

small numbers of certain species of marine mammals. While behavioral and avoidance reactions may be made by these species in response to the resultant noise from the airguns, these behavioral changes are expected to have a negligible impact on the affected species and stocks of marine mammals.

While the number of potential incidental harassment takes will depend on the distribution and abundance of marine mammals in the area of seismic operations, the number of potential harassment takings is estimated to be relatively small in light of the population sizes (see Tables 3, 4, and 5). NMFS anticipates the actual take of individuals to be even lower than the numbers depicted in the tables, because those numbers do not reflect either the implementation of the mitigation numbers or the fact that some animals likely will avoid the sound at levels lower than those expected to result in harassment.

In addition, no take by death and/or injury is anticipated, and the potential for temporary or permanent hearing impairment will be avoided through the incorporation of the mitigation measures described in this document.

Proposed Authorization

NMFS proposes to issue an IHA to L-DEO for a marine seismic survey project in the ETP in April–August 2008, provided the previously mentioned mitigation, monitoring, and reporting requirements are incorporated.

Dated: February 28, 2008.

Helen Golde,

Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. E8–4237 Filed 3–4–08; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary

AGENCY: Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent to initiate public scoping.

SUMMARY: The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) is preparing a draft

environmental impact statement to consider the establishment of a research (control) area in Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS). Activities are restricted within research areas in order to facilitate better understanding of resources and environmental processes. This notice announces the beginning of public scoping pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. The public scoping process, including public scoping meetings, is intended to solicit information and comments on the range and significance of issues related to the establishment of a research area at Gray's Reef. The results of this scoping process will assist NOAA in formulating alternatives for the draft environmental impact statement for the proposed research area. This notice contains times, dates, and locations for scoping meetings.

DATES: Comments will be considered if received by April 21, 2008.

Scoping meetings will be held at:

- (1) March 18, 2008, Camden Public Library, 6–8 p.m.
- (2) March 20, 2008, Armstrong Center, 6–8 p.m.
- (3) March 24, 2008, Statesboro Regional Library, 6–8 p.m.
- (4) March 25, 2008, Stevens Wetlands Education Center, 6–8 p.m.
- (5) March 27, 2008, Best Western Sea Island Inn, 6–8 p.m.

ADDRESSES: Written comments may be sent to Gray's Reef NMS (Research Area), 10 Ocean Science Circle, Savannah, GA 31411; or by facsimile to 912/598–2367; or to grnms.researcharea@noaa.gov.

Scoping meetings will be held at:

- (1) Camden Public Library, 1410 Highway 40 East, Kingsland, Georgia 31548.
- (2) Armstrong Center, 13040 Abercorn St., Savannah, Georgia 31419.
- (3) Statesboro Regional Library, 124 South Main St., Statesboro, Georgia 30458.
- (4) Stevens Wetlands Education Center, 600 Cedar St., Richmond Hill, Georgia 31324.
- (5) Best Western Sea Island Inn, 1015 Bay St., Beaufort, South Carolina 29902.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Becky Shortland (912) 598–2381 or Becky.Shortland@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA), 16 U.S.C. 1431 et seq., authorizes the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) to designate discrete areas of the marine environment as national marine sanctuaries to protect their special conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, cultural, archaeological, scientific, educational,

or esthetic qualities. The NMSA is administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS).

The concept of a research (control) area within Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary has been under discussion for several years. The concept was first raised in 1999 during the early stages of the GRNMS Management Plan review process at public scoping meetings and was raised again during public research workshops.

Subsequently, the Gray's Reef Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC), with the approval of the Sanctuary superintendent, formed a research area working group (RAWG) to further consider the concept. The Advisory Council's recommendation to investigate the concept of a marine research area was adopted by GRNMS as a research and monitoring strategy for the Management Plan which was released in 2006.

The RAWG comprised representative constituents of Gray's Reef including: researchers, academics, conservation groups, recreational anglers and divers, educators, commercial fishing, law enforcement and sanctuaries representatives. The working group met initially in May 2004, and then periodically over the course of a year, to discuss the concept in detail. The working group employed a consensus-driven, constituent-based process to address the concept of a marine research area. All participants discussed at length all issues, considerations, priorities and concerns for each step of the process.

