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Mr. Rick Steiner
9641 Homestead Trail
Anchorage, Alaska 99507-6729

Dear Rick:

Thank you for writing to share your concerns about the Navy's participation in the Northern Edge 2018 exercise in the Gulf of Alaska. It is good to hear from you.

In the aftermath of Northern Edge 2015, I requested that the Navy conduct a series of meetings with stakeholders in Gulf of Alaska communities well in advance of the Northern Edge 2017 exercise. This request was agreed to. The Navy conducted 15 stakeholder engagements and 2 tribal consultations in advance of Northern Edge 2017.

In response to the input received at these meetings the Navy indicated that it would limit the scope and intensity of activities conducted during Northern Edge 2017. Looking to the future, the Navy also chose the less intense of two courses of action described in the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the conduct of future Northern Edge exercises in the Gulf of Alaska. To better educate the public about its activities in the Gulf of Alaska, the Navy conducted two port calls in connection with the exercise: one in Homer and the other in Juneau.

The Northern Edge 2017 exercise is now concluded and the Navy has begun planning for the Northern Edge 2019 exercise. Although the Navy does not believe that the 2017 exercise adversely impacted the fishery and marine mammal stocks in the Gulf of Alaska, it is well aware of your concern that military exercises on the water should not be conducted in such close proximity to the opening of high value commercial and subsistence fisheries, as is the case with a May exercise. The Navy is also acutely aware that many stakeholders do not trust the science that the Navy relies upon in its assessment of potential impacts.

Since the conclusion of Northern Edge 2017, I have had an opportunity to discuss both of these issues with Admiral John M. Richardson, the Chief of Naval Operations. Admiral Richardson is the nation's top ranking naval officer and holds a seat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Admiral Richardson confirmed to me that the Navy is exploring a change in the dates of the 2019 exercise with the exercise sponsor, the US Pacific Command. He also acknowledged that the Navy must do more to build trust and confidence in the stakeholder communities. He expressed a desire, going forward, for the Navy to be one with the community. In order for this to occur, Admiral Richardson observed that the Navy and the community must see the same things and see them the same way. And that requires continued conversations about the science.

Toward this end, I have asked that the Navy conduct a new round of community engagements to discuss the 2017 and 2019 exercises with the Gulf of Alaska stakeholders – what

went right, what caused dissatisfaction, what should be done better and at what level of risk. Admiral Richardson agrees that this is important. The Navy has committed to conduct a series of "after action" engagements with stakeholders to receive your input. I hope that you will participate in these ongoing discussions.

Thank you once again for contacting me with your concerns about Northern Edge 2017.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Murkowski". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "M".

Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

