

in the MCD. Expected benefits include: (1) Establishment of a refuge and resource replenishment area to increase abundance and diversity of reef resources; (2) protection of critical spawning stock and recruits from overfishing, thus helping to ensure continued abundance of fishery resources; (3) physical protection of the coral reef structures; and (4) improvement of opportunities for eco-tourism that does not damage coral. Disadvantages include displacement of fishing effort to other areas and possible short-term loss of revenues for commercial fishermen, especially reef fish trap fishermen.

Scoping Process

Public hearings were held on these issues during March 1996 and October 1997 in the USVI. No additional scoping meetings are scheduled. The Council is requesting written comments on the scope of the issues to be addressed in the DSEIS.

Timetable for DSEIS Preparation and Decisionmaking Schedule

The Council intends to accept public comments on the completed DSEIS, prepare a final supplemental environmental impact statement (FSEIS), and submit the FSEIS to NMFS when it submits Amendment 1 for NMFS' review, approval, and implementation.

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

Dated: December 31, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Docket No. 97-1114270-7270-01; I.D. 111397A]

RIN 0648-ZA35

Financial Assistance for Research and Development Projects in the Gulf of Mexico and Off the U.S. South Atlantic Coastal States; Marine Fisheries Initiative (MARFIN)

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

ACTION: ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: Subject to the availability of funds, NMFS will continue MARFIN to

assist persons in carrying out research and development projects that optimize the use of fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and off the South Atlantic States of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida involving the U.S. fishing industry (recreational and commercial), including fishery biology, resource assessment, socio-economic assessment, management and conservation, selected harvesting methods, and fish handling and processing. NMFS issues this notice describing the conditions under which applications will be accepted and how NMFS will select applications for funding. Areas of emphasis for MARFIN were formulated from recommendations received from non-Federal scientific and technical experts, and from NMFS research and operations officials.

DATES: Applications for funding under this program will be accepted between January 7, 1998 and 5 p.m. eastern daylight time on March 9, 1998. Applications received after that time will not be considered for funding. No facsimile applications will be accepted.

Applications may be inspected at the NMFS Southeast Regional Office (see **ADDRESSES**) from March 13, 1998, through March 16, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Send applications to: Ellie Francisco Roche, Competitive Programs Manager, State/Federal Liaison Office, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive, N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ellie Francisco Roche, 813-570-5324.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Authority

The Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) is authorized under 15 U.S.C. 713c-3(d) to carry out a national program of research and development addressed to such aspects of U.S. fisheries (including, but not limited, to harvesting, processing, marketing and to associated infrastructures), if not adequately covered by projects assisted under 15 U.S.C. 713c-3(c), as the Secretary deems appropriate.

II. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA)

This program is described in the "Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance" (CFDA) under program number 11.433, Marine Fisheries Initiative.

III. Program Description

MARFIN is a competitive Federal assistance program that promotes and endorses programs that seek to optimize research and development benefits from

U.S. marine fishery resources through cooperative efforts that involve the best research and management talents to accomplish priority activities. Projects funded under MARFIN are focused into cooperative efforts that provide answers for fishery needs covered by the NMFS Strategic Plan, available from the Southeast Regional Office (see **ADDRESSES**), particularly those goals relating to rebuilding overfished marine fisheries, maintaining currently productive fisheries, and integrating conservation of protected species and fisheries management.

Emphasis will be placed upon funding projects that have the greatest probability of recovering, maintaining, improving, or developing fisheries; improving the understanding of factors affecting recruitment success; and/or generating increased values and recreational opportunities from fisheries. Projects will be evaluated as to the likelihood of achieving these benefits through both short- and long-term research efforts, with consideration of the magnitude of the eventual economic or social benefits that may be realized. Short-term projects that may yield more immediate benefits and projects yielding longer-term benefits will receive equal consideration.

IV. Funding Availability

This solicitation announces that funding of approximately \$1.10 million may be available in fiscal year (FY) 1998. MARFIN financial assistance started in FY 1986 for financial assistance to conduct research for fishery resources in the Gulf of Mexico and off the South Atlantic states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all approved projects.

Project proposals accepted for funding for a project period over 1 year that include multiple project components and severable tasks to be funded during each budget period will not compete for funding in subsequent budget periods within the approved project period. However, funding for subsequent project components is contingent upon the availability of funds from Congress and satisfactory performance and will be at the sole discretion of the agency. Publication of this notice does not obligate NMFS to award any specific cooperative agreement or to obligate all or any parts of the available funds.

