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ICE SEAL CO-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES DRAFT
 January 21, 2020
 9:00 am
 Dimond Center Hotel – 700 E Dimond Blvd, Anchorage, AK 99515

1. Call to Order

Called to order at 0900 by Chairman Adams

2. Invocation

Given by Sam Gosuk

3. Roll Call:

A quorum for a Co-Management committee meeting has 5 members

Ice Seal Committee:

- X Billy Adams, North Slope Borough present
- X Brandon Ahmasuk, Kawerak, Inc. present
- Emerson Moto, Maniilaq Association absent
- X¹ Helen Aderman, Bristol Bay Native Association present¹
- X Jennifer Hooper, Association of Village Council Presidents present

National Marine Fisheries Service

- X Jon Kurland, Alaska Region, Juneau present
- X Peter Boveng, MML, Seattle present
- X Barbara Mahoney, Alaska Region, Anchorage present

4. Introductions

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|---|
| Andrew Von Duyke | NSB Wildlife | ISC Executive Manager |
| Larinda Danner | NSB Wildlife | ISC Executive Assistant |
| Billy Adams | NSB Wildlife | ISC Chair & Regional Representative (NSB) |
| Joe Mello Leavitt | Utqiagvik | Hunter Representative (NSB) |

¹ Helen’s flight was delayed due to weather and so she was not present at the start of this meeting. However, because there were 6 members present, we had a quorum and could continue with the meeting. Helen arrived after lunch.

36	Jennifer Hooper	AVCP	Regional Representative (AVCP)
37	Albert Simon-1	Hooper Bay	Hunter Representative (AVCP)
38	Helen Aderman	BBNA	Regional Representative (BBNA) – delayed
39	Sam Gosuk	BBNA	Hunter Representative (BBNA)
40	Brandon Ahmasuk	Kawerak, Inc.	Regional Representative (Kawerak)
41	Jon Kurland	NMFS	Federal Co-Management Partner
42	Peter Boveng	NOAA/NMFS-MML	Federal Co-Management Partner
43	Barbara Mahoney	NMFS	Federal Co-Management Partner
44	Jared Nayakik	NSB Wildlife	
45	Raphaela Stimmelmayer	NSB Wildlife	
46	Nicole Kanayurak	NSB Wildlife	
47	Carla Sims Kayotuk	NSB Wildlife	
48	Lori Quakenbush	ADFG	
49	Shawn Carey	NMFS	
50	Michael Cameron	NOAA/NMFS-MML	
51	Tammy Olson	NOAA	
52	Albert Simon-2	Hooper Bay	
53	Marvin Okitkun	Kotlik	

54

5. Dispense with “Robert Rules of Order” and proceed by consensus

56 Adopted – but really not required because the need to proceed by consensus.
 57 Sam Gosuk was Helen’s alternate until her arrival.

58

6. Select a Chairman from the Ice Seal Committee

60 Billy Adams (ISC) was selected

61

7. Adopt the Agenda

63 Adopted unanimously

64

8. Approve the May 29, 2019 Ice Seal Co-Management Committee meeting minutes

66

67 Approved unanimously with following corrections:

- 68 • Brandon Ahmasuk - #9 Ice Seal topics
- 69 • Peter Boveng - #9 last paragraph second sentence. Add “for the 2019 minutes” to
 70 sentence about who is responsible for generating minutes in 2019.
- 71 • Sam Gosuk - #10 comment on herring biomass relating to seal status, not just ringed
 72 seals. Also last name spelled wrong. Correct spelling is GOSUK.
- 73 • Jennifer Hooper – Last name misspelled. #16 Executive Session. Also under current
 74 executive session. Correct spelling is HOOPER.
- 75 • Andy Von Duyke – Pg. 9 typo under “current applicaton” should read “one day
 76 workshop” and not “once day...”
- 77 • Barbara Mahoney - #9 typo Shawn reminds ice seal to delete to (?)

78

79

80

81

82 **9. National Marine Fisheries Service - Alaska Region** Jon Kurland & Tammy Olson

83 a. Petition to delist threatened Arctic ring seals

84

85 Provided review of the delisting. No updates. Delays in 90-day finding. Upon positive
86 finding, then a status review. If negative, petition will be rejected. Will update the ISC
87 when they have reached a finding.

88

89 Albert Simon-1: asked about how delisting occurs. (Jon) NMFS only reviews the
90 information provided in the petition to delist and any other information that NMFS
91 already has. If petition presents enough information to indicate that delisting may be
92 appropriate, then NMFS would do a more in-depth status review that would also include
93 community.

