Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP). However, further review and consultation may be necessary before a final determination is made to issue the EFP. Therefore, NMFS announces that the Assistant Regional Administrator proposes to recommend that an EFP be issued that would allow three commercial fishing vessels to conduct fishing operations that are otherwise restricted by the regulations governing the fisheries of the Northeastern United States. The EFP, which would enable researchers to investigate the efficacy of an experimental trawl designed to reduce the bycatch of cod while maintaining selectivity for haddock, would allow for exemptions from the FMP as follows: U.S./Canada Management Area gear requirements for trawl nets, U.S./Canada Management Area harvest control regulations, and NE multispecies possession restrictions. Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require publication of this notification to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on applications for proposed EFPs.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before December 29, 2006.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, 1 Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope ''Comments on the Massachusetts Haddock Trawl Study.'' Comments may also be sent via facsimile (fax) to (978) 281–9135, or submitted via e-mail to the following address: *DA6347@noaa.gov*.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tobey Curtis, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281–9273, fax (978) 281–9135.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: A complete application for an EFP was submitted on November 15, 2006, by David Chosid and Michael Pol of the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF). The project was funded by the DMF/University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, School for Marine Science and Technology, Marine Fisheries Institute grant program. The primary goal of the research is to test the effectiveness of a sweepless raised footrope trawl, designed to minimize the catch of Atlantic cod while maximizing the catch of haddock. The intent of the researchers is that the experimental net, if successful, could potentially be an acceptable alternative trawl design to be used in the groundfish fishery.

The project is a continuation of research previously conducted in 2006 by DMF, which has preliminarily shown that this new trawl net design significantly reduces the bycatch of cod, as compared to the standard legal trawl. Specifically, DMF will test the effectiveness of a sweepless (no ground gear) raised footrope, semi-pelagic trawl, referred to as the ''5–point trawl.'' The net was designed to exploit the differences in behavior of haddock and cod in relation to towed gears. Similar to the haddock separator trawl, this experimental net proposes to reduce cod mortality; however, it avoids some of the complexities associated with separator trawls, since the cod would not pass through meshes, or encounter grids or escape vents. Although this study would focus on reducing cod-haddock interactions, this net may also reduce the bycatch of flatfish species such as winter flounder, yellowtail flounder, witch flounder, and American plaice.

The species of principal interest in the study are cod and haddock, but the study will also have implications for flatfishes, including yellowtail flounder, winter flounder, witch flounder, and American plaice. All fish would be sorted and weighed, and fish of legal size would be retained for sale. All discards would be released as quickly as practicable to reduce incidental mortality. Based on catch data from previous experimental tows with this net design, the researchers anticipate that a total of 34 mt (74,957 lb) of fish would be harvested throughout the course of the study. All proceeds from the sale of the fish would be returned to DMF for the purpose of enhancing future research.

All at-sea research would be conducted from three fishing vessels. The vessels intend to fish in the Eastern and Western U.S./Canada Management Areas. The vessel would fish exclusively outside of all closed areas. A total of 21 days would be used for testing the experimental trawls, carried out under NE multispecies Category A Days-at-Sea. An anticipated 120, 2-hour tows, using a twin trawl rig, would be conducted during that time. This effort would result in a total of 240 hours of bottom time for the experimental trawls. DMF staff would be aboard the vessel at all times during testing.

Based on preliminary review of this project, and in accordance with NOAA Administrative Order 216–6, a Categorical Exclusion from requirements to prepare either an Environmental Impact Statement or an Environmental Assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act appears to be justified. The applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope or impact of the initially approved EFP request.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: December 11, 2006.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. E6–21275 Filed 12–13–06; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 113006B]

Marine Mammals

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; availability of new criteria for designation of marine mammal Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs).

SUMMARY: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announces new criteria developed by the Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events (Working Group) to help determine when a marine mammal Unusual Mortality Event (UME) is occurring.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Teri Rowles, D.V.M., Ph.D. or Trevor Spradlin, NMFS, Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program, Office of Protected Resources; telephone: (301) 713–2322; fax: (301) 427–2522.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Marine mammals strand for a variety of reasons. Some identified causes include: infectious disease (*e.g.*, viral, bacterial, parasitic), non-infectious disease (*e.g.*, stress, starvation, exposure to biotoxins or contaminants.), physical trauma (*e.g.*, ship strikes, entanglements, predation, acoustic sources), behavioral changes (*e.g.*, associated with prey shifts, social cohesiveness), weather and oceanographic conditions (*e.g.*, hurricanes, tsunamis, El Nino), to name a few (Geraci *et al.*, 1999; Dierauf and Gulland, 2001; Geraci and Lounsbury, 2005). Title IV of the Marine Mammal