V. Matching Requirements

Applications must reflect the total budget necessary to accomplish the project, including contributions and/or donations. Cost-sharing is not required

for the MARFIN program. However, cost-sharing is encouraged and, in case of a tie in considering proposals for funding, cost-sharing may affect the final decision. The appropriateness of all cost-sharing will be determined on the basis of guidance provided in applicable Federal cost principles. If an applicant chooses to cost-share, and if that application is selected for funding, the applicant will be bound by the percentage of the cost share reflected in the cooperative agreement award.

The non-Federal share may include the value of in-kind contributions by the applicant or third parties or funds received from private sources or from state or local governments. Federal funds may not be used to meet the non-Federal share of matching funds, except as provided by Federal statute. Third party in-kind contributions may be in the form of, but are not limited to, personal services rendered in carrying out functions related to the project and use of real or personal property owned by others (for which consideration is not required) in carrying out the projects. In 15 U.S.C. 713c-3(c)(4)(B) the amount of the grant is specified to be no less than 50 percent of the estimated cost of the project.

The total cost of a project begins on the effective award date of an authorized cooperative agreement between the applicant and the NOAA Grants Officer and ends on the date specified in the award. Accordingly, costs incurred in either the development of a project or the financial assistance application, or time expended in any subsequent discussions or negotiations prior to the award, are neither reimbursable nor recognizable as part of the recipient's cost share.

VI. Type of Funding Instrument

The cooperative agreement has been determined to be the appropriate funding instrument. NMFS is substantially involved in developing program research priorities, conducting cooperative activities with recipients, and evaluating the performance of recipients for effectiveness in meeting national and regional goals for fishery research in the southeastern United States.

VII. Eligibility Criteria

A. Applications for cooperative agreements for MARFIN projects may be made, in accordance with the procedures set forth in this notice, by:

1. Any individual who is a citizen or national of the United States or a citizen of the Northern Mariana Islands.
2. Any corporation, partnership, or other entity, non-profit or otherwise, if

such entity is a citizen of the United States within the meaning of section 2 of the Shipping Act, 1916, as amended (46 app. U.S.C. 802). Colleges, universities, and game and fish departments of the several states are included in this eligibility criteria.

B. Federal agencies, Federal instrumentalities, and Federal employees, including NOAA employees (full-time, part-time, and intermittent personnel or their immediate families), and NOAA offices or centers are not eligible to submit an application under this solicitation or aid in the preparation of an application during the 60-day solicitation period, except to provide information about the MARFIN program and the priorities and procedures included in this solicitation. However, NOAA employees are permitted to provide information about ongoing and planned NOAA programs and activities that may have implication for an application. Potential applicants are encouraged to contact Ellie Francisco Roche at the NMFS Southeast Regional Office (see ADDRESSES) for information on NOAA programs.

VIII. Award Period

The award period for the project may be made for more than 1 year consisting of one, two, or three budget periods that correspond to the funding for the proposed project components. The award period will depend upon the duration of funding requested by the applicant in the Application for Federal Assistance, the decision of the NMFS selecting official on the amount of funding, the results of post-selection negotiations between the applicant and NOAA officials, and pre-award review of the application by NOAA and Department of Commerce (DOC) officials. Normally, each project budget period may be no more than 12 months in duration. NOAA policy limits the total duration of a project to 3 years.

IX. Indirect Costs

The total dollar amount of the indirect costs proposed in an application under this program must not exceed the indirect cost rate negotiated and approved by a cognizant Federal agency prior to the proposed effective date of the award or 25 percent of the Federal share of the total proposed direct costs dollar amount in the application, whichever is less. Institutions with indirect cost rates above 25 percent may use the amount above the 25-percent level as part of the non-Federal share. A copy of the current, approved, negotiated Indirect Cost Agreement with the Federal Government must be included with the application.

X. Profit or Fees

Profit or management fees paid to for-profit or commercial organization grantees are allowable at the discretion of NOAA. However, they shall not exceed 7 percent of the total estimated direct costs. There must be no profit or fees to the recipient in any overhead charge. Payment of fees or profit is based on successful completion of project objectives.