94

95 Albert Simon-1: also asked about how listing happens. (Jon) Under the ESA there are
96 several criteria (habitat, overharvest, disease, regulatory framework). Based on these
97 factors, a determination is made. For ringed and bearded seals this determination has
98 been made on the basis of climate change related loss of habitat.

99

100 b. Settlement agreement on completion of proposed determinations concerning the
101 designation of critical habitat for bearded and ringed seals

102

103 Jon Kurland provided the following brief summary:

104

105 NMFS was sued by Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) for not promptly designating
106 critical habitat. NMFS reached a settlement with CBD, agreeing to make a determination
107 on proposed critical habitat by September 15, 2020 (proposed) and final determination
108 will be one year after proposed. NMFS will move forward with a “proposed rule
109 designating critical habitat” and will be seeking public comments, with public hearings as
110 part of this process.

111

112 c. Critical habitat designation process

113

114 Tammy Olson provided a summary via powerpoint.

115 Much of her presentation is summarized in a 2-page Q&A document NMFS has put
116 together.

117 Info to address this process is requested soon (mid-March) because of tight scheduling.

118

119 Joe Mello Leavitt asked if NMFS will be visiting all the regions to inform the
120 communities. (Tammy) If new proposed critical habitat, then process ensues to allow
121 public comments, including public hearings.

122

123 Tammy’s slides describe what is meant by critical habitat and which features were used
124 to define it. NMFS is asking for information from subsistence hunters.

125

126 NMFS provided a list of questions seeking further information from hunters on what
127 features are important to determining critical habitat.

128
129 Brandon Ahmasuk asked about primary prey for ringed seals in this designation. Tammy
130 said this was distilled down to primary species. Brandon suggested that flounders are
131 important (3-4” in size).

132
133 Sam Gosuk mentioned other important food sources: cod, halibut, and shrimp...also
134 smelt (fall) and herring (spring). The last two are very important.

135
136 Billy Adams – timing within the different regions differs and should be considered. Not
137 well studied. Each region is different. Animals are abundant and healthy now.
138 Emphasized importance of better and more communication among the communities.

139
140 Jon Kurland – NMFS would like to get input from communities to inform the proposed
141 critical habitat. Input SOON. Critical habitat has to do with federal consultation and does
142 not influence subsistence.

143
144 Albert Simon-1 – each region to provide feedback

145
146 Brandon Ahmasuk – can critical habitat be designated in state waters? (Jon) yes, it can
147 be designated in state waters.

148
149 Joe Mello Leavitt – Need to have regional meetings. Cannot have on representative
150 speak for an entire region.

151
152 Billy Adams – maps that account for the time of the year would be helpful. Space use
153 differs at different times of the year (territoriality). 18” of snow in Elson Lagoon is
154 enough for lairs. Billy has lots of photos to share. Shallow lagoons in the fall (ugruk).
155 River deltas (spotted seals).

156
157 d. Critical habitat for bearded and ringed seals – topics for DISCUSSION:

158
159 This was a free flowing conversation. Difficult to consolidate. General reluctance to
160 make statements without first going back to and discussing with the regional
161 communities. Billy gave a long description based on Barrow region, but made it clear
162 that this is only one region.

- 163
164 i. What specific habitat features are essential for bearded and ringed seals?
165 ii. What types of sea ice are most important for bearded and ringed seals?
166 iii. How important are shallow areas, near the shore, for bearded and ringed seals, as
167 compared to areas in deeper waters?
168 iv. How important are estuaries, lagoons, and/or similar areas for bearded and ringed
169 seals?
170 v. What specific area, if any, should be excluded from bearded and ringed seals
171 critical habitat?

172

173 Secretary has discretion to exclude areas. (Billy) this depends on the timing of
174 use.

175

176 vi. Other considerations?

177

178 Barbara Mahoney – gave example of seasonal vs year-round habitat protection...so
179 the habitat feature is there when the animal needs it. This is part of consultation
180 request. Billy said that it will take time and effort get people together to consolidate
181 this information. This takes money too. Jon said that time is very short and they
182 are seeking whatever LK/TK is available. Better to get input sooner, but other
183 opportunities to comment too.

184

185 Joe Mello Leavitt – ugruks have dens inside gaps in the pressure ridges, even if
186 there is no snow present. Shipping lanes need to be set up to minimize conflict with
187 subsistence hunters. Regional meetings will help clarify this.