Protection Act (MMPA, 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) defines a set of multiple strandings to be part of an ''Unusual Mortality Event'' (UME) if it has the following characteristics: (1) It is unexpected; (2) involves a significant die-off of any marine mammal population; and (3) demands an immediate response. In recent years, increased efforts to examine carcasses and live stranded animals and new diagnostic capabilities have improved our knowledge of mortality rates, patterns, and causes, allowing us to better understand population threats and stressors and to determine when a situation is ''unusual.'' These advancements have contributed significantly to conservation efforts for marine mammals. Understanding and investigating marine mammal UMEs is also important because they can serve as indicators of ocean status or health, giving us insight into larger environmental issues which also may have implications for human health and welfare (Reddy *et al.*, 2001; Wells *et al.*, 2004) and population management. From 1991 through 2006, there have been 37 formally recognized UMEs in the United States involving either single or multiple species and dozens to hundreds of individual marine mammals per event.

The Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) formally declare an UME upon the recommendation of the Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events (The Working Group or WGMMUME). The Working Group was first established in 1991 by NMFS in response to large numbers of marine mammal mortalities in the late 1980s involving humpback whales in the Northeast U.S., bottlenose dolphins along the Atlantic coast and the Exxon Valdez oil spill (Geraci *et al.*, 1999; Dierauf and Gulland, 2001; Gulland, 2006), and was formalized when Congress passed the 1992 amendments to the MMPA as the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Act. As statutorily defined, the Working Group's primary role is to determine when an UME is occurring and to help direct the response and investigation. From 1991 through 2006, the Working Group has consulted on 37 marine mammal UMEs throughout the United States involving numerous species of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises), pinnipeds (seals, sea lions), manatees and sea otters (Gulland, 2006).

The Working Group is comprised of members from scientific and academic institutions, conservation organizations, and state and/or Federal agencies who have a wide variety of expertise in biology, toxicology, medicine, pathology, ecology, and/or epidemiology. The members are appointed for three-year terms and meet annually in person, and engage in discussions throughout the year by e-mail or conference call to review and consult on individual cases, events, or disease issues. In addition to the core members, there are two international participants (one from Canada and one from Mexico) and Federal Government representatives (currently including NMFS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Marine Mammal Commission) who, although they have no voting privileges, contribute significantly to the data reviews, internal discussions, sample analyses, and overall UME investigations. Responses to UMEs are coordinated by either the NMFS or USFWS Regional Offices depending on the species (NMFS has jurisdiction for all cetaceans and most pinnipeds (seals and sea lions), whereas USFWS has jurisdiction for walrus, sea otters, manatees and polar bears) and the regional stranding networks, as well as other Federal, state and local agencies. Investigation of such events has led to a greater understanding of the impacts of human-related and natural causes of mortality in marine mammal populations.

In order to determine whether an UME is occurring, the Working Group developed seven criteria to evaluate mortality events, which were published in the National Contingency Plan for Response to Unusual Marine Mammal Mortality Events (Wilkinson 1996):

(1) A marked increase in the magnitude of strandings when compared with prior records.

(2) Animals are stranding at a time of the year when strandings are unusual.

(3) An increase in strandings is occurring in a very localized area (possibly suggesting a localized problem), is occurring throughout the geographical range of the species/population, or spreads geographically with time.

(4) The species, age, or sex composition of the stranded animals is different than that of animals that normally strand in the area at that time of the year.

(5) Stranded animals exhibit similar or unusual pathologic findings or the general physical condition (e.g., blubber thickness) of stranded animals is different from what is normally seen.

(6) Mortality is accompanied by behavior patterns observed among living individuals in the wild that are unusual, such as occurrence in habitats normally avoided or abnormal patterns of swimming and diving.

(7) Critically endangered species are stranding. Stranding of three or four right whales, for example, may be cause for great concern whereas stranding of a similar number of fin whales may not.

The Working Group considers that a single criterion or combination of criteria may indicate the occurrence of an UME.

The process of declaring an UME involves the Working Group reviewing all available information on the event within 24 hours of receiving a request for a formal consultation from concerned stakeholders (e.g., government officials, the marine mammal stranding network, scientific researchers, wildlife conservation organizations, etc.). The Working Group reviews historical stranding data and current population trends for the species of marine mammals involved, as well as environmental factors. After the Working Group announces their decision, which is achieved by a majority vote from a quorum of responders, NMFS or USFWS (depending on which agency has jurisdiction) has an additional 24 hours to officially declare the event an UME and appoint an Onsite Coordinator to oversee and administer the investigation. If an UME is declared, the Working Group will provide advice on how the investigation should be conducted, and individual members may serve on the investigation team. When an UME is officially declared, money from the Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Event Fund may be made available to help reimburse some of the ''special costs'' incurred during the investigation as specified in Section 405 of the MMPA and the *National Contingency Plan for Response to Unusual Marine Mammal Mortality Events* (Wilkinson 1996).