XI. Application Forms and Kit

Before submitting an application under this program, applicants should contact the NMFS Southeast Regional Office for a copy of this solicitation's MARFIN Application Package (see ADDRESSES).

Applications for project funding under this program must be complete and in accordance with instructions in the MARFIN Application Package. They must identify the principal participants and include copies of any agreements describing the specific tasks to be performed by participants. Project applications should give a clear presentation of the proposed work, the methods for carrying out the project, its relevance to managing and enhancing the use of Gulf of Mexico and/or South Atlantic fishery resources, and cost estimates as they relate to specific aspects of the project. Budgets must include a detailed breakdown, by category of expenditures, with appropriate justification for both the Federal and non-Federal shares. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NMFS as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. Applications are not to be bound in any manner and must be one-sided. All incomplete applications will be returned to the applicant. Ten copies (one original and nine copies) of each application are required and should be submitted to the NMFS Southeast Regional Office, State/Federal Liaison Office (see ADDRESSES). OMB has approved 10 copies, under Approval #0648-0175.

XII. Project Funding Priorities

A. Proposals for FY 1998 should exhibit familiarity with related work that is completed or ongoing. Where appropriate, proposals should be multidisciplinary. Coordinated efforts involving multiple institutions or persons are encouraged. The areas of special emphasis are listed below, but proposals in other areas will be considered on a funds-available basis.

In addition to referencing specific area(s) of special interest as listed

below, proposals should state whether the research will apply to the Gulf of Mexico only, the South Atlantic only, or to both areas. Successful applicants may be required to collect and manage data in accordance with standardized procedures and formats approved by NMFS and to participate with NMFS in specific cooperative activities that will be determined by consultations between NMFS and successful applicants before project grants are awarded. All recipients of financial assistance under this program shall include funding in their applications for the principal investigator to participate in an annual MARFIN Conference in Tampa, FL, at the completion of the project.

1. Bycatch

The bycatch of biological organisms (including interactions with sea turtles and marine mammals) by various fishing gears can have wide-reaching impacts from a fisheries management and an ecological standpoint, with the following major concerns:

a. *Shrimp trawl fisheries.* Studies are needed to contribute to the regional shrimp trawler bycatch program (including the rock shrimp fishery) being conducted by NMFS in cooperation with state fisheries management agencies, commercial and recreational fishing organizations and interests, environmental organizations, universities, Councils, and Commissions. Specific guidance and research requirements are contained in the Cooperative Bycatch Plan for the Southeast, available from NMFS (see ADDRESSES). In particular, the studies should address:

(1) Data collection and analyses to expand and update current bycatch estimates, temporally and spatially emphasizing areas of greatest impact by shrimping. Sampling effort should include estimates of numbers, weight, and random samples of size (age) structure of associated bycatch complex, with emphasis on those overfished species under the jurisdiction of the Councils.

(2) Assessment of the status and condition of fish stocks significantly impacted by shrimp trawler bycatch, with emphasis given to overfished species under the jurisdiction of the Councils. Other sources of fishing and nonfishing mortality should be considered and quantified as well.

(3) Identification, development, and evaluation of gear, non-gear, and tactical fishing options to reduce bycatch.

(4) Improved methods for communicating with and improving technology and information transfer to the shrimp industry.

(5) Development and evaluation of statistical methods to estimate the bycatch of priority management species in the Gulf and South Atlantic shrimp trawl fisheries.

b. *Pelagic longline fisheries.* Several pelagic longline fisheries exist in the Gulf and South Atlantic, targeting highly migratory species, such as tunas, sharks, billfish, and swordfish. Priority areas include:

(1) Development and evaluation of gear and fishing tactics to minimize bycatch of undersized and unwanted species, including sea turtles, marine mammals, and overfished finfish species/stocks.

(2) Assessment of the biological impact of longline bycatch on related fisheries.

c. *Reef fish fisheries.* The reef fish complex is exploited by a variety of fishing gear and tactics. The following research on bycatch of reef fish species is needed:

(1) Development and evaluation of gear and fishing tactics to minimize the bycatch of undersized and unwanted species, including sea turtles and marine mammals.