188

189 Brandon Ahmasuk – have a regional meeting in Nome to help make this process
190 work better. Each sub-region has differences. Concern about mining and state
191 waters.

192

193 Albert Simon-1 – described seal hunting conditions when he first started to seal
194 hunt when he was very young. Lost shore-fast ice, ocean is almost always open
195 water now. Slow hunt in the fall of 2019.

196

197 Lori Quakenbush – How will answers to questions be used for critical habitat?
198 There is a need for examples to be given to communities. Complicated process.

199

200 Barbara Mahoney – Provided clarification on what type of info NMFS is looking
201 for so they can be specific and accurate in their critical habitat designation.

202

203 Brandon Ahmasuk – Seal and walrus mapping project by Kawerak over the seasons
204 and was endorsed by the ISC. Available to be presented for critical habitat process.
205 Haulout areas are needed to be considered. Barbara Mahoney said NMFS has used
206 this report already.

207

208 Joe Mello Leavitt – Weather/wind vs geography is important. Village associations
209 work because each village knows its own region best. This is how AEWC works.

210

211 Jennifer Hooper – What is this process, is it a refinement? (Tammy) yes. Updating
212 the info to go into the proposal. Previous map 2014 may not change much, but
213 depends on the new info under consideration.

214

215 Sam Gosuk – ice in spring in Bristol Bay. Ringed and bearded seals hang out in
216 Bristol Bay where they eat shrimp and herring. Need to protect herring spawning
217 areas because they are so important to marine mammals.

218

219 Barbara Mahoney – Frequently asked question form was provided in the yellow
220 folder.

221
222 Nicole K – Workshops would be worthwhile use of time and resources for NMFS.
223 Wanted to know how info would be used. Recommend travel to communities.
224 What is timeline? Will there be time for NMFS to go to regional hubs. (Tammy)
225 ultimate deadline is 15-Sept-2020. Still time for internal drafts prior to 15-Sept
226 deadline.

227
228 Barbara Mahoney – NMFS is committed to going to the regional hubs.

229
230 **10. Ice Seal Committee** Andrew Von Duyke

231 Brief discussion on current Ice Seal Committee operations

232
233 This was moved to the end of the agenda.

234
235 **11. Action Plan 2020** Barbara Mahoney & Andrew Von Duyke

236 The Action Plan includes action items and information needed to promote the conservation
237 of Alaska ice seal populations and co-management of subsistence uses of ice seals in Alaska.

238
239 a. Review and edit the 2020 Action Plan for the Ice Seal Committee
240 *The following discussion of the Action Plan was mostly free-flowing, in which members*
241 *asked questions to understand the timeframe of the Action Plan. In sum, members agreed*
242 *to 10 extra days to review the 2020 Action Plan and provide Barbara and Andy with*
243 *comments and revisions. In addition, ISC members requested a calendar with important*
244 *dates in regards to the Action Plan timeline. More in-depth details on this discussion are*
245 *below:*

246
247 Barbara Mahoney – Provides overview for 2020 Action Plan.

- 248 • In 2019 proposal, there are items related to population monitoring, harvest
249 management, ice seal strandings, and education and outreach, where NIMFS and
250 ISC will work together to accomplish from Jan 2020-21.
- 251 • Population monitoring – NIMFS analyzes trends for ice seal populations.
252 Surveys from 2015 now have results. The surveys from 2016 will be available
253 sometime in 2020. Indigenous knowledge is being incorporated into monitoring
254 processes through ISC, NIMFS, and NSB collaboration and website building for
255 survey entry.
- 256 • Strandings – For bearded, ringed, and spotted seals, an unusual mortality rate was
257 declared in 2019, but actually started in 2018. We will be doing outreach to
258 communities in 2020 to get current information in samples. NIMFS will take the
259 lead here, but will keep in touch with ISC members. Will work with ISC to make
260 sure that hunters have our contact information for reporting stranded/dead/odd
261 seals.
- 262 • Outreach/Education –NIMFS and ISC developed a fact sheet on critical habitats.

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Albert Simon-1 – How do you get the population estimates on the seals?

Peter Boveng – We are working towards first population estimates that are reliable for all four species in Alaska waters. Aerial surveys are the best means of collecting the basic data, but statistics and calculation work also goes into this. Close to getting estimates for Bering Sea and Chukchi Sea.

Albert Simon-1 – Does using population estimates make sea populations fall within the Endangered Species Act?

