the Service and the United States.

The Service is committed to continuing our efforts to initiate and coordinate seabird bycatch reduction at the necessary ecosystem and international levels. We will continue efforts to work in partnership with the various agencies, the commercial fishing industries, and other governments as appropriate to identify risks and develop coordinated strategies to minimize seabird bycatch. We anticipate a continued and increased level of coordination at the international level through the various wildlife and fishery venues including the Trilateral Committee, the Pacific Salmon Commission, the FAO, and continued efforts at the local level. The recent findings of reasonable and effective seabird bycatch reduction measures underscores the need to continue to strive for further development and implementation as a standard for responsible fisheries and migratory bird management. Your interest and commitment to furthering efforts to are appreciated.

Sincerely,

DON WEATHERS



ACTING Regional Director

Enclosure