


MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, AP, and SSC Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke 
Executive Director

DATE: December 2, 1992

SUBJECT: Harbor Seal and Killer Whale Population Status Report

ACTION REQUIRED

Receive NMFS report on harbor seals and killer whales

BACKGROUND

At this meeting, staff from the NMFS Marine Mammal Lab will provide a summary of recently completed 1992 survey results for harbor seals and killer whales. The content of this report is pertinent to Council decisions on the management of groundfish in both the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

Harbor Seals

The results of the summer 1992 harbor seal surveys in the GOA indicate that the population in the central and western Gulf of Alaska continues to decline. Counts from over 50 sites in the Kodiak Archipelago show a decrease of over 90 percent since 1984. Only about 2,900 harbor seals were counted in the central and western Gulf of Alaska in 1992 compared to over 22,800 in 1984. The number of harbor seals on Tugidak Island alone has decreased from over 6,900 in 1976 to less than 600 in 1992.

Killer Whales

Population assessment surveys were conducted for killer whales in the central and western Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea during the summer of 1992. A total of 12 pods were located, and 184 animals were counted by individual identification. As a by-product of the survey, researchers noted scarring, probably resulting from gunshot wounds, on members of seven pods (totaling 13 animals). The highest frequency of scarring (six cases) was noted in four pods located north of Unalaska Island. NMFS is concerned that shooting may be a significant source of mortality on the relatively small population of killer whales in Alaskan waters.