Peter Boveng – No. Not sure if it would make a difference in agency’s decision, but got petitioned to list all four ice seals under ESA and listed two of them, ringed and bearded seal. One area of concern -- we haven’t known how many individuals within population. Need more information.

Albert Simon – How do you determine if the species is endangered?

Peter Boveng – The two species that have been listed as threatened. The species on the ESA list are things that have already declined, or overharvested, but here, the seals were listed because of concern over what would happen to habitats in the future. ESA tries to prevent species from becoming endangered.

Albert Simon-1 – Does this have to do with the ice conditions and the weather? How can you determine what effect receding sea ice is having on the seals?

Peter Boveng – That is the reasoning that is the basis for the listings, that the climate predictions tell us by 2100 Bering Sea Ice in springtime will not be there. That is loss habitat for these species and is the primary concern.

Albert Simon-1 – Sometimes we end up proving these claims wrong as hunters and observers. Just because the ice is receding doesn’t mean that these species have to go on the ESA. Every other year, they’re still out there. You should hear these observations from the community.

Jon Kurland – Thank you Barbara and Andy for work on Action Plan. Have you given thoughts onto how the completed questionnaires will be compiled and how results will be shared?

Barbara Mahoney – The ISC will collect traditional knowledge and changes in environment via questionnaire on website. This info will be helpful to Peter’s group if they are seeing changes/declines/moving populations.

Andy Von Duyke – The inspiration for the seal questionnaire comes from the Wildlife observation form on the NSB webpage. This is a long-term database that Craig George

311 has been maintaining for decades, based on opportunistic observations from hunters on
312 things that they've noticed. This database informs us on what's happening, and we hope
313 to emulate that here. One bottleneck is a way to make it easy to collect this information
314 into one database. The output from this will help us quantify observations into reports
315 and publications.

316
317 Jon Kurland – Thank you. I encourage you both to capture this in Action Plan so that we
318 get a sense of what the product might look like to make it clearer to the co-management
319 committee. Second question –are there any items you wanted to include for research
320 recommendations?

321
322 Barbara Mahoney – [The Action Plan] lists what we can do with the funds for '19. This
323 plan doesn't include a discussion of future research, as it only lists what we can do this
324 year with given funds. Right now, we are taking baby steps with Action Plan and then
325 expanding

326
327 Billy Adams – Thank you Jon for your questions. I agree that research is going to be
328 important to include in Action Plan, and will dictate what kind of research the ice seal
329 company will want to endorse in the future. Other organizations go back to associations
330 to see what kind of research should be done. It is important for our communities to
331 determine research priorities.

332
333 Peter Boveng– I agree that research recommendations are an important aspect of an
334 Action Plan. This is in the ISC and co-management's interest. There is an ice seal
335 management plan that has broad/aspirational goals. This group has updated a research
336 plan for ice seals. So, there is management, research, and action plan. My view is that the
337 Action Plan is a 1-year list of tangible lists of steps we can take towards achieving goals.

338
339 Billy Adams – This gives us understanding of what Action Plan is about.

340
341 Barbara Mahoney – The Action Plan is something we can do, including research ideas
342 that ISC or lab can complete. These go under budget proposals. Today, we can add
343 research ideas or table it to get research ideas for next year. Our original co-management
344 plan was signed in 2006, and last time we had a research plan was 2012, so I would like
345 to suggest to the committee that we revisit the research plan in 2021. We will be
346 providing this research plan to committee throughout the summer and be able to approve
347 it in 2021.

348
349 Andy Von Duyke – This Action Plan as written is reflective of what last year's grant
350 proposal was. In a way, we are looking backwards, but it says 2021. So, is this still a to-
351 do list for upcoming grant proposal? If so, we still have time for our strategic planning. I
352 am a little confused about time and dates.

353
354 Barbara Mahoney – This should be reflective of the money received in August 2019 that
355 you will use through August 2020. If the ISC component is not funded we need to go
356 through again.

