

DATES: Written, telefaxed, or email comments must be received on or before February 16, 2017.

ADDRESSES: The application and related documents are available for review by selecting "Records Open for Public Comment" from the "Features" box on the Applications and Permits for Protected Species (APPS) home page, <https://apps.nmfs.noaa.gov>, and then selecting File No. 19508 from the list of available applications.

These documents are also available upon written request or by appointment in the Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705, Silver Spring, MD 20910; phone (301) 427-8401; fax (301) 713-0376.

Written comments on this application should be submitted to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, at the address listed above. Comments may also be submitted by facsimile to (301) 713-0376, or by email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov. Please include the File No. in the subject line of the email comment.

Those individuals requesting a public hearing should submit a written request to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division at the address listed above. The request should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this application would be appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Carrie Hubbard or Amy Hapeman, (301) 427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject permit is requested under the authority of 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 parts 222-226).

The applicant requests a five-year permit to examine patterns and trends in the abundance, distribution, movements, foraging ecology, and population structure of sea turtles. Research would occur in three study areas: (1) Indian River Lagoon, Florida; (2) Trident Turning Basin, Cape Canaveral, Florida; and (3) Northern and Eastern Gulf of Mexico, which includes waters up to 120 miles offshore from Louisiana to Western Florida. Researchers would capture sea turtles by tangle net, dip net, or by hand; annual requested take numbers per species vary by year and project. Sea turtles would have the following procedures performed before release: Measure, flipper tag, passive integrated transponder tag, photograph/video, gastric lavage, and scute, blood, fecal, and tissue sampling. A subset of

animals would receive an epoxy-attached transmitter before release.

Dated: January 10, 2017.

Julia Harrison,

Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2017-00811 Filed 1-13-17; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XF163

North Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The North Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scallop Plan Team will meet February 22, 2017.

DATES: The meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 22, 2017, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at Fishermen's Hall, 403 Marine Way, Kodiak, AK 99615.

Council address: North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 605 W. 4th Ave., Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501-2252; telephone: (907) 271-2809.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jim Armstrong, Council staff; telephone: (907) 271-2809.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Agenda

Wednesday, February 22, 2017

The agenda includes updating the status of the Statewide Scallop Stocks and Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) compilation, update on monitoring ocean acidification and its potential effect on the scallop stocks, update on new scallop assessment programs and a review of research priorities. The Agenda is subject to change, and the latest version will be posted at <http://www.npfmc.org/>

Special Accommodations

The meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Shannon Gleason at (907) 271-2809 at least 7 working days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: January 11, 2017.

Jeffrey N. Lonergan,

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

[FR Doc. 2017-00887 Filed 1-13-17; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XF086

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species; Exempted Fishing Permits

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

ACTION: Notice of receipt of an application for an exempted fishing permit; availability of a draft environmental assessment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces the receipt of an application for an exempted fishing permit (EFP) from Dr. David Kerstetter of Nova Southeastern University to evaluate pelagic longline (PLL) catch and bycatch rates from within two different sub-areas in the northern portion of the East Florida Coast Pelagic Longline (PLL) Closed Area (north and south of 29°50' N. lat.) and compare those rates to rates obtained by authorized samplers from outside the EFC PLL Closed Area and the availability of a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzing the impacts of granting the application to conduct the research using commercial PLL vessels, with certain terms and conditions. The overall purpose of the research project would be to evaluate PLL catches and catch rates of target and non-target species within a portion of the EFC PLL Closed Area to evaluate the effectiveness of existing area closures at meeting current conservation and management goals under current conditions using standardized PLL gear on a specified number of commercial vessels.

DATES: Written comments on the issuance of the EFP or on the draft EA will be considered by NMFS and must be received on or before February 16, 2017.

ADDRESSES: Comments may be submitted by any of the following methods:

- *Email:* nmfs.hms.pllefp@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line the following identifier: 0648-XF086.

• *Mail:* Margo Schulze-Haugen, Highly Migratory Species Management Division (F/SF1), NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Craig Cockrell at (301) 427–8503 or Rick Pearson at (727) 824–5399.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS published a notice of intent to issue EFPs, Scientific Research Permits, Letters of Acknowledgement, and Chartering Permits for Atlantic highly migratory species (HMS) in 2017 (81 FR 80646, November 16, 2016). Although that notice anticipated a variety of applications, it also stated that occasionally, NMFS receives applications for research activities that were not anticipated, or for research that is outside the scope of general scientific sampling and tagging of Atlantic HMS, or rarely, for research that is particularly controversial and that NMFS will provide additional opportunity for public comment, consistent with the regulations at 50 CFR 600.745 if that were to occur.

