

July 21, 2025

The Honorable Bruce Westerman  
Chair  
House Natural Resources Committee  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman  
Ranking Member  
House Natural Resources Committee  
1332 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman,

As Alaskans who care deeply about the health of our marine ecosystems and the wildlife that defines our coastal identity, we write to express our strong opposition to the amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) proposed by Representative Begich. This bill would fundamentally dismantle the MMPA, shifting the focus of the law from conserving marine mammals as a national priority to enabling maximum extractive activities in our oceans at their expense. The harmful consequences for Alaska's marine life, Alaskan communities, and coastal economies would be profound and potentially irreversible.

### **Our marine mammals are already struggling**

From shrinking sea ice to louder oceans, and shifting fish stocks to increased water pollution, Alaska's marine mammals are facing more threats than ever before. Instead of helping them thrive, this bill lowers the bar for what counts as adequate protection, only requiring that the federal government maintain the bare minimum population levels needed for marine species to survive. That's not what multi-generational stewardship looks like, and it's not the way Alaskans want to care for marine mammals that call our waters home.

### **It puts industry ahead of our communities**

The bill gives more power to extractive industries and less to the people, Native co-managers, Tribes, small businesses, conservation organizations, and agencies trying to protect what's left. For example, if the government can't meet new, shorter permitting deadlines, it automatically approves harmful projects without any meaningful review, local engagement, or Tribal consultation. With the potential for significant cuts to NOAA's budget and the agency woefully understaffed, it is likely that these deadlines will commonly be missed, and many permitting approvals will become de-facto automatic.

### **Alaska Native and coastal communities will pay the price**

Marine mammals are central to the food security, culture, and identity of Alaska Native communities. The MMPA supports sustainable Alaska Native subsistence harvest by helping

to ensure harmful industrial activities do not drastically reduce marine mammal populations such that subsistence harvest would be restricted or shut down. These protections that help keep marine mammal populations healthy for subsistence harvest would be gutted by the proposed amendments.

Marine mammals are also a foundation of our coastal economies, drawing visitors from around the world to see whales, otters, polar bears, walruses, and seals in the wild. If these species disappear, so do the jobs, traditions, and futures intricately woven with them.

Alaska's marine mammals are essential to our environment, economy, and cultural heritage. Weakening their protections in favor of profit, pollution, and plunder of our oceans is both short-sighted and dangerous. We respectfully urge you to oppose the Begich draft bill and any legislation that undermines the foundational conservation principles of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Now more than ever, strong protections are needed to ensure these species can survive and recover in our rapidly changing marine ecosystem.

Sincerely,

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