

The Honorable Bob Ferguson
Governor of Washington State
Office of the Governor
Olympia, WA 98504

CC:

Jaime Martin, External Relations Director, jaime.martin@gov.wa.gov
Owen Rowe, Senior Policy Advisor, Natural Resources, owen.rowe@gov.wa.gov

March 14, 2025

Dear Governor Ferguson,

We, the 74 undersigned scientists, conservationists, and environmental advocates, write to express our concern over your decision to remove Dr. Timothy Ragen from the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. We respectfully urge you to reverse this decision and reappoint Dr. Ragen—an action that would affirm your administration’s commitment to science-driven policy and the conservation of the Pacific Northwest’s fish and wildlife.

Our collective work spans research, policy, advocacy, and habitat restoration efforts in the U.S. and Canada, with a shared goal of reversing the decline of the Southern Resident killer whales and the at-risk salmon populations upon which they depend. The undersigned signatories represent a broad geographic scope, including Washington, Oregon, California, other U.S. states, Canada, and additional international experts dedicated to marine conservation. This work is guided by the best available science to which several of the undersigned have contributed in peer-reviewed publications and presentations at professional conferences. We recognize that Washington’s Fish and Wildlife Commissioners play a pivotal role in shaping policies that determine the future of these imperiled species. Removing Dr. Ragen at this critical juncture threatens to undermine both Washington and transboundary efforts to recover these iconic populations.

Despite ongoing recovery efforts, the Southern Resident killer whale (SRKW) population remains at risk of functional extinction within the next 40 years unless major fisheries management reforms are implemented¹. Effective policy must account for complex ecological factors, such as the whales’ caloric needs, seasonal prey availability, and the specific salmon stocks they rely on throughout their range. As another example, the decline in Chinook salmon size and age diversity necessitates policy measures to restore older, larger individuals and life histories, which are critical to SRKW energy intake.²

Without Dr. Ragen’s deep understanding of these interconnected issues, and his unique ability to balance competing interests with respect and effectively communicate with his peers and, it is unlikely the Commission will develop timely policies that truly support recovery. Removing Dr. Ragen at this critical time weakens Washington’s ability to craft science-based policies that address the unprecedented and escalating challenges to the region’s fish and wildlife, as well as the ecosystems and communities that depend on them.

Now more than ever, Washington’s Fish and Wildlife Commission needs leaders with a strong record of decision-making grounded in science. Dr. Ragen is internationally recognized for his expertise in ecological

¹ Williams, R., Lacy, R.C., Ashe, E. *et al.* Warning sign of an accelerating decline in critically endangered killer whales (*Orcinus orca*). *Commun Earth Environ* **5**, 173 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-024-01327-5>

² Couture F, Oldford G, Christensen V, Barrett-Lennard L, Walters C (2022) Requirements and availability of prey for northeastern pacific southern resident killer whales. *PLOS ONE* **17**(6): e0270523. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0270523>

modeling and marine mammal conservation. As the former Executive Director and Scientific Program Director of the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission, he provided independent, science-based oversight of domestic and international policies affecting marine mammals and their ecosystems. His unparalleled experience and deep understanding of marine ecosystems—particularly those critical to the survival of Southern Resident killer whales and wild salmon—make him uniquely qualified to guide complex fisheries and wildlife management decisions. In addition to his technical expertise, Dr. Ragen exemplifies the highest level of professionalism and treats everyone he works with respectfully.

Beyond his technical expertise, Dr. Ragen is widely respected for his ability to work collaboratively, engaging diverse stakeholders with professionalism, fairness, and integrity. He approaches every challenge with an open mind, ensuring that all perspectives are heard and considered. His commitment to unbiased, science-driven decision-making and his unwavering respect for colleagues and partners make him an exceptional leader in the field.

The challenges facing the Southern Resident killer whales and wild salmon are complex and urgent, requiring leadership that is both informed and unwavering in its commitment to sound science. Dr. Ragen’s deep expertise and proven track record make him uniquely qualified to navigate these complex issues. Removing him from the Commission weakens Washington’s ability to implement the policies necessary to prevent functional extinction of these species. We strongly urge you to reconsider this decision and reappoint Dr. Ragen, ensuring that the state’s fish and wildlife management remains rooted in the best available science.

Sincerely,

Name	Title	Affiliation	Location
John Calambokidis, PhD	Founder and Research Biologist	Cascadia Research Collective	Washington
John K.B. Ford, PhD	Research Scientist (Emeritus)	Pacific Biological Station, Fisheries and Oceans Canada	British Columbia, Canada
Daryl Boness, MA, PhD	Former Chair of the US Marine Mammal Commission; Retired Senior Scientist from the Smithsonian Institution	Current Editor-in-Chief of Marine Mammal Science, Society for Marine Mammalogy	Maine
Joseph Gaydos, VMD, PhD	Wildlife Veterinarian and Marine Scientist		Washington
Brandon Southall, PhD		California Ocean Alliance	California
Randall Reeves	Chair, Cetacean Specialist Group	International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	Quebec, Canada
Ken Macdonald, PhD	Professor Emeritus, Marine Geoscience	University of California, Santa Barbara	California
Deborah Giles, PhD	Science and Research Director	Wild Orca	Washington