357
358 Andy Von Duyke – This should be done in a way that is clear and coincides with the
359 grant and funding cycle.
360

361 Shawn Carey – I wouldn't say they have to match exactly, but if you can foresee into the
362 future for next fall, you can propose it in the next cycle. The Action Plan and grant
363 schedule doesn't have to be in lockstep. We shouldn't worry about backdating, just start
364 document when things are completed. Spend grant until August, and then propose
365 addition in next rounds.
366

367 Barbara Mahoney – If you get money in August 2020 and want to do a youth program in
368 September 2020, and the Action Plan won't be effective until 2021. I don't think that will
369 make or break it.
370

371 Shawn Carey– They don't have to be reflective of each other. The grant proposal is just
372 what your responsibility is.
373

374 Brandon Ahmasuk– When harvests begin, are they going to be done across all
375 communities and all households?
376

377 Barbara Mahoney – It is loose and is based on what committee members are bringing to
378 board meetings since there is no funding from interviews. It will be local and committee
379 members will create budget for 2021 funding.
380

381 Brandon Ahmasuk– A suggestion, whenever this does come up, that hunters are being
382 surveyed for the seals they're getting. I would like to see a survey on bearded seals on
383 what they're eating in the middle of winter time. In our region, we are seeing seals that
384 are starving, a spotted seal I thought was a leopard seal because of starvation.
385

386 Sam Gosuk– Did you mention anything on critical habitats being allowed and F&G to
387 protect species of ice seal? On the proposed one, it does not reach the Togiak/Bristol Bay
388 area despite the fact that bearded & ringed seals in our area during springtime. In the past,
389 Togiak people would say they would see bearded seal. I was wondering if the proposed
390 habitat area would extend to the Togiak area if Fish & Game doesn't protect these species
391 in the area.
392

393 Barbara Mahoney – We did not propose critical habitat for bearded seal. I suggest you
394 write comments and email them to me with information of when you hunted them and
395 when they were there. If everyone agrees that another 10 days of review on the Action
396 Plan, they can suggest changes to the plan if approved. For 2020-21, it will not include
397 research plans except the one proposed for harvest management.
398

399 Andy Von Duyke – Is the group in consensus that within 10 days we will receive
400 revisions and will update it?
401

402 Billy Adams– This Action Plan is a working document and we are getting an
403 understanding of what we want to do next.

404
405 Jennifer Hooper – When we schedule the next meeting, it might be helpful to put the
406 timeline of the work that is required of the committee in a structured, listed out form so
407 that we can review when it will be operate to adjust timing of certain activities.

408
409 Billy Adams– We will iron this out to give us more understanding of what we will be
410 working on our upcoming meetings.

411
412 Andy Von Duyke – I agree with Jennifer’s point that there should be a calendar of work
413 for committee.

414
415 Billy Adams – We are agreeing this Action Plan and are going through with it in the next
416 10 days to get comments back on it and revisions.

417
418 Barbara Mahoney – By the end of the month we will send out final Action Plan with
419 comments.

420
421 b. Final Action Plan completed and approved by the ISC and NMFS by 12-Feb-2020
422

423 **12. Marine Mammal Lab, National Marine Fisheries Service** Peter Boveng

424 a. Update on MML coordination with Kawerak, Inc. on research activities and co-
425 production of knowledge.

426
427 b. Research in 2020
428 i. Communications and information sharing with Bering Sea communities
429 A. Avoid conflict

430
431 ii. NOAA Oscar Dyson ship and the Bering Sea cruise, spring 2020
432 A. Working closely with Kawerak

433
434 • Last year, met to report on AK Fisheries Science Center discussions (AFSC)
435 in Bering Strait Region about outreach done on fishery surveys for Northern
436 Bering Sea. These discussions didn’t go well. First time fisheries engaged
437 with local communities. Initial outreach didn’t go smoothly. This prompted
438 more ASFC effort to become better at communicating research plans and
439 discussing potential conflicts with communities. AFSC has hired
440 communications director for this purpose. These discussions are ongoing.

441
442 • Since last time reported, small group of science director Bob Foye, the
443 AFSC Race Division Director Jeff Knapp, and Maggie Mooney Suess all
444 met in Homer in conjunction with North Pacific Fisheries Management
445 Council Meeting in late September.
446 ○ Met with Kawerak and discussed main goal, to develop framework
447 for working together and do a better job at the co-production of

448 knowledge and involving communities in research and development
449 of priorities. Also, to establish a way of working together. We called
450 it the Northern Bering Sea Research Partnership and will meet as
451 small group and to meet annually.

452
453 • In the process of putting in place some of objectives; Michael and I are
454 going from this meeting to Nome to meet with local groups and give a
455 straight science seminar.

456
457 Sam Gosuk – Are there differences in aerial seal observing when ice is present in the Bering
458 Sea versus when it isn't?

