

LISA MURKOWSKI
ALASKA

COMMITTEES:
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN

APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,
ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
CHAIRMAN

HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR,
AND PENSIONS

INDIAN AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0203
(202) 224-6665
(202) 224-5301 FAX

510 L STREET, SUITE 600
ANCHORAGE, AK 99501-1956
(907) 271-3735

101 12TH AVENUE, ROOM 329
FAIRBANKS, AK 99701-6278
(907) 456-0233

800 GLACIER AVENUE, SUITE 101
JUNEAU, AK 99801
(907) 586-7277

805 FRONTAGE ROAD, SUITE 105
KENAI, AK 99611-9104
(907) 283-5808

1900 FIRST AVENUE, SUITE 225
KETCHIKAN, AK 99901-6059
(907) 225-6880

851 EAST WESTPOINT DRIVE, SUITE 307
WASILLA, AK 99654-7142
(907) 376-7665

April 7, 2017

Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr. USN
Commander
US Pacific Command
Box 64031
Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii 96861-4031

Admiral Scott H. Swift, USN
Commander
US Pacific Fleet
250 Makalapa Drive
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii 96860-3131

Gentlemen:

I write with respect to the Northern Edge 2017 exercise which is scheduled to take place in Alaska from May 1-12, 2017. This biennial exercise is conducted under the auspices of the US Pacific Command and hosted by the Alaskan Command. While much of the exercise occurs on the ground ranges and airspace of the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex, a portion is conducted in the Gulf of Alaska. It is this latter aspect of the exercise, conducted by the Navy, which has generated concern among Alaska communities.

In September 2016, I wrote Secretary Mabus to request that the Navy conduct a robust outreach to stakeholders in the course of planning Northern Edge 2017 to ensure that concerns were received and addressed. The Navy, with support from Alaskan Command, has participated in an extensive series of stakeholder meetings. During these meetings, the Navy discussed a mitigation package for Northern Edge 2017, which included avoidance of sensitive areas and restrictions on the scope of the exercise. The outreach team briefed the Alaska congressional delegation on two occasions.

In spite of the Navy's improved outreach there remains dissatisfaction with respect to the timing of the exercise: specifically, its proximity to the fishing season in the Gulf of Alaska. Some stakeholders argue that scientific knowledge is insufficient to assure that the Navy's activities during this sensitive time are fully compatible with the region's commercial fishing economy. Last evening, the legislative body of the Kodiak Island Borough unanimously passed a resolution acknowledging these concerns.

The purpose of this letter is to request that US Pacific Command give serious thought to conducting the Gulf of Alaska component of the Northern Edge 2019 exercise in the fall. I have raised this issue with the outreach team and understand that this alternative is under consideration. It is important that your consideration of this alternative be transparent to the affected communities.

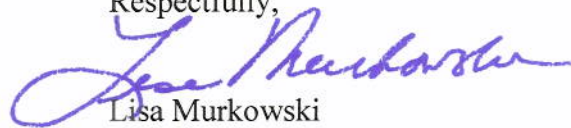
While the communities are appreciative that the outreach team came to visit, one member of the Kodiak Island Borough Assembly related the frustration at not being able to meet with the senior leader who ultimately makes the decision on exercise scheduling. Another related that a member of the outreach team stated that the concerns expressed by the Assembly Member were “above his pay grade.”

In addition to the scheduling issues, it has also been suggested to me that the Navy review the base of scientific knowledge relating to the compatibility of naval exercises with high value fisheries and commit to fund research gaps. Some of the stakeholders insist that the Navy submit to an independent review of the impact of offshore exercise activities in the Pacific on the fisheries by the National Academies. I find that the National Academies’ rigorous evidence based analysis is useful to constructive resolution of resource conflicts. I would appreciate your views on these suggestions.

Finally, I encourage the outreach team to continue its work with communities and stakeholders before, during and after the Northern Edge 2017 exercise. If adverse environmental impacts are identified in the course of the exercise, it is important that they be immediately addressed. An after-action review with communities and stakeholders following the conclusion of the exercise, to include the satisfaction of stakeholders with the quality of the outreach, would also be in order.

I expect to address these issues with senior leaders when the Navy appears before the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee next month. Thank you for considering my views on this matter.

Respectfully,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

cc: Lt. Gen. Kenneth S. Wilsbach, USAF,
Commander, Alaskan Command