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FROM: Dave Weller
TO: Virtual Team Leaders and Science Team
SUBJECT: Gray whales and climate change

Dear Virtual Team Members!

Our calf count continues to go very well. Today, I want to discuss the topic of our changing environment. In the Arctic marine (ocean) environment, already observable changes include: reductions in sea ice, extended periods of open water, and overall increases in water and air temperatures.

Marine mammal species dependent upon sea ice, such as polar bears and walrus, could be negatively impacted by these changes. Other species that are only seasonally associated with the Arctic, such as gray whales, could possibly get some benefit.

The reduction in sea ice coverage in the Arctic has resulted in an expansion of where we find gray whales on their summer feeding grounds. Observations of gray whales off the North Slope of Alaska and even further to the east in the Canadian Beaufort Sea are now common.

There have also been observations of gray whales in the Mediterranean Sea in 2010. That's the first record of a gray whale in the Atlantic Ocean since the since the 1700s. In 2013, a gray whale was observed off Namibia West Africa. That's the first record of a gray whale in the Southern Hemisphere! These wayward gray whales could indicate the future if the sea ice continue to shrink. That could cause the northern Arctic passageways, linking the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, to become ice-free.

Time for me to get back to counting gray whales here in California.

Have fun,

Dr. Dave

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