(2) Characterization and assessment of the impact of bycatch of undersized target species, including release mortality, during recreational fishing and during commercial longline, bandit gear and trap fishing.

d. *Finfish trawl fisheries.* Studies are needed on quantification and qualification of the bycatch in finfish trawl fisheries, such as the flounder and fly-net fisheries in the South Atlantic.

e. *Gillnet fisheries.* Studies are needed on quantification and qualification of the bycatch in coastal and shelf gillnet fisheries for sciaenids, scombrids, bluefish and other dogfish sharks of the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico (particularly interaction with sea turtles and marine mammals).

f. *Economic considerations of bycatch reduction.*

(1) Develop and test models, using actual or hypothesized data, that explicitly consider the costs to the directed fishery and gains to the bycatch fishery. The models should include the effects of the management systems for the directed and bycatch fisheries and should attempt to describe criteria for the correct level of bycatch reduction (e.g., marginal cost and value of reduction are equal).

(2) Develop economic incentives and other innovative alternatives to gear and season/area restrictions as ways to reduce bycatch. The proposal should attempt to contrast the relative costs, potential gains, and levels of bycatch reduction associated with traditional

methods and any innovative alternatives addressed by the proposals.

2. Reef Fish

Some species within the reef fish complex are showing signs of being overfished, either because of directed efforts or because of being the bycatch of other fisheries. The ecology of reef fish makes them vulnerable to overfishing, because they tend to concentrate over specific types of habitat with patchy distribution. This behavior pattern can make traditional fishery statistics misleading. Priority research areas include:

a. *Collection of basic biological data for species in commercially and recreationally important fisheries.* (1) *Age and growth of reef fish.* (a)

Description of age and growth patterns, especially for red, vermilion, gray, and cubera snappers; gray triggerfish; gag; black grouper; spottail pinfish; hogfish; red porgy; and other less dominant forms in the management units for which data are lacking.

(b) Contributions to the development of annual age-length keys and description of age structures for exploited populations for all species in the complex addressed in the Reef Fish and Snapper/Grouper Management Plans for the Gulf and South Atlantic, respectively, prioritized by importance in the total catch.

(c) Design of sampling systems to provide a production-style aging program for the reef fish fishery. Effective dockside sampling programs are needed over a wide geographic range, especially for groupers, to collect information on reproductive state, size, age, and sex.

(2) *Reproduction studies of reef fish.*

(a) Maturity schedules, fecundity, and sex ratios of commercially and recreationally important reef fish, especially gray triggerfish, gag, and red porgy in the Gulf and South Atlantic.

(b) Studies of all species to characterize the actual reproductive contribution of females by age.

(c) Identification and characterization of spawning aggregations by species, area, size group and season. (d) Effects of fishing on changes of sex ratios for gag, red grouper, and scamp, and disruption of aggregations.

(e) Investigations of the reproductive biology of gag, red grouper and other grouper species.

(3) *Recruitment of reef fish.* (a) Source of recruitment in Gulf and South Atlantic waters, especially for snappers, groupers, and amberjacks.

(b) Annual estimation of the absolute or relative recruitment of juvenile gag, gray snapper, and lane snapper to

estuarine habitats off the west coast of Florida and to similar estuarine nursery habitats along the South Atlantic Bight; development of an index of juvenile gag recruitment for the South Atlantic based on historical databases and/or field studies.

(c) The contribution of live-bottom habitat and habitat areas of particular concern (*Oculina* banks) off Fort Pierce, FL, to reef fish recruitment.

(4) *Stock structure of reef fish.* (a) Movement and migration patterns of commercially and recreationally valuable reef fish species, especially gag in the Gulf and South Atlantic and greater amberjack between the South Atlantic and Gulf.

(b) Biochemical/immunological and morphological/meristic techniques to allow field separation of lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish from greater amberjack to facilitate accurate reporting of catch.

(c) Stock structure of wreckfish in the South Atlantic and of greater amberjack in the Gulf and South Atlantic.

b. *Population assessment of reef fish.* (1) Effect of reproductive mode and sex change (protogynous hermaphroditism) on population size and characteristics, with reference to sizes of fish exploited in the fisheries and the significance to proper management.

(2) Source and quantification of natural and human-induced mortalities, including release mortality estimates for charter boats, headboats, and private recreational vessels, especially for red snapper and the grouper complex.

(3) Determination of the habitat and limiting factors for important reef fish resources in the Gulf and South Atlantic.

(4) Description of habitat and fish populations in the deep reef community and the prey distributions supporting the community.

(5) Development of statistically valid indices of abundance for important reef fish species in the South Atlantic and Gulf, especially red grouper, jewfish, and Nassau grouper.

