

The Status of Beluga Whales, *Delphinapterus leucas*, in Cook Inlet, Alaska, and Surrounding Waters: Part II

Preface

In “The Status of Beluga Whales, *Delphinapterus leucas*, in Cook Inlet, Alaska, and Surrounding Waters: Part I (Shelden and Hobbs, 2015), seven papers were published in the first of two volumes dedicated to beluga whale research in Alaska, with a focus on the endangered Cook Inlet population. It had been 15 years since publication of the special issue on beluga whales in the *Marine Fisheries Review* 62(3), at that time featuring the depleted Cook Inlet population. *Marine Fisheries Review* 77(1) includes an update of the Cook Inlet abundance and trend time series through 2012 (Hobbs et al., 2015), a synopsis of Alaska beluga whale prey based on stomach content analyses (Quakenbush et al., 2015), an ethogram for wild beluga whales based on studies at Eagle Bay in Cook Inlet (Howe et al., 2015), three papers on the Yakutat Bay belugas, a small breeding group that is genetically distinct from Cook Inlet (Castellote et al., 2015; Lucey et al., 2015; O’Corry-Crowe et al., 2015), and a novel beluga monitoring project con-

ducted on the Little Susitna River in Cook Inlet (Polasek et al., 2015).

This second issue is dedicated exclusively to Cook Inlet studies and includes a review of spatio-temporal changes in beluga distribution, a population viability analysis and extinction risk assessment, a summary of potential natural and anthropogenic risks, a calf index, a citizen science project, a note on socio-sexual behavior, and beluga behavioral responses observed during Port of Anchorage monitoring studies. We hope these contributions generate discussion on future research and management needs for this unique species.

This concludes the two part series but by no means is the end of the story. We are aware of a number of studies currently in progress within Cook Inlet, including, but not limited to, photo-identification, acoustic monitoring, stranding response, and the biennial abundance survey planned for June 2016. These studies, and the studies presented herein in *Marine Fisheries Review* 77(1) and 77(2), provide valuable information to meet our mandate for protecting this endangered species.

By Kim Shelden and Rod Hobbs

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