

Dated: April 22, 2008.

Emily H. Menashes

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XG85

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permits

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

ACTION: Notice; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Northeast Region, NMFS (Assistant Regional Administrator), has made a preliminary determination that an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) application submitted by the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI) contains all of the required information and warrants further consideration. The Assistant Regional Administrator has made a preliminary determination that the activities authorized under this EFP would be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). However, further review and consultation may be necessary before a final determination is made to issue an EFP. Therefore, NMFS announces that the Assistant Regional Administrator proposes to recommend that an EFP be issued that would allow 11 commercial fishing vessels to conduct compensation fishing operations that are otherwise restricted by the regulations governing the fisheries of the Northeastern United States. This EFP, which would enable vessels to harvest monkfish granted through the Monkfish Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program, would grant exemptions from the monkfish days-at-sea (DAS) possession limits in the Southern Fishery Management Area.

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 May 12, 2008.

ADDRESSES: You may submit written comments by any of the following methods:

- Email: DA8-081@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line "Comments on GMRI Monkfish EFP."

- Mail: Patricia A. Kurkul, Regional Administrator, NMFS, NE Regional Office, 1 Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope "Comments on GMRI monkfish EFP, DA8-081."

- Fax: (978) 281-9135.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Emily Bryant, Fishery Management Specialist, 978-281-9244.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: An application for an EFP was submitted by GMRI on March 21, 2008, for a project funded under the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils' Monkfish RSA Program. The project itself will evaluate the discard of monkfish caught as bycatch on Northeast (NE) multispecies DAS and directed monkfish trips. Research trips will be covered under a separate EFP. This EFP would grant an exemption from monkfish possession limits to 11 vessels for the purpose of harvesting RSA to fund this research project (i.e. compensation fishing). Funds generated by the compensation fishing will be used to pay for vessel charters, technical and sampling equipment, as well as salaries and stipends for principal investigators and industry collaborators.

The research portion of this project will occur over the course of 1 year and will utilize boat- and port-based data collection programs to estimate and compare monkfish discards between boats trawling for NE multispecies in the DAS program and directed monkfish trips in the Gulf of Maine. The boat-based program will utilize the Study Fleet electronic logbook and independent at-sea sampling, and will be complemented with port-based sampling of retained and otherwise discarded monkfish. The research would be covered under the programmatic Study Fleet EFP. More information regarding the exemptions requested for this EFP can be found in the **Federal Register** notice that published on March 25, 2008 (73 FR 15739).

Compensation fishing for this research will occur from May 2008 through April 2009. The 11 fishing industry collaborators will have access to 139 Monkfish DAS that will be awarded to the project through the Monkfish RSA Program. These vessels must be able to land at least 2,500 lb (1,134 kg) of whole monkfish (730 lb (331 kg) tail weight) per trip to achieve

the goal of \$3,000 per RSA DAS. In order to achieve this target catch, these fishing activities would require an exemption from monkfish DAS possession limits at § 648.94(b)(2). This exemption would provide these 11 vessels with the flexibility they need to generate sufficient income to meet projected costs, while minimizing operating expenses, of the research activity. Based on the awarded 139 DAS, this would require a total catch of 347,500 lb (157,623 kg) of whole monkfish (104,669 lb (47,477 kg) tail weight). Operating under this total landings cap, compensation fishing would continue until the required goal of 347,500 lb (157,623 kg) of whole monkfish is met, or until the awarded DAS have been fully utilized, which ever occurs first. Aside from this exemption, fishing activity will be conducted under normal commercial practices.

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. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited. If the research project is terminated for any reason prior to completion, any unused funds collected from catch sold to pay for research expenses may be refunded to NOAA.

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

Dated: April 22, 2008.

Emily H. Menashes

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Docket Number: 080411558-8559-01]

Draft Revision of the NOAA Hurricane Forecasting Improvement Project Plan

AGENCY: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce (DOC).

ACTION: Notice of availability and request for public comment.

SUMMARY: NOAA publishes this notice to announce the availability of the draft NOAA Hurricane Forecasting

Improvement Project Plan for public comment. The Plan has been written to document NOAA's commitment to work with its partners in hurricane research and development to improve its capabilities to forecast hurricanes.

DATES: Comments on this draft document must be submitted by 5 p.m. EDT on May 27, 2008.

ADDRESSES: The draft NOAA Hurricane Forecasting Improvement Project Plan will be available on the NOAA Research Council Web site at <http://www.nrc.noaa.gov/HFIPDraftPlan.html>.