459
460 Peter Boveng– Can only survey seals when they are on the ice, difficult to count when they
461 are in the water. We don't know what seals are doing when the sea ice isn't present. With
462 tagging, we were able to locate where primary breeding ground for these species are, and
463 there was no ice or seals within those breeding grounds when we recently visited them.

464
465 Albert Simon– What kind of seals do you mostly see when you conduct surveys and which
466 areas are they most abundant?

467
468 Peter Boveng– The vessels we are not ice-breakers and we are limited to seeing
469 concentration of seals near ice edge. We see all 4 species, but mostly see spotted and ribbon
470 seals. In 2018 there was no ice and we went further north and saw almost no ribbon seals. For
471 bearded and ringed seals its limited to young.

472
473 Billy Adams – It would be good to have a knowledgeable hunter on your boat which will
474 help you see what's going on and give him and his community more insight on mammal
475 movements. These are the things they are expecting.

476
477 Peter Boveng – Some other activities that occurred: 1) My group did an education outreach
478 project in November with Chukchi Sea population abundance project – a board game was
479 made in which players work their way through an Arctic research expedition for kids. We
480 took 35 copies of board game to schools in Utqiagvik and Wainwright and gave presentations
481 to classes. We engaged with about 250 students. 2) Met with AEWC to give presentation on
482 findings on seals, polar bears, and future aerial survey plans.

483
484 **13. Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program** Barbara Mahoney
485 a. Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (83 FR 13955, 2 April 2018)

486
487 Barbara discussed that NMFS was working with local governments and tribes to identify
488 stranded marine mammals, unusual animals, and are updating an EIS we created in 2008.
489 There is a draft coming this Fall 2020. The draft will discuss how we operate nationally.
490 A motion passed that was approved by ISC that stranded ice seals are not to be released
491 back to the Arctic. A resolution against that was received that the ISC was opposed to
492 this.

493

- 494 b. Draft Programmatic EIS will be published in December 2020
 495
 496 c. Programmatic EIS will revisit ice seal rehabilitation and release policy
 497 i. NMFS letter to ISC President J. Goodwin (3 June 2018) and Alaska SeaLife Center
 498 Chief of Husbandry, Mr. L. Keller (28 May 2008)
 499

500 Lori Quakenbush – Charlie Brower and several others were on the committee at the time
 501 and the discussion was that seals that were sick that stay on the beach on Nome were
 502 flown to Seward, rehabilitated there, and then flown to Prudhoe Bay and released there.
 503 A member was upset with that idea, as unhealthy seals were being moved around and
 504 released back and could bring disease with them. In other parts of country, rehabilitation
 505 centers are near where seals are picked up by NMFS.
 506

507 Joe Mello Leavitt – Agree that we shouldn't move sick animals around. Once, someone
 508 tried to keep reindeer as pets in Barrow.
 509

510 Barbara Mahoney – In Alaska, there is only one rehabilitation center, which is located in
 511 Seward. This was the concern of the ISC and AK Native organizations. Exposure to the
 512 southern animals they were housed with in Seward and Alaskan Gulf waters was a health
 513 concern. NMFS agreed with these concerns brought forth by the ISC.
 514

515 Robert – One spring, we went out hunting and found a female bearded seal and removed
 516 the pup. When we took the pup out and brought it home, our father got upset and told
 517 them not send the pup to Seward, but rather, to kill it and return it to the Ocean.
 518

519 Brandon Ahmasuk– I agree that seals sent out shouldn't be brought back. I thought that
 520 SeaLife Center protocols did not allow for ice seals to be rehabilitated there – is that true?
 521

522 Barbara Mahoney – The SeaLife Center can get permission from NMFS to rehabilitate
 523 ice seals, which come from outside of the Southcentral region in which they operate.
 524

525 **14. Ice Seal Unusual Mortality Event**

Barbara Mahoney

- 526 a. Live and dead ice seals
 527 i. 1-Jun-2018 to present
 528

529 Barbara provided a summary

- 530 • In September, we declared an UME for ice seals, which included bearded, ringed,
 531 and spotted seals.
- 532 • An UME is unusual in terms of numbers and location and allows NMFS to
 533 consolidate a working group of species' experts to hypothesize the cause of the
 534 UME.
- 535 • There are seven criteria in determining an UME, and for the ice seals, it was the
 536 marked increase in numbers that was the determining factor.
- 537 • The advantage of declaring a UME are the experts we are able to call onto the scene
 538 to conduct lab tests, necropsies, etc to minimize death and determine the cause,
 539 population effects, and environmental parameters.

