

Preassessment Data Report #8

Aerial surveys of birds near the grounded M/V *Selendang Ayu* on the northwest coast of Unalaska Island, Alaska, January 2005

COMMENTS OF THE RESPONSIBLE PARTY

Page 2; Paragraph 1; Introduction

“Initial assessment of the wreck suggested substantial oil remained in the two halves of the ship and the likelihood that it would eventually spill was high.”

This is speculative, factually incorrect, and not relevant to a data report.

“Therefore, even though the aerial survey was not initiated until 28 days after the initial wreck (probably at least 7-14 days after most of the oil was out of the ship)...”

This is speculative, factually incorrect, and not relevant to a data report.

Page 6; Paragraph 1; Survey Methods

The most unfortunate aspect of the aerial survey methodology was the use of 200 m transect widths by each observer. The survey craft, a Turbo Commander, was flown at an altitude of 100 ft -130 ft. at a speed of approximately 105 mph. It was shown by Briggs et al. (1985) that observers scanning a 75 m wide transect when flying at a 200 ft. altitude and at 100 mph missed seeing significantly more seabirds than observers surveying at the same time but looking at only the first 50 m of the 75 m wide transect. Based on these findings and my own experience of over 500 hrs of aerial survey work, it is my opinion that the USFWS observers scanning a 200 m wide transect from an altitude of 100 ft. missed at least half of the swimming birds that passed by their windows. Moreover, I know of no one who can reliably see with the unaided eye, much less identify to species/family level, murre-sized or smaller birds that are more than 100 m away. Lastly, with the plane flying at altitudes of less than 150 ft., there is an increased probability of diving seabirds to do just that as the plane approaches. All of these shortcomings have undoubtedly led to an underestimate of the abundance of seabirds in the study area, especially the abundance of smaller species like the Crested Auklet.

[Briggs, K.T., W.B. Tyler and D.B. Lewis. 1985. Aerial surveys for seabirds: methodological experiments. J. of Wildlife Management 49(2):412-417]