The public is encouraged to submit comments electronically to noaa.review.hfip_plan@noaa.gov. For individuals who do not have access to the internet, comments may be submitted by mail to: NOAA Research, c/o Mr. Roger Pierce, Silver Spring Metro Center Bldg. 3, Room 11412, R/PPE, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Roger Pierce, Silver Spring Metro Center Bldg. 3, Room 11314, R/PPE, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910. (Phone 301-734-1062, Fax: 301-713-0158, E-mail: roger.pierce@noaa.gov), during normal business hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NOAA is publishing this notice to announce the availability of the draft NOAA Hurricane Forecasting Improvement Project Plan for public comment. The NOAA is seeking public comment from all interested parties. The NOAA Hurricane Forecasting Improvement Project Plan draft is being issued for comment only and is not intended for interim use. Suggested changes will be incorporated where appropriate, and the final document will be posted on a NOAA Web site.

The NOAA Hurricane Forecasting Improvement Project Plan is being developed to reflect the evolution of NOAA's research activities and priorities. The draft NOAA Hurricane Forecasting Improvement Project Plan is consistent with the NOAA Science Advisory Board, Hurricane Intensity Research Working Group recommendations and other recent internal and external reports on hurricanes.

The draft NOAA Hurricane Forecasting Improvement Project Plan frames research in NOAA within the context of societal needs and by working with other government and academic organizations working on critical environmental challenges, particularly those associated with hurricanes, facing the United States

today and in the future. This plan states NOAA's priority research areas, such as Hurricane Intensity forecast improvements, improvements in high performance computing, use of new data, for the short term and the milestones by which NOAA intends to measure progress within these areas. Significant topics addressed in the NOAA Hurricane Forecasting Improvement Project Plan include the importance of transition of research to application, the recognition of the value of transformational research, and the engagement and alignment of inter-agency and the larger scientific community efforts toward finding solutions to the challenges posed to improve hurricane forecasts.

NOAA welcomes all comments on the content of the draft NOAA Hurricane Forecasting Improvement Project Plan. We also request comments on any inconsistencies perceived within the document and possible omissions of important topics or issues. For any shortcoming noted within the draft document, please propose specific remedies.

Please follow these instructions for preparing and submitting comments. Using the format guidance described below will facilitate the processing of reviewer comments and assure that all comments are appropriately considered. Overview comments should be provided first. Comments that are specific to particular pages, paragraphs, or lines of the section should follow any overview comments and should identify the page numbers to which they apply. Please number each page of your comments.

Dated: April 21, 2008.

Mark E. Brown,

Chief Financial Officer, Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

[FR Doc. E8-9062 Filed 4-24-08; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XH09

Marine Mammals; File No. 774-1714

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

ACTION: Notice; issuance of permit amendment.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that NMFS, Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) (Jeremy Rusin,

Principal Investigator), Protected Resources Division, 8604 La Jolla Shores Dr., La Jolla, CA 92037 has been issued an amendment to scientific research Permit No. 774-1714-06.

ADDRESSES: The amendment and related documents are available for review upon written request or by appointment in the following offices: See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION.**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Amy Hapeman or Carrie Hubard, (301)713-2289.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On March 12, 2007, notice was published in the **Federal Register** (72 FR 10986) that an amendment of Permit No. 774-1714, issued June 30, 2004 (68 FR 57673), had been requested by the above-named organization. The requested amendment has been granted under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*), the regulations governing the taking and importing of marine mammals (50 CFR part 216), the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), and the regulations governing the taking, importing, and exporting of endangered and threatened species (50 CFR 222-226).

Permit No. 774-1714-07 authorizes the SWFSC to conduct research on seven pinniped species, 55 cetacean species, and five sea turtle species in the Pacific, Indian, Atlantic, Arctic and Southern Oceans. The permit authorizes Level B harassment during aerial and vessel surveys for photo-identification/photogrammetry, incidental harassment, collection of sloughed skin, and salvage of carcasses and parts; Level A harassment for capture, biopsy sampling, and tagging activities; and the import/export of specimens. This amendment: (1) reorganizes the take table to reflect annual takes instead of 5-year cumulative takes; (2) increases the number of animals harassed during aerial and vessel surveys, biopsy sampled, and/or tagged for several cetacean species; (3) collapses authorized takes of six cetacean stocks to the species level; (4) adds Antarctic minke whales (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*) to species that may be harassed during aerial and vessel surveys for photo-id and biopsy sampled; (5) adds four new cetacean categories for animals that are observed but not identifiable during surveys; (6) adds 14 cetacean species/stocks to those that may be harassed/sampled in the Southern Ocean; and (7) authorizes the satellite tagging of 50 non-endangered killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in Antarctic