(6) Assessment of tag performance on reef fish species, primarily snappers and groupers. Characteristics examined should include shedding rate, effects on growth and survival, and ultimately, the effects of these characteristics on estimations of vital population parameters.

(7) Stock assessments to establish the status of major recreational and commercial species. Innovative methods are needed for stock assessments of aggregate species, including the effect of fishing on genetic structure and the incorporation of sex change for

protogynous hermaphrodites into stock assessment models.

(8) Assessment of Florida Bay recovery actions on reef fish recruitment and survival.

c. *Management of reef fish.* (1) Research in direct support of management, including catch-and-release mortalities, by gear and depth.

(2) Evaluation of the use of marine reserves as an alternative or supplement to current fishery management practices and measures for reef fish. Studies should focus on the Experimental Oculina Reef Reserve, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, as well as on the identification of prime sites for the establishment of reserves in the U.S. south Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.

(3) Characterization and evaluation of biological impacts (e.g., changes in age or size structure of reef fish populations in response to management strategies).

(4) Evaluation of vessel log data for monitoring the fishery and for providing biological, economic, and social information for management; and methods for matching log data to Trip Information Program samples for indices of effort.

3. Coastal Migratory Pelagic Fisheries

The commercial and recreational demand for migratory coastal pelagics has led to overfishing for certain species, including some stocks of king and Spanish mackerel. Additionally, some are transboundary with Mexico and other countries and may ultimately demand international management attention. Current high priorities include:

a. Recruitment indices for king and Spanish mackerel, cobia, dolphin, wahoo, and bluefish, primarily from fishery-independent data sources.

b. Assessment and management models for coastal pelagic resources that are dominated by single year classes, such as Spanish mackerel, dolphin, and bluefish.

c. Fishery-independent methods of assessing stock abundance of king and Spanish mackerel.

d. Release mortality data for all coastal pelagic species.

e. Improved catch statistics for all species in Mexican waters, with special emphasis on king mackerel. This includes length-frequency and life history information.

f. Information on populations of coastal pelagics overwintering off the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic States of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, especially concerning population size, age and movement patterns.

g. Development of a practical method for aging dolphin.

h. Basic biostatistics for cobia, dolphin, and wahoo to develop age-length keys and maturation schedules for stock assessments.

i. Impact of bag limits on total catch and landings of king and Spanish mackerel.

j. Demand and/or supply functions for the commercial king mackerel fisheries, including baseline cost and return data. Cooperative efforts that cover the entire Southeast and employ common methodologies for all geographic areas are strongly encouraged.

k. Sociological and anthropological surveys of coastal pelagic fisheries.

4. Groundfish and Estuarine Fishes

Substantial stocks of groundfish and estuarine species occur in the Gulf and South Atlantic. Most of the database for assessments comes from studies conducted by NMFS and state fishery management agencies. Because of the historic and current size of these fish stocks, their importance as predator and prey species, and their current or potential use as commercial and recreational fisheries, more information on their biology and life history is needed. General research needs are:

a. Red drum. (1) Size and age structure of the offshore adult stock in the Gulf.

(2) Life history parameters and stock structure for the Gulf and the South Atlantic: Migratory patterns, long-term changes in abundance, growth rates, and age structure. Specific research needs for Atlantic red drum are estimates of fecundity as a function of length and weight and improved coastwide coverage for age-length keys.

(3) Catch-and-release mortality rates from inshore and nearshore waters.

b. Life history and stock structure for weakfish, menhaden, spot, and croaker in the Gulf and the South Atlantic: Migratory patterns, long-term changes in abundance, growth rates, and age structure and comparisons of the inshore and offshore components of recreational and commercial fisheries.

c. Improved catch-and-effort statistics from recreational and commercial fisheries, including development of age-length keys for size and age structure of the catch, to develop production models.

