

Lance Barrett-Lennard

563 W 16th Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia, V5G1S3, Canada
lance.barrettlennard@gmail.com +1 604 341 4747

November 19, 2021

Exxon Valdez Trustee Council

Re: North Gulf Ocean Society

Dear Trustee Council Members

This letter is to urge the Trustee Council to restore funding for the long term, Prince William Sound-based killer whale research program led by the North Gulf Oceanic Society (NGOS). In the way of background about me, I recently retired from a 20 year position at the Coastal Ocean Research Institute, Ocean Wise Conservation Association, where I led a 25 person research team conducting diverse conservation-oriented research on killer whales and other cetacean species in the NE Pacific. My MSc and PhD research was conducted on killer whales in Prince William Sound in the early 90's, where I worked in close collaboration with Craig Matkin of the North Gulf Oceanic Society. I have also collaborated with NGOS research scientist Dr John Durban on various killer whales research projects since the early 2000's, in Alaska, British Columbia and Washington.

The North Gulf Society's began a systematic study of Prince William Sound killer whales in the early 1980s. When EVOS occurred in 1989, the data NGOS had collected to that point provided a baseline for assessing the immediate impacts of the spill on that iconic keystone species, and its continuous monitoring ever since has provided extremely valuable insights into the long terms effects of the spill. It would not be an exaggeration to say that NGOS program of research, which has been supported in part or in full by the Trustee Council since EVOS, constitutes a global gold standard for individual-based monitoring of an at risk cetacean population following an major anthropogenic disturbance. Among other things, it has shown two groups of killer whales that were in the Sound when EVOS occurred (AB pod and the AT1 transient population) suffered long term impacts. AB pod has not fully recovered, and the AT1 population is on the verge of extinction.

Over the last 40 years NGOS has built one of the world's longest and most extensive databases tracking the lives, reproductive histories and association patterns of a mammalian population. That database is

a treasure, and in and of itself is a positive legacy of EVOS---it would be a tragedy if it terminated at this point, in my opinion. Furthermore, NGOS introduced a new research component in 2021, the monitoring of the whales' body condition using drone-based aerial photogrammetry. This is a relatively new research method that makes it possible to precisely measure changes in a whales' body condition—and by inference its health—over relatively short time periods. It will be used to both assess responses of Prince William Sound killer whales to changing environmental conditions and to compare their health to that of populations off Washington and British Columbia. It would be particularly unfortunate in my opinion to terminate NGOS' funding before its new photogrammetry component has realized its potential.

Finally, I should say the NGOS team contributes greatly the productivity and credibility to the Gulf Watch Long Term Monitoring Program. Craig Matkin and Dan Olsen have many years of experience working on Prince William Sound killer whales. No one knows better than them how to find the whales in the vast expanse of the Sound, how to identify them individually, how to recognize anomalies in their group composition or behaviour, and how to operate safely and efficiently in the Sound's challenging environment. John Durban contributes many years of experience studying the species in diverse parts of the world and particular expertise in photogrammetry, having pioneered the technique. Matkin and Durban have extensive publication records and solid reputations for fulfilling grant deliverables.

In view of all of these considerations, and also in view of the positive recommendations of the Council's Science Review Panel and Public Advisory Committee, I urge the Council to reverse its recent decision to discontinue funding for NGOS' long term killer whale monitoring program.

Warm regards,

Lance Barrett-Lennard, PhD]