New Criteria for Determining Marine Mammal UMEs

At the Working Group's 2004 annual meeting, the members reevaluated the original seven criteria used to determine an UME and have revised them to include morbidity, pathology and population-level declines in an effort to improve detection of events that could have significant impacts on populations of marine mammals (e.g., unusual disease outbreaks that do not necessarily result in mortalities). Steady declines in population abundance can influence numbers of animals detected by the stranding network, this in turn influencing the likelihood of a stranding event being declared ''unusual'' under

the current criteria. An emphasis on considering mortalities in the current criteria may also delay a response that could be crucial to identify causal factors. Elevating the importance of ''morbidity'' could initiate consideration of an UME sooner, and improve the effectiveness of a subsequent investigation. Therefore, the UME criteria have been revised as follows:

(1) A marked increase in the magnitude or a marked change in the nature of morbidity, mortality or strandings when compared with prior records.

(2) A temporal change in morbidity, mortality or strandings is occurring.

(3) A spatial change in morbidity, mortality or strandings is occurring.

(4) The species, age, or sex composition of the affected animals is different than that of animals that are normally affected.

(5) Affected animals exhibit similar or unusual pathologic findings, behavior patterns, clinical signs, or general physical condition (e.g., blubber thickness).

(6) Potentially significant morbidity, mortality or stranding is observed in species, stocks or populations that are particularly vulnerable (e.g., listed as depleted, threatened or endangered or declining). For example, stranding of three or four right whales may be cause for great concern whereas stranding of a similar number of fin whales may not.

(7) Morbidity is observed concurrent with or as part of an unexplained continual decline of a marine mammal population, stock, or species.

As with the original criteria, the Working Group considers whether a single criterion or combination of the revised criteria may indicate the occurrence of an UME. The Working Group agreed to use the revised criteria on a pilot basis beginning in July 2004 and evaluate their utility after applying them to several consultation requests throughout 2005 and 2006. The Working Group has since determined that the revised criteria have been more applicable to current stranding events than the original criteria and has voted to adopt them as the new official UME criteria to be used for all future consultations (or until such time when they are reevaluated and revised again).

Additional information on the MMHSRP and UME program, including frequent updates, can be found on the Internet at: *http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/*

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*

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Dated: December 8, 2006.

James H. Lecky,

Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. E6–21300 Filed 12–13–06; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–S

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

[OMB Control No. 9000–0094]

Federal Acquisition Regulation; Information Collection; Debarment and Suspension

AGENCIES: Department of Defense (DOD), General Services Administration (GSA), and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

ACTION: Notice of request for public comments regarding an extension to an existing OMB clearance.

SUMMARY: Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Secretariat will be submitting to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) a request to review and approve an extension of a currently approved information collection requirement concerning debarment and suspension. The OMB clearance expires March 31, 2007.

DATES: Submit comments on or before February 12, 2007.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to the General Services Administration, FAR Secretariat (VIR), 1800 F Street, NW, Room 4035, Washington, DC 20405. Please cite OMB Control No.9000–0094, Debarment and Suspension, in all correspondence.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: William Clark, Contract Policy Division, GSA (202) 219–1813.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

A. Purpose

The FAR requires contracts to be awarded to only those contractors determined to be responsible. Instances where a firm or its principals have been indicted, convicted, suspended, proposed for debarment, debarred, or had a contract terminated for default are critical factors to be considered by the contracting officer in making a responsibility determination. This certification requires the disclosure of this information.

B. Annual Reporting Burden

Respondents: 89,995.
Responses per respondent: 12.223.
Total Responses: 1,100,000.
Hours Per Response: 0.0833 hrs.
Total Burden Hours: 91,667.
Obtaining Copies of Proposals: Requesters may obtain a copy of the information collection documents from the General Services Administration, FAR Secretariat (VIR), Room 4035, Washington, DC 20405, telephone (202) 501–4755. Please cite OMB Control No. 9000–0094, Debarment and Suspension, in all correspondence.

Dated: December 11, 2006.

Ralph De Stefano,

Director, Contract Policy Division.

[FR Doc. 06–9702 Filed 12–13–06; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6820–EP–S