Charge to Peer Reviewers: Draft Impact Analysis Report for Proposed Arctic Ringed Seal Critical Habitat:

Dear Reviewer,

Thank you for agreeing to provide peer review of the enclosed draft economic report for Arctic ringed seal proposed critical habitat. We appreciate your willingness to help with this important effort to ensure and maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the scientific information upon which the critical habitat designation is based.

Background:

On December 9, 2014, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the Arctic ringed seal (Enclosure 1), which is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). We are presently soliciting public comment on this proposed designation. Before including areas in a critical habitat designation, section 4(b)(2) of the ESA and our implementing regulations require NMFS to take into consideration the economic, national security, and other relevant impacts of the designation. A draft economic report (i.e., Regulatory Impact Review (RIR)/4(b)(2) Preparatory Assessment/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Act (IRFA) report) describes the impact analysis for the proposed ringed seal critical habitat designation in detail.

The Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review (OMB Bulletin) establishes standards and guidelines for dissemination of influential or highly influential scientific information by federal agencies. Agency regulatory impact analyses and regulatory flexibility analyses subject to interagency review under Executive Order 12866 on regulatory planning and review, are exempt from the OMB bulletin requirements, except for underlying data and formal analytical models used. Accordingly, we are conducting independent peer review of the data considered in the draft economic report that supports the proposed Arctic ringed seal critical habitat designation (Enclosure 2). We will address any peer review comments received in developing the final economic report.

To ensure that we have a transparent process for public disclosure, names and affiliations of each peer reviewer, as well as the reviewer's comments, are posted online. In posting reviewer comments online, we will not attribute specific comments to individual reviewers; rather, we will post the unabridged comments received, organized by a reviewer number. However, please note that if NMFS receives a Freedom of Information Act request, anonymity of peer reviewers or comments cannot be guaranteed. Previously submitted peer reviews are available at http://www.cio.noaa.gov/services_programs/prplans/PRsummaries.html.

Peer Reviewer Requirements:

Pursuant to the OMB Bulletin, NOAA has adapted the National Academy of Sciences policy for evaluating the potential for peer reviewer conflicts of interest. This adapted policy requires that non-federal peer reviewers submit background information and complete a confidential "Conflict

of Interest Disclosure" form (see "Review Logistics" below). Peer reviewers who are federal employees do not need to sign the conflict of interest form; rather they must comply with applicable federal ethics requirements.

Peer Review Request:

We request that you review the data considered in the enclosed draft economic report and provide comments on the following topics:

1. The quality, thoroughness, and relevance of the data; particularly if any are any additional relevant data available that were not considered, but should be.

2. Whether the data are accurately presented.

3. Whether uncertainties in the data are adequately identified and characterized.

Review Logistics:

1. Please summarize your comments in a letter that provides a brief overview, followed by more detailed responses to the specific review questions identified above.

2. If you are not a federal employee, please complete the enclosed confidential "Conflict of Interest Disclosure" form (Enclosure 3), and return it with your review – please note that this form requires inclusion of a CV.

3. Your participation in this peer review is important to the critical habitat designation process and we appreciate your time and effort in this review. We request that you submit comments no later than **March 9, 2015**, to: Jon Kurland, Assistant Administrator for Protected Resources, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802.

If you are unwilling to participate in this review, or should you have questions regarding this request, please contact Tammy Olson in our Anchorage Field Office by phone at (907) 271–2373 or by email at tammy.olson@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,

James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.
Administrator, Alaska Region

Enclosures
1) Proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the Arctic ringed seal
2) Draft RIR/4(b)(2) Preparatory Assessment/RFA of Critical Habitat Designation for the Arctic Ringed Seal
3) NOAA "Conflict of Interest Disclosure" form