



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

May 11, 2005

Ms. Edrie Vinson
Federal Highway Administration
P.O. Box 21648
Juneau, Alaska 99802

Re: Knik Arm Crossing EIS-
Scoping Comments

Dear Ms. Vinson:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has received your letter of April 11, 2005 in which you request scoping comments for the Knik Arm Crossing Project. NMFS has attended all the scoping meetings and reviewed all the information provided by the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority (KABATA) and its contractors. We offer the following comments regarding the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this project.

The proposed bridge may adversely affect fish habitat by changing the hydrology of Knik Arm. Data collected so far suggest that juvenile and adult salmon use the intertidal and shoreline area as a migration corridor. Other species of fish are found in the intertidal area, but the dependence of those fish on that area is speculative. Preliminary bridge design calls for some amount of intertidal fill on both ends of the bridge. Any fill into the intertidal area will change the hydrology of Knik Arm at that point. Any significant hydrology change could result in a significant impact to fish migration in Knik Arm. The EIS should clearly document the steps taken to avoid and minimize impacts attributable to filling in the intertidal area. If steps to avoid and minimize impacts are insufficient to ameliorate significant environmental changes, then compensatory mitigation should be clearly addressed in the EIS.

Studies conducted thus far have documented salmonid use of the shoreline. Minimal data have been collected on salmonid use of the offshore area of Knik Arm. NMFS encourages KABATA to expand present studies into the offshore area of Knik Arm to fill the existing data gap and provide information necessary to minimize the effects of the proposed bridge on salmon habitat.

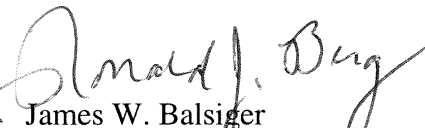
NMFS expressed concerns regarding the potential effects of this project on Cook Inlet beluga whales during previous agency and scoping meetings. Effects on beluga whales should be analyzed in detail in the EIS. KABATA and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities have indicated their intentions to continue research on



beluga whales within Knik Arm during the feasibility, construction, and operational phases of the crossing. We have also advised KABATA to seek authorization under the Marine Mammal Protection Act for the unintentional take by harassment of beluga whales due to construction activities. Through the authorization process, NMFS will continue to work with project proponents on monitoring protocols for these whales.

NMFS will continue to remain actively involved in the development of the EIS for the Knik Arm Crossing Project. NMFS contacts for this project are Larry Peltz and Brian Lance for fisheries issues and Barbara Mahoney for marine mammal issues.

Sincerely,


For James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: Robin Reich – HDR - Robin.Reich@hdrinc.com
Phil Brna – USFWS - Phil_Brna@fws.gov
Matt Lacroix – ADNR - matthew_lacroix@dnr.state.ak.us
Heather Dean – EPA - dean.heather@epa.gov
ADOT&PF