As discussed in the November 2016 notice of intent to issue EFPs and related permits, issuance of EFPs and related permits are necessary because HMS regulations (*e.g.*, fishing seasons, prohibited species, authorized gear, closed areas, and minimum sizes) may otherwise prohibit activities that could be undertaken for scientific data collection or other valuable purposes. Thus, pursuant to 50 CFR parts 600 and 635, a NMFS Regional Administrator or Director may issue permits to authorize, for limited testing, public display, data collection, exploratory fishing, compensation fishing, conservation engineering, health and safety surveys, environmental cleanup, and/or hazard removal purposes, the target or incidental harvest of species managed under an FMP or fishery regulations that would otherwise be prohibited. These permits exempt permit holders from the specific portions of the regulations (*e.g.*, fishing seasons, prohibited species, authorized gear, closed areas, and minimum sizes) that may otherwise prohibit the collection of HMS for public education, public display, or scientific research. The terms and conditions of individual permits are unique. EFPs and related permits are issued under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*) and/or the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA) (16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.*).

NMFS closed the EFC area to PLL gear year-round in early 2001 (65 FR 47213,

August 1, 2000). The closure was implemented to reduce bycatch and incidental catch of overfished and protected species by PLL fishermen who target HMS because there was a noticeable difference in the bycatch of some non-target species (mainly undersized swordfish) between the EFC area and open areas. At the time, Atlantic blue marlin, white marlin, sailfish, bluefin tuna, and swordfish were overfished, and bycatch reduction was a component of rebuilding efforts. In particular, the United States was implementing a 1999 swordfish rebuilding plan, and the closure helped reduce bycatch of undersized swordfish. Several other laws required that NMFS address bycatch in the HMS fisheries, including the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which required reductions in sea turtle bycatch in the PLL fishery. National Standard 9 of the MSA also requires that fishery management plans minimize bycatch and bycatch mortality to the extent practicable.

The closure has been in place for more than 15 years and, since 2001, a number of changes in stock status and fishery management measures have occurred. Specifically, North Atlantic swordfish has been rebuilt since 2009, current international assessments of white marlin and Western Atlantic sailfish indicate that overfishing is likely not occurring, the PLL fishery has been required since 2004 to use circle hooks instead of J-hooks to reduce sea turtle bycatch, and individual bluefin tuna quota (IBQ) allocations were implemented in the PLL fishery through Amendment 7 to the 2006 Consolidated HMS Fishery Management Plan in 2014 (79 FR 71509, December 2, 2014). Allowing limited access to the EFC PLL Closed Area for research purposes via an EFP would provide important data from the closed area under these changed conditions. NMFS has not obtained scientific data related to catch and bycatch rates from this area since 2010, and that data suggested that more research was needed due to the small sample size and poor spatial distribution of PLL sets in the research conducted from 2008–2010. The data resulting from the research under this EFP would be used to assess current bycatch rates during typical commercial fishing operations and to evaluate the effectiveness of the closed area in continuing to reduce bycatch of non-target species (*e.g.*, billfish, undersized swordfish, prohibited species, and protected species). It would also provide more current data about the socio-economic impact of reduced catches of target species (swordfish and tunas) as

a result of the closure, assess changes in species availability and distribution over time, and contribute to future stock assessments or other fishery management measures. Among the purposes of EFPs in the regulations are the “conduct of scientific research, the acquisition of information and data . . . , [and] the investigation of bycatch, economic discard and regulatory discard,” and such an EFP would be in furtherance of those purposes (§ 635.32(a)(1)).

NMFS received an application to conduct research within two portions of the EFC PLL Closed Area and one portion of the open area (for comparative purposes) and has made a preliminary determination that it warrants further consideration and an opportunity for public comment. The application is available for review on the HMS Management Division’s Web site at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/compliance/efp/index.html>. The research conducted within the EFC PLL Closed Area and in the open areas would be carried out by no more than six PLL vessels at any one time. An additional seven “backup” vessels could be used to conduct research as replacements if any mechanical or technical issues arise on the other six vessels. The proposed research project would be authorized for 12 months and, pending annual review of any changed environmental conditions or impacts and of catches and catch rates of all species, as well as individual vessel performance, may be re-authorized for two additional 12-month periods. A maximum of 1,080 sets per year (12 months) would be authorized to occur between the six vessels, and sets would be distributed evenly between two sub-areas of the EFC PLL Closed Area and one open area. Each set would consist of a maximum of 750 16/0 or larger circle hooks.