5. General

There are many other areas of research that need to be addressed for improved understanding and management of fishery resources. These include methods for data collection, management, analysis, and better

conservation. Examples of high-priority research needs include—

a. Identification of fishing communities, characterization of community dependence upon fishery resources and demographics of the families dependent on fishing or fishing related businesses.

b. Development of improved methods and procedures for transferring technology and educating constituency groups concerning fishery management and conservation programs. Of special importance are programs concerned with controlled access and introduction of conservation gear.

c. Compilation of baseline socio-demographic data for describing the social and cultural framework of managed fisheries.

d. Design and evaluation of innovative approaches to fishery management with special attention given to those approaches that control access to specific fisheries.

e. Social, cultural, and/or economic aspects of establishing fishery reserves. Studies should employ surveys or other accepted data collection methods and should include consumptive users, non-consumptive users, and persons not dependent on use of marine resources. Various management alternatives should be considered in the studies, e.g., exclude all users, exclude all consumptive users, size of reserve, anchoring rules, or any other relevant management tools.

f. Full development of non-Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) methods to limit fishery effort and participation. Examples could include allocation of overall effort, annual number of trips or any other methods to control effort. The economic and biological effects, including consideration of bycatch levels, should be investigated and contrasted with expected outcomes under ITQ methods. Recreational, as well as commercial effort control methods, may be investigated.

g. Estimation of demand models for recreational fishing trips when the target species include a single species, an aggregate of related species, or all species combined. Studies using new data from the Southeast economics add-on to Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey are highly encouraged.

h. Sociocultural survey of commercial fishing in the Florida Keys. Proposals should address all fishing enterprises including potential sociocultural effects of large marine reserves in the Tortugas area.

B. Priority in program emphasis will be placed upon funding projects that have the greatest probability of recovering, maintaining, improving, or

developing fisheries; improving the understanding of factors affecting recruitment success; and generating increased values and recreational opportunities from fisheries. Projects will be evaluated as to the likelihood of achieving these benefits through short- and long-term research efforts, with consideration given to the magnitude of the eventual economic benefits that may be realized.

XIII. Evaluation Criteria

Successful applicants generally will be recommended within 210 days from the date of publication of this notice. The earliest start date of awards will be about 90 days after each project is selected and after all NMFS/applicant negotiations of cooperative activities have been completed (the earliest start date of awards will be about 300 days after the date of publication of this notice). Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for their applications. Proposed projects will be evaluated and ranked as follows:

A. Unless otherwise specified by statute, in reviewing applications for cooperative agreements, including those that include consultants and contracts, NOAA will make a determination regarding the following:

1. Is the involvement of the applicant necessary to the conduct of the project and the accomplishment of its goals and objectives?

2. Is the proposed allocation of the applicant's time reasonable and commensurate with the applicant's involvement in the project?

3. Are the proposed costs for the applicant's involvement in the project reasonable and commensurate with the benefits to be derived from the applicant's participation?

4. Is the project proposal substantial in character and design?

B. Applications meeting the above requirements will be forwarded for technical evaluation. Applicants submitting applications not meeting the above requirements will be notified. Evaluations normally will involve experts from non-NOAA as well as NOAA organizations. Comments submitted to NMFS by each evaluator will be taken into consideration in the ranking of projects. NMFS will provide point scores on proposals, based on the following evaluation criteria:

1. Does the proposal have a clearly stated goal(s) with associated objectives that meet the needs outlined in the Project Narrative? (30 points)

2. Does the proposal clearly identify and describe, in the Project Outline and Statement of Work, scientifically valid

methodologies and analytical procedures that will adequately address project goals and objectives? (30 points)

3. Do the principal investigators provide a scientifically realistic timetable to enable full accomplishment of all aspects of the Statements of Work? (20 points)

4. Do the principal investigators define how they will maintain stewardship of the project performance, finances, cooperative relationships, and reporting requirements for the proposal? (10 points)

5. Are the proposed costs appropriate for the scope of work proposed? (10 points)

XIV. Selection Procedures

All applications will be ranked by a NMFS scientific panel into two groups: "Recommended," and "Not Recommended." Proposals ranked as "Not Recommended" will not be given further consideration for selection and funding. "Recommended" rankings will be presented to a panel of non-NOAA fishery experts who will individually consider the significance of the problem addressed in each project proposal, the technical evaluation, and need for funding. These panel members will provide individual recommendations to NMFS on each proposal classified as "Recommended."

