



LUMMI INDIAN BUSINESS COUNCIL

2665 KWINA ROAD BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON 98226 (360) 312-2000

DEPARTMENT _____

DIRECT NO. _____

January 16, 2019

Kristin Wilkinson
NOAA Fisheries, Protected Resources Division
West Coast Region, Based in Seattle
Regional Stranding Coordinator, Washington and Oregon

Dear Ms. Wilkinson,

We are writing you about an emergency regarding our relatives the *qwe lhol mechten* (killer whales). We must act *now* if we are to save two of our ailing relatives in the Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW) population. The loss of these two relatives would be a devastating blow to our relatives and would cascade through the SRKW families.

News of the quickly deteriorating health condition of two SRKW relatives (K25 and J17) arrived at a challenging time. The current federal government shutdown has halted an urgently needed emergency response to this situation. The loss of these two relatives is more than the loss of two individuals. K25 is an adult male whose mother, K13, died in 2017. The current decline in his health began after losing his mother, the family unit's matriarch. Matriarchs like K13 play a crucial role in the care of the other members in tight knit family groups via both prey and knowledge sharing. Research on kin directed prey sharing clearly shows the vital role that matriarchs (even post-menopausal females) play in the health and survivability of their family groups. Sons like K25 are hit particularly hard when their mothers die. His decline in health exemplifies not only the ecological pressures on these critically endangered animals, but also the strength of the social bonds within the family groups and how critical these bonds are to survival.

J17, an adult female, is an important matriarch within J-Pod. With five other whales in her family unit, J17's survival could very realistically *impact the survival of 8%* of the entire SRKW population (currently only 74 animals – potentially 75 if the new L-Pod calf survives). Her family unit includes three of her children and two of her grandchildren. J17's nearly 10 year old son, J44, and her nearly 4 year old daughter, J53, would be particularly vulnerable should she perish.

During the summer of 2018, the Lummi Nation partnered with NOAA, local researchers, marine mammal veterinarians, state and county agencies, and NGOs to establish a precedent for direct intervention with ailing wild southern resident killer whales. Protocols and procedures established and tested during the attempted intervention for the compromised 4 year old female, J50, established methods for delivering Chinook salmon to wild whales as a method for short-term nutritional supplementation as a tool with which to potentially deliver oral medications.

Additional methods of deploying medication were developed and successfully implemented, such as injectable delivery via dart. Medications such as anti-parasitic drugs can be highly beneficial to nutritionally compromised animals, since parasites often thrive and multiply in compromised animals, thus exasperating the starvation. This collaborative effort created a template for emergency response to ailing SRKW, a template that can and should be used and built upon moving forward.

Many of the current solutions we are discussing at the state level for future management of the SRKW, such as the recommendations of the SRKW Task Force, aim to yield long-term (and ideally sustainable) outcomes for this fragile population. However, in a situation as challenging as the one we are currently in with this population, long-term sustainable solutions can only successfully work when paired with short-term immediate actions. The emergency response for J50 during the summer of 2018 represents a model for such an action, and we are in a critical moment to take such action again.

We are faced with the loss of two more relatives in the SRKW and know that the loss of K25 and J17 will likely lead to additional losses. We all have a sacred obligation to take action, now, and we need your help and support to save our relatives.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lawrence Solomon', written over a horizontal line.

Lawrence Solomon, Secretary
Lummi Nation