NMFS invites comment on certain terms and conditions that we believe would be appropriate for inclusion on this EFP, if issued. The commercial vessels that would be participating in this EFP project are otherwise authorized to fish and, absent this EFP, would be conducting normal PLL fishing operations in open areas consistent with their past practices. NMFS conducted an analysis that compared projected catches if vessels were to continue fishing only in open areas (*i.e.*, all effort in open areas) versus projected catches from fishing operations under the EFP (*i.e.*, $\frac{2}{3}$ effort in closed area and $\frac{1}{3}$ effort in open area). The analysis indicated that fishing operations under the EFP could result in comparatively higher interactions with

dusky, silky, and night sharks. Many of the proposed terms and conditions are structured to maximize the survival of these shark species and to increase the Agency's understanding of these data poor stocks. The proposed terms and conditions include:

- During the proposed research project, 33 percent of sets occurring in both portions of the EFC PLL Closed Area and in open areas would be observed by NMFS-trained NOVA Southeastern University students or NMFS-approved observers.

- NMFS would review 100 percent of electronic monitoring data for sets occurring in both portions of the EFC PLL Closed Area and in open areas.

- After three dusky sharks are discarded dead by a vessel participating in the EFP, that vessel would be required to reduce the soak time of the gear to no longer than 10 hours when conducting fishing operations under the EFP. If, after reducing the soak time to no longer than 10 hours, an additional three dusky sharks are discarded dead, then that vessel would no longer be authorized to fish in the EFC PLL Closed Area under this EFP, if issued, for the remainder of the 12-month project period, unless otherwise permitted by NMFS.

- All live sharks caught but not being retained must be safely sampled (*e.g.*, fin clip) and photographed without removing the shark from the water. All fin clips and photographs would be sent to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) for identification purposes.

- All sharks that are dead at haul back, including prohibited species, and all sharks being retained for sale must be biologically sampled (*e.g.*, vertebra and reproductive organs removed) to facilitate species identification and collection of life history information. All biological samples would be sent to the SEFSC.

- Sets inside and outside of the closed areas would be equipped with hook timers, in accordance with protocols established by NMFS, to determine when animals were captured and when mortality occurs.

Availability of a Draft Environmental Assessment

NMFS is also announcing the availability of a draft EA that analyzes the potential impacts to the human environment of granting this EFP application for experimental PLL fishing within northern portions of the EFC PLL Closed Area and one area outside the Closed Area, as the request is described above. Among other analyzed impacts, the draft EA projects the annual catches

of all HMS species, as well as some non-HMS species interactions, from the EFC PLL Closed Area and open areas that could be expected to occur if this EFP is approved. Additionally, the draft EA describes NMFS' rationale for the preferred alternative and other alternatives under consideration for this research. The draft EA may be found on the HMS Management Division's Web site at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/compliance/efp/index.html>. Comments on the draft EA may be submitted via the methods outlined in the ADDRESSES section of this notice.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 971 *et seq.* and 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: January 10, 2017.

Emily H. Menashes,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2017-00791 Filed 1-13-17; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XF153

Marine Mammals; File No. 20043

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

ACTION: Notice; receipt of application.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Whitlow Au, Ph.D., University of Hawaii, P.O. Box 1346, Kaneohe, HI 96744, has applied in due form for a permit to conduct research on marine mammals in Hawaii.

DATES: Written, telefaxed, or email comments must be received on or before February 16, 2017.

ADDRESSES: The application and related documents are available for review by selecting "Records Open for Public Comment" from the "Features" box on the Applications and Permits for Protected Species (APPS) home page, <https://apps.nmfs.noaa.gov>, and then selecting File No. 20043 from the list of available applications.

These documents are also available upon written request or by appointment in the Permits and Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13705, Silver Spring, MD 20910; phone (301) 427-8401; fax (301) 713-0376.

Written comments on this application should be submitted to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division, at the address listed above. Comments may

also be submitted by facsimile to (301) 713-0376, or by email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov. Please include the File No. in the subject line of the email comment.

Those individuals requesting a public hearing should submit a written request to the Chief, Permits and Conservation Division at the address listed above. The request should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this application would be appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sara Young or Carrie Hubbard, (301) 427-8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject permit is requested under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (MMPA; 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) and 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).

The applicant requests a five-year permit to investigate the population dynamics and behavior of cetaceans around Hawaii and the Pacific, to study: (1) The behavior and use of the acoustic environment by large whales, and (2) the effects of noise on behavior of cetaceans around Hawaii. The applicant proposes to use genetic sampling, suction-cup acoustic recording tags, high frequency pinger tags, biopsy sampling, darted satellite tags, acoustic recording, underwater video recording, behavioral observation, photo-identification, and acoustic playbacks. Target species would be: Blainville's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon densirostris*), Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*), killer whale (*Orcinus orca*), humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), dwarf sperm whale (*Kogia sima*), pygmy sperm whale (*K. breviceps*), short-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*), pygmy killer whale (*Feresa attenuata*), melon-headed whale (*Peponocephala electra*), short-beaked common dolphin (*D. delphis*), striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*), spinner dolphin (*S. longirostris*), pantropical spotted dolphin (*S. attenuata*), bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*), Pacific white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*), and rough-toothed dolphin (*Steno bredanensis*).

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), an initial