



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

November 22, 2022

Simon Kinneen, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
1007 West Third, Suite 400
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Chairman Kinneen:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reinitiated Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 consultation to evaluate the effects of the fisheries managed under the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish Fishery Management Plans, including State of Alaska parallel groundfish fisheries, on ESA-listed species and designated critical habitats.

NMFS continually evaluates compliance with the ESA and has determined that reinitiation of consultation is required to ensure the anticipated level of incidental take of listed species is authorized under the ESA; to consider the effects of newly listed species (endangered Western Pacific DPS humpback whales and threatened Mexico DPS humpback whales) and newly designated critical habitat (for the two DPSs of humpback whales as well as for Arctic ringed seals and Beringia DPS bearded seals) since the last consultations; and to update other information such as the most recent population numbers and trends for listed marine mammal species. The consultations will focus on the effects of the current fishery management regime (i.e. status quo), and NMFS will use the best scientific information available in the analyses. At this point, NMFS is not aware of any particular new information that suggests the Alaska groundfish fisheries have population level effects on ESA-listed species or critical habitats other than those effects already considered in previous consultations. NMFS will keep the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and stakeholders informed throughout the consultation process, beginning with an informational presentation at the December 2022 Council meeting.

NMFS has determined that allowing the groundfish fisheries to continue to operate during this reinitiation period will not violate ESA section 7(a)(2) or 7(d). These consultations will be a significant undertaking and will require considerable NMFS staff time and resources, but are necessary to update compliance with the ESA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jonathan M. Kurland".

Jonathan M. Kurland
Regional Administrator