The following recommendations were developed by the working group and were referred to the SAC. After reviewing and considering the recommendations, the SAC adopted and submitted them to NOAA GRNMS:

Recommendation #1

Significant research questions exist at Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary that can only be addressed by establishing a control (research) area. Therefore, the research area concept should be further explored by NOAA through a public review process.

Recommendation #2

As many appropriate tools as feasible, especially a GIS (Geographic Information Systems, geographic and spatial analysis software) site evaluation tool and a RAWG should be used to investigate a research area with proper siting criteria.

Recommendation #3

Diversity of habitat with emphasis on high relief habitat should be the primary siting criterion. The RAWG should be maintained to support NOAA GRNMS in consideration of these various criteria (e.g., habitat, size, existing research and monitoring sites, bottom fishing data) in developing proposed options for a draft environmental impact statement.

Recommendation #4

Minimizing impacts to user communities including fishing, diving, research, and resource management should be a priority under the research area concept. Non-bottom impinging activities should not be viewed as conflicting with the primary objectives of a proposed research area. Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Council, NOAA has concluded that the research area concept should be further explored through a public review process. In the upcoming DEIS, NOAA will likely develop a range of alternatives for the creation of a research area, including a no-action alternative. If this action results in the creation of a research area in the GRNMS, a companion management plan for the research area will serve as a supplement to the 2006 GRNMS Final Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement.

By this notice, NOAA announces the initiation of scoping for the proposed research area in Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary. Scoping is the initial process intended to solicit information and comments on the range and significance of issues related to the proposed action. The results of this scoping process will assist NOAA in formulating alternatives for a draft environmental impact statement for the proposed research area.

NOAA encourages the public and interested parties to submit (via mail, e-mail, or fax) comments and to attend the public scoping meetings in March.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1431 *et seq.*
(Federal Domestic Assistance Catalog
Number 11.429 Marine Sanctuary Program)

Dated: February 26, 2008.

John H. Dunnigan,

*Assistant Administrator, Ocean Services and
Coastal Zone Management, National Oceanic
and Atmospheric Administration.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

RIN: 0648-XG05

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings

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

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will convene a public meeting of the Ad Hoc Recreational Red Snapper Advisory Panel (AP).

DATES: The meeting will convene at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, March 25, 2008 and conclude no later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 26, 2008.

ADDRESSES: This meeting will be held at the Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel, 64 S. Water St., Mobile, AL 36602; telephone: (251) 438-4000.

Council address: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 2203 North Lois Avenue, Suite 1100, Tampa, FL 33607.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steven Atran, Population Dynamics Statistician; Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; telephone: (813) 348-1630.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: At this meeting, the AP will prioritize the goals and objectives for the recreational red snapper fishery that were developed in earlier meetings as well as the list of ideas for managing the recreational red snapper fishery that was previously developed. The AP will select ideas from its list for further development, and will begin the initial work of developing those ideas into possible management action. The AP will also discuss the possible formation of working groups for the task of developing discussion papers on the ideas to be developed. In addition, the AP will receive several presentations providing an overview on marine protected areas, a review of party boat and charter boat catch data, a discussion of educational materials on proper venting and dehooking, and clarification on referendum requirements pertaining to possible changes in the red snapper allocation.

Although other issues not on the agenda may come before the panel for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, those issues may not be the subject of

formal panel action during this meeting. Panel action will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in the agenda listed as available by this notice.

A copy of the agenda can be obtained by calling 813-348-1630.

Special Accommodations

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

Dated: February 29, 2008.

Tracey L. Thompson,

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

[FR Doc. E8-4181 Filed 3-4-08; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

RIN: 0648-XG06

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of a public meeting.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council's (Council) Herring Oversight Committee will meet to consider actions affecting New England fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

DATES: The meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 26, 2008, at 9:30 a.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Holiday Inn by the Bay, 88 Spring Street, Portland, ME 04101; telephone: (207) 775-2311.

Council address: New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA 01950.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Paul J. Howard, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council; telephone: (978) 465-0492.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The items of discussion in the committee's agenda are as follows:

1. Review Council actions for 2008 priority-setting and discuss issues to be addressed in Amendment 4 to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

2. Identify goals and objectives for Amendment 4 to the Herring FMP