

February X, 2022

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce,  
Science, and Transportation  
254 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on  
Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Cantwell, and Ranking Member Wicker,

We write to you with appreciation for your committee's continued support of marine mammal and ocean conservation. As you may know, the Marine Mammal Research and Response Act (H.R.2848/S.1289) was included in the House-passed America COMPETES Act (H.R.4521). We appreciate Chair Cantwell's leadership on this bipartisan bill, which was reported favorably out of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation this Congress. As you work to reconcile the differences between the America COMPETES Act (H.R. 4521) and the United States Innovation and Competition Act (S.1260), we urge you, on behalf of the millions of members and supporters of our organizations, to include this important provision in the final bill.

Marine mammals are vital to the balance of healthy marine ecosystems. However, because they are transboundary in nature, development in areas of international jurisdiction pose threats to many of America's most cherished species. The Arctic is an area of particular concern as competition for resources steadily increases. Despite bilateral and multilateral arrangements to manage marine biodiversity in the region, ice melt acceleration threatens the fragile Arctic ecosystem and the marine mammal species that depend upon it. Rapidly changing sea ice conditions are opening new sea routes, leading to an increase in maritime traffic and other activity, raising the potential for human-marine mammal conflicts. Although the U.S. has strong marine management practices, we cannot always rely on other nations, such as Russia and the non-Arctic nation of China, to meet U.S. standards. We must use caution and invest in protecting our shared resources against these emerging threats to marine mammals and the communities that depend on them.

The Marine Mammal Research and Response Act directs analysis, planning, and cooperation to expand Arctic marine mammal rescue, research, and response activities by increasing funding for the Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program and the Unusual Mortality Event Contingency Fund. Both programs are critical to protecting and recovering marine mammals across the country. Additionally, it creates a Marine Mammal Health Monitoring and Analysis Platform to collect and report data about marine mammals, thereby promoting interdisciplinary research, facilitating communication, and improving collaboration among scientists and observation networks. This information is fundamental to protecting marine mammals against the uncertainty of international, joint management.

Gray whales and Northern fur seals, two species with an active Unusual Mortality Event designation, spend a significant portion of their lives in the Bering Sea in American, Russian,

Chinese, and Japanese waters. We must act preemptively to ensure that our federal and state agencies, stranding network partners, and scientists have the tools they need to protect marine mammals like these in the face of expanding maritime activities in international waters. Protecting our oceans and the species that inhabit them is crucial to the United States' role as a responsible global leader in international trade, development, and competitiveness.

We are grateful for your leadership on marine mammal issues and urge you to support the inclusion of the Marine Mammal Research and Response Act in the final innovation bill.

Sincerely,

**[Groups]**