- 540 • In 2019, there were 168 ice seals – 10 alive and 158 dead.
541 ○ Bearded seals are easier to distinguish from ringed and spotted seals when
542 dead for long periods of time.
543 ○ My guess that most of the skin tests we have yet to complete will be ringed
544 and spotted seals, which are currently labelled unidentified.

545
546 ii. Bearded, ringed, and spotted seals

547
548 iii. All age classes

- 549 • All ages classes were represented, but it tended to be more pups that were stranded
550 near the end of the year.
551 • These were animals that were reported and confirmed, likely many hundred more
552 actually stranded.
553 • The UME is geographically located in Bering and Chukchi and does not include
554 Bristol Bay.
555 • From April to July, the numbers of stranded increased to about 130, when the
556 average is usually 30.
557 • In 2018-19, we don't have many samples because animals that were reported were
558 dead for a while. Averages for ice seals are increasing. Since 18-19 many animals
559 have been reported as skinny and emaciated.

560
561 b. Harvested ice seals

562
563 Barbara Mahoney – They pup in California and feed in the North for what we call a bloody
564 molt. It is called a live stranding if there is an action. If we remove the animal, we include
565 that in our count as a part of the total number. There are many ice seals in the Northern
566 regions that are being counted, but they do not require an action/removal to a remote beach
567 so they are not included in our live stranding count.

568
569 Billy – We get animals that are washed up on the shore, which are good for predators that are
570 foraging. In next few years, we hope that you'll monitor what the average is in the next 5
571 years, and we'll be concerned if there is a very large event. Our hunters will know when
572 there is a large event.

573
574 Albert Simon-1 – As hunters, we have a lot of questions, which haven't been answered yet.
575 The first event caused great concern amongst hunters, who were wondering what was going
576 on with the seals. It's been a few years, and research is ongoing, but our biggest question is:
577 how long will it take to determine what happened to them?

578
579 Barbara Mahoney – For 2011-16 UME the cause is unknown, and that event is pretty much
580 done. This year, we're not seeing marks on dead animals, just skinny seals dead on beach in
581 large numbers. In 2018, NMFS was not very active, but in 2019 we have been busy in
582 collecting data and reaching out to village community.

583

584 Joe Mello Leavitt – It is wrong that Seward Sealife Center released seal back to Prudhoe
585 Bay, because Nuiqsut is located so close, where hunters are located. Tranquilizers used in
586 polar bears will accumulate in our people.

587
588 Barbara Mahoney – Yes, they also released a seal in Dutch that went up to Bethel and got
589 hunted. People were happy with that. It’s a learning curve for the SeaLife Center.

590
591 Joe Mello Leavitt – If it had an airtag, it would have been good to send out a sample to a
592 biologist.

593
594 Carla Sims Kayotuk–Just wondering if you’re going to check into other things that might
595 have been occurring on a global scale (i.e. seismic activity near Russia) around the time seals
596 are getting sick.

597
598 Barbara Mahoney – We have a good following of what projects are going on because of
599 Section 7. This gives us a picture of what activities are happening around Alaska. In terms of
600 Russia, we don’t have insight into what they did that might affect seals. Most of it is due to
601 lack of food.

602
603 Michael Tuzroyluk – Introduction.

604
605 Nicole Kanayurak – The first UME and the second ones were very different, have you
606 established or refined the criteria for a UME between the first and since the first event, has
607 there been more monitoring? What would you consider a normal die-off and what would you
608 consider unusual? Have we established a co-management process for establishing a UME?

609
610 Barbara Mahoney – With the past UME, the seals looked very sickly with alopecia. Some of
611 seals had eye spots. This tended to be more of a sickness and some acted strange and didn’t
612 swim away from boat. Getting fresh, unfrozen samples helps. Our average is 30 for ice seals
613 over the past years.

614
615 Marvin Okitkun – One thing I noticed with the sea ice was that it was so mild last winter. It
616 started on May 10th and the sea ice 10-15 miles from Stebbins was already near the beach.
617 They were in the rivers already because of the sea ice, which was already opening up. The
618 seals need this to have their pups. My theory is that, because the ice that moved out so
619 quick and melted away, the baby seals couldn’t survive, which is why a lot of them were
620 found dead. In the summertime and fall, a lot of the seals had less than inch of fat. They
621 didn’t show up in our areas in high numbers like they usually do. The spring hunt coming up
622 in April will allow us to see how the health of the seals has progressed.