Howard W. Braham, PhD	Emeritus Director	National Marine Mammal Laboratory, Seattle	Washington
Casey Mclean, LVT	Executive Director	SR3 Sealife Response, Rehab and Research	Washington
David Checkley, PhD	Emeritus Professor	University of California, San Diego	California
Misty MacDuffee	Biologist, Wild Salmon Program Director	Raincoast Conservation Foundation	British Columbia, Canada
Gina Himes Boor, PhD	Research Scientist	National Marine Mammal Foundation	Montana
Ann Pabst, PhD	Retired	Marine Mammal Researcher	North Carolina
Holly Fernbach, PhD	Marine Mammal Research Director	SR3, SeaLife Response, Rehab and Research	Washington
Lee Blankenship	Retired, Senior Research Scientist	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Congressionally Appointed Hatchery Science Review Group (HSRG)	Washington
Barbara Taylor, PhD	Cetacean Specialist Group	International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	California
Stephen Conroy, PhD	Board Member	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington
Shari Tarantino	Executive Director	Orca Conservancy	Washington
Peter Bahls, MSc	Executive Director	Northwest Watershed Institute	Washington
Robert Warner, PhD	Distinguished Research Professor	University of California Santa Barbara	California
David Bain, PhD	Chief Scientist	Orca Conservancy	Washington
Fred Koontz, PhD	Former Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissioner and Collaborator	Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission	Washington
Lisa Levin, PhD	Professor Emerita	Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego	California

Kevin Campion, Cpt	Founder	Deep Green Wilderness, Captain of the S/V Orion, Film Maker "The Unknown Sea" and "Right Over the Edge" and Environmental Educator	Washington
Juan Carlos Cardenas	Medico Veterinario	Centro Ecoceanos Chile	Chile
Shaye Wolf, PhD	Scientist	Center for Biological Diversity	California
Maradel Gale, PhD	Associate Professor Emerita	University of Oregon	Oregon
Jay Barlow, PhD		Barlow Acoustic Gadgets, Analysis and Design - AGAD	California
Michelle Lute, PhD	Executive Director	Wildlife for All	New Mexico
Rachel Haymon, PhD	Professor Emerita, Marine Geoscience	University of California, Santa Barbara	California
Nick Gayeski, PhD	Senior Fisheries Scientist	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington
Nathan Donley, PhD		Center for Biological Diversity	Washington
Francisco J. Santiago-Ávila, PhD, MPP/MEM	Science & Advocacy Director	Washington Wildlife First	Washington
Peter Hapke, JD, MA		Washington Wildlife First	Washington
Kriss Kevorkian, PhD	Founder	Legal Rights for the Salish Sea	Washington
Jamie Glasgow, MSc	Director of Science and Research	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington
Elizabeth Carr, MSc	Director of Wildlife Programs	Kettle Range Conservation Group	Washington
Patrick Kelly, PhD, MA	Washington and Montana Director	Western Watersheds Project	Montana
John Rosapepe, MSc	Pacific Northwest Representative	Endangered Species Coalition	Washington
Collette Adkins, MSc	Carnivore Conservation Program Director	Center for Biological Diversity	Minnesota
Marianne Edain, MSc		Frosty Hollow Ecological Restoration	Washington
Lynn Okita, MSc	Environmental Advocate		Washington

Doug Hennick, MSc	Aquatic Ecologist	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington
Catherine Kilduff	Senior Attorney	Center for Biological Diversity	California
Sharon Stroble, MSc		Various Affiliations	Washington
Elsa Cabrera	Executive Director	Centro de Conservacion Cetacea Chile	Chile
Mike Petersen	Former Washington Fish and Wildlife Department Budget and Policy Advisory Group Member	Private citizen	Washington
Kurt Beardslee	Founder and Former Executive Director, Director of Special Projects	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington
Patricia L Arnold	Executive Director	Friends of the White Salmon River	Washington
Gwendolyn McManus	Biologist	Center for Biological Diversity	Washington
Karen Wristen	Executive Director	Living Oceans Society	British Columbia
Emily Diaz-loar	Economist	Center for Biological Diversity	Massachusetts
Emma Helverson	Executive Director	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington
Curtis Bradley	Senior Scientist	Center for Biological Diversity	Arizona
Dan Paul	Western Regional Director	Humane World for Animals (Formerly Called the Humane Society of the United States)	Washington
Conrad Gowell	Biologist	Wild Fish Conservancy	Oregon
Hannah Thompson-Garner	Director of Advocacy	Northwest Animal Rights Network	Washington
Claire Loeb Davis, JD	President and Executive Director, Founding Member	Washington Wildlife First	Washington
Brooks Fahy	Executive Director	Predator Defense	Washington/ Oregon
Arny Stonkus, PE	Ecologist	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington

Samantha Miller	Senior Carnivore Campaigner	Center for Biological Diversity	Colorado
Heather Nicholson		Washington State Constituent	Washington
Ronald Reed		Independent Citizen Advocate	Washington
Vance Jennings	Board Member, Eastern Washington Constituent	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington
Chris Bachman, BA, Med	Environmental Consultant, Biologist		Washington
Hugh Lewis, JD	Attorney	Retired	Washington
Mary Lou White	Project Manager, Biologist	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington
Fritz Wollett		Independent Citizen Advocate	Washington
Jeff Martin		Independent Citizen Advocate	Washington
Paige Hosman	Biologist	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington
Candace Beardslee	Board Member	Wild Fish Conservancy	Washington
Coleman Byrnes	Fishery Biologist	Snake Rivers Savers	Washington
Toby Cooper		Private Citizen	Washington