The non-NOAA panel members' individual comments, recommendations and evaluations, and recommendations of the NMFS scientific panel and NMFS Southeast Program Officer will be considered by the Regional Administrator, Southeast Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator). The Regional Administrator, in consultation with the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, will (a) Determine which projects do not substantially duplicate other projects that are currently funded by NOAA or are approved for funding by other Federal offices, (b) select the projects to be funded, (c) determine the amount of funds available for each project, and (d) determine which components of the selected projects shall be funded. The exact amount of funds awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NMFS cooperative involvement with the activities of each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and the NMFS Program Staff. Projects must not be initiated by recipients until a signed award is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

NMFS will make project applications available for review as follows:

A. *Consultation with members of the fishing industry, management agencies,*

environmental organizations, and academic institutions. NMFS shall, at its discretion, request comments from members of the fishing and associated industries, groups, organizations, and institutions who have knowledge in the subject matter of a project or who would be affected by a project.

B. Consultation with Government agencies. Applications will be reviewed by the NMFS Southeast Region Program Office in consultation with the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center, including appropriate operations and laboratory personnel, the NOAA Grants Office and, as appropriate, DOC bureaus and other Federal agencies.

XV. Other Requirements

A. Federal policies and procedures. Recipients and subrecipients are subject to all Federal laws and Federal and DOC policies, regulations, and procedures applicable to Federal financial assistance awards. Women and minority individuals and groups are encouraged to submit applications under this program.

B. Past performance. Any first-time applicant for Federal grant funds is subject to a pre-award accounting survey prior to execution of the award. Unsatisfactory performance under prior Federal awards may result in an application not being considered for funding.

C. Pre-award activities. If applicants incur any costs prior to an award being made, they do so solely at their own risk of not being reimbursed by the Government. Notwithstanding any verbal or written assurance that they may have received, there is no obligation on the part of DOC to cover pre-award costs.

D. No obligation of future funding. If an application is selected for funding, DOC has no obligation to provide any additional future funding in connection with the award. Renewal of an award to increase funding or extend the period of performance is at the total discretion of DOC.

E. Delinquent Federal debts. No award of Federal funds shall be made to an applicant or to its subrecipients who have any outstanding delinquent Federal debt or fine until either:

1. The delinquent account is paid in full;
2. A negotiated repayment schedule is established and at least one payment is received; or
3. Other arrangements satisfactory to DOC are made.

F. Name check review. All non-profit and for-profit applicants are subject to a name check review process. Name checks are intended to reveal if any key

individuals associated with the applicant have been convicted of, or are presently facing, criminal charges such as fraud, theft, perjury, or other matters that significantly reflect on the applicant's management honesty or financial integrity. Potential non-profit and for-profit recipients may also be subject to reviews of Dun and Bradstreet data or other similar credit checks.

G. Primary applicant certifications. All primary applicants must submit a completed Form CD-511, "Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension and Other Responsibility Matters; Drug-Free Workplace Requirements and Lobbying," and the following explanations are hereby provided:

1. **Nonprocurement debarment and suspension.** Prospective participants (as defined at 15 CFR 26.105) are subject to 15 CFR part 26, "Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension" and the related section of the certification form prescribed above applies;

2. **Drug-free workplace.** Grantees (as defined at 15 CFR 26.605) are subject to 15 CFR part 26, Subpart F, "Government-wide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants)" and the related section of the certification form prescribed above applies;

3. **Anti-lobbying.** Persons (as defined at 15 CFR 28.105) are subject to the lobbying provisions of 31 U.S.C. 1352, "Limitation on use of appropriated funds to influence certain Federal contracting and financial transactions," and the lobbying section of the certification form prescribed above applies to applications/bids for grants, cooperative agreements, contracts for more than \$100,000, loans and loan guarantees for more than \$150,000, or the single family maximum mortgage limit for affected programs, whichever is greater; and

4. **Anti-lobbying disclosures.** Any applicant who has paid or will pay for lobbying using any funds must submit a Form SL-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," as required under 15 CFR part 28, appendix B.

H. Lower tier certifications. Recipients shall require applicants/bidders for subgrants, contracts, subcontracts, or other lower tier covered transactions at any tier under the award to submit, if applicable, a completed Form CD-512, "Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion-Lower Tier Covered Transactions and Lobbying" and disclosure form SF-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities." Form CD-512 is intended for the use of recipients and should not be transmitted to DOC. A form SF-LLL submitted by any tier

recipient or subrecipient should be submitted to DOC in accordance with the instructions contained in the award document.

I. False statements. A false statement on the application is grounds for denial or termination of funds and grounds for possible punishment by a fine or imprisonment as provided in 18 U.S.C. 1001.

J. Intergovernmental review.

Applications under this program are subject to the provisions of E.O. 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs."