623
624 Barbara Mahoney – I can bring the pamphlets containing this information for you to bring
625 home.

626
627 Brandon Ahmasuk – The reporting slipped through the cracks last spring, but at least two
628 bearded seals harvested had the signs of the old UME, we brought it on top of the ice and

629 began butchering, but there was a foul smell. I thought I had relayed in an email this
630 information.

631

632 c. Supplies for carcass collection (harvested and/or stranding)

633 i. Body bags

634 ii. Gloves

635 iii. Trash bags, extra large

636

637 Barbara Mahoney – We have body bags, wipes, and gloves for hunters so that they can ship
638 contaminated bodies to get tested in Anchorage. Pictures are also helpful because they determine
639 date.

640

641 Andy Von Duyke – The handout with the stranding network is in the 3-ring binder. Do you have
642 a best practice way for hunters to decontaminate their boats, knives, and other materials?

643

644 Barbara Mahoney – I haven't thought about that, great point. It doesn't have to be the whole
645 animal shipped, it can just be parts.

646

647 Sam Gosuk – The UME made me think of a place close to the sea in the North that had buried
648 toxins. Could the lack of cold weather allow these places to melt and bring toxins into the sea?

649

650 Barbara Mahoney – Usually military sites are either Superfund or contaminated sites that make
651 people worried about human safety. After the meeting, we can have people take as many
652 materials as they want, the body bags, etc are all available.

653

654 Peter Boveng – Should we put these items into a kit with a contact information sheet included for
655 hunters?

656

657 Andy Von Duyke – This topic came up during our last meeting and is a highlighted action item.
658 It goes over best practices for shippers, and it would be good to have a worksheet included.

659

660 Carla Sims Kayotuk – Our research specialist should be trained on this message and learn how to
661 get the message out, because they will be contacted in our villages.

662

663 Barbara Mahoney – Part of the UME includes some funds that could be included in that. We
664 have the flexibility to send people up there to collect bodies and pictures.

665

666 Nicole Kanayurak – Have you considered compensation for the hunters?

667

668 Barbara Mahoney – Yes, fuel is compensated and we have a contract that allows flexibility with
669 that as well.

670

671 Andy Von Duyke – There is no shortage of topics for having a Wildlife radio show on KBRW
672 but this should be put on the top of the list.

673

674 Billy Adams – A talk show is a good idea and is something that is needed for our communities.
675 You could allow communities to call in with questions, have frequently asked questions, etc.
676 This will provide a lot of answers.

677
678 Barbara Mahoney – We have a budget for press releases that will begin in March.

679
680 Billy Adams – As soon as we get back we'll send out a poll so everyone agree to a time and date
681 for a radio show.

682
683 Brandon Ahmasuk – For our region, we've done talk shows about birds, UMEs, etc. We did do a
684 talk show on the UME of last year and got callers from around the region and are encouraging
685 people to bring samples back.

686
687 **15. Closing Comments**

688
689 Billy Adams – Thank you to everyone who put in the effort to continue their membership in
690 the ISC. When we get to our next meeting, we will have a clear vision of what we want to
691 achieve. Now, we understand the Action Plan, our Co-Management meetings, and
692 workshops. The most important part is the friendships we continue to have with our federal,
693 state, and local partners.

694
695 Peter Boveng – This is a first time I've come to the meeting having read the minutes, gone
696 through the Action Plan, and a lot of people were in the same boat and everything went
697 smoothly. We had a roadmap to follow and I hope we continue to do that. This was a very
698 productive meeting, thank you.

699
700 Joe Mello Leavitt – On this radio talk show, it will help a lot with transparency for our
701 people. This will be a good help, thank you.

702
703 Shawn Carey – Thank you for allowing us who aren't part of the committee to come in and
704 listen and help when we can.

705
706 Barbara Mahoney – I like the idea of a radio show, and perhaps it could be an ISC
707 discussion, where NMFS and ISC members answer questions on air.

708
709 **16. Date for Next Meeting**

710
711 **17. Adjournment**

712 Motion to adjourn by Albert.

713 Second by Marvin.

714 Question called for.

715 Motion passed.

716 Meeting adjourned.

717

718

719

720 **Executive Session (if needed)**

721

722 ISC:

723 Billy Adams, Brandon Ahmasuk, Emerson Moto, Jennifer Hooper, Helen Aderman

724

725 ISC staff: Andy Von Duyke

726

727 NMFS: Jon Kurland, Peter Boveng, Barbara Mahoney

DRAFT