K. Requirement to buy American-made equipment and products. Applicants are hereby notified that they are encouraged, to the extent feasible, to purchase American-made equipment and products with funding provided under this program.

Classification

Prior notice and an opportunity for public comments are not required by the Administrative Procedure Act or any other law for this notice concerning grants, benefits, and contracts. Therefore, a regulatory flexibility analysis is not required for purposes of the Regulatory Flexibility Act.

This action has been determined to be not significant for purposes of E.O. 12866.

Cooperative agreements awarded pursuant to pertinent statutes shall be in accordance with the Fisheries Research Plan (comprehensive program of fisheries research) in effect on the date of the award.

Federal participation under the MARFIN Program may include the assignment of DOC scientific personnel and equipment.

Reasonable, negotiated financial compensation will be provided under awards for the work of eligible grantee workers.

Information-collection requirements contained in this notice have been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB control number 0648-0175) under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Public reporting burden for agency-specific collection-of-information elements, exclusive of requirements specified under applicable OMB circulars, is estimated to average 4 hours

per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this reporting burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to NMFS (see ADDRESSES).

Authority: 15 U.S.C. 713c-3(d).

Dated: December 22, 1997.

David L. Evans,

*Deputy Assistant Administrator for Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 98-289 Filed 1-6-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 123197A]

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council; Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the New England Fishery Management Council will have a joint Dogfish Committee meeting together with their respective industry advisors.

DATES: The meeting will be held on Thursday, January 22, 1998, from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Westin Suites (previously Doubletree), 4101 Island Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19153; telephone: 215-365-6600.

Council address: Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 300 S. New Street, Dover, DE 19904; telephone: 302-674-2331.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: David R. Keifer, Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council; telephone: 302-674-2331.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Agenda items include: Review fishery management plan development schedule/progress, overview of biology and fisheries for spiny dogfish, review of status of spiny dogfish stock, summary of scoping hearing comments, discussion of possible management measures, discussion of possible control date, and establishment of a plan development team.

Although other issues not contained in this agenda may come before this Council for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, those issues may not be the subject of formal Council action during this meeting. Council action will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in the agenda listed in this notice.

Special Accommodations

This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Joanna Davis at the Council (see ADDRESSES) at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: December 31, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

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

[FR Doc. 98-320 Filed 1-6-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 123197B]

Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of public meetings.

SUMMARY: The Pacific Fishery Management Council's Coastal Pelagic Species Plan Advisory Subpanel will hold a public meeting.

DATES: The meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 20, 1998, at 10:00 a.m. and may go into the evening until business for the day is completed.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be California Department of Fish and Game office, 330 Golden Shore, Suite 50, Long Beach, CA.

Council address: Pacific Fishery Management Council, 2130 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 224, Portland, OR 97201.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Doyle Hanan, telephone: (619) 546-7170; or Dr. Larry Jacobson, telephone: (619) 546-7117.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The primary purpose of the meeting is to convene the reconstituted subpanel, elect a chair, and discuss topics including limited entry, maximum sustainable yield control rules, and

other matters related to the fishery management plan for coastal pelagic species currently under development.

Although other issues not contained in this agenda may come before this Subpanel for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, those issues may not be the subject of formal Subpanel action during this meeting. Subpanel action will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in the agenda listed in this notice.

Special Accommodations

The meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Mr. Eric Greene at (503) 326-6352 at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: December 31, 1997.

Gary C. Matlock,

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

[FR Doc. 98-321 Filed 1-6-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

[Docket No. ER98-929-000]

Atlantic City Electric Company; Notice of Filing

December 31, 1997.

Take notice that on December 4, 1997, Atlantic City Electric Company (Atlantic Electric), tendered for filing service agreements under which Atlantic Electric will sell capacity and energy to Allegheny Power (Allegheny), and NESI Power Marketing, Inc. (NESI), under Atlantic Electric's market-based rate sales tariff. Atlantic Electric requests the agreements be accepted to become effective on December 4, 1997.

Atlantic Electric states that a copy of the filing has been served on Allegheny and NESI.

Any person desiring to be heard or to protest said filing should file a motion to intervene or protest with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20426, in accordance with Rules 211 and 214 of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure (18 CFR 385.211 and 385.214). All such motions or protests should be filed on or before January 12, 1998. Protests will be considered by the Commission in determining the appropriate action to be taken, but will not serve to make