

jurisdictions, and the NMFS review, and are intended to be used in the applicant's development of the final application.

Upon receipt of the final application, complete with the requisite Federal forms, NMFS will review the complete package and make final funding recommendations based on the incorporation of, and/or response to, comments that were returned to the applicant. NMFS will submit these funding recommendations to the NOAA review panel for final review, pursuant to Section X(4) of the Guidelines. The review panel will ensure that funding decisions are consistent with the geographic distribution requirements of 16 U.S.C. 6403(d). As a result, awards may not necessarily be made to the highest scoring applications.

If insufficient eligible projects are received, NOAA may reallocate residual funds from this program area to a different funding category under the Program.

H. Program Authority

Specific authority for this program is found in 16 U.S.C. 6403. Proposals will be reviewed and awarded by the National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Habitat Conservation under title, *Habitat Conservation*, CFDA 11.463.

VI. Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans

A. Program Description

This description provides guidance for applying for funding appropriated by Congress to NOAA in FY 2003 to support conservation and management of coral reef fisheries by Regional Fishery Management Councils with responsibilities for Fishery Management Plans (FMP) that include coral reefs or fishery resources that depend on these reef ecosystems, as established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*). This program will be administered by the NMFS Office of Habitat Conservation (OHC).

The objective of this program is to support value-added studies or projects by the Councils that will enhance the conservation of coral reef fishery resources. It is not intended to support normal Council activities or responsibilities.

B. Eligibility Criteria

Applicants are limited to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, and Caribbean Fishery Management Council.

C. Funding Availability and Mechanisms

1. Funding Availability

NMFS OHC will provide approximately \$1,350,000 in FY 2003 funding for cooperative agreements to support coral reef conservation activities under this program. In order to ensure the regional balance called for by the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000, a maximum of \$750,000 will be available for activities in the Western Pacific, and a maximum of \$600,000 will be available for activities in the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean. Funding will be subject to the availability of federal appropriations.

2. Funding Mechanism

Cooperative agreements will be awarded to successful applicants from each eligible Regional Fishery Management Council for eligible activities. Activities approved by NOAA will be awarded either as new cooperative agreements or amendments to existing cooperative agreements by either the Southeast Region or the Pacific Islands Area Office. Proposals should cover a project period of 12- to 18-month period with an anticipated start date of October 1, 2003.

D. Matching Funds

The Administrator has waived the matching requirement of Section X of the Guidance for the Fishery Management Councils. This waiver is based on the fact that the Councils are funded solely by awards from the U.S. Federal Government, and, therefore, do not have the ability to generate matching funds.

E. Application Content and Format

1. Application Content

Applications should support the *National Coral Reef Action Strategy* and the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force *National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs*. In addition, proposed activities should be coordinated, where appropriate, with ongoing and proposed NOAA mapping, monitoring, and fishery management initiatives, and State and Territorial coral reef conservation initiatives in their own waters contiguous to the Federal Exclusive Economic Zone.

Fishery Management Councils must consult with state and territorial agencies and all other relevant local governmental and non-governmental entities involved in coral reef activities in developing applications. Councils are strongly encouraged to coordinate project proposal development with NMFS Regions and Science Centers to

ensure mutually supportive coral reef conservation programs.

Councils may submit applications covering a 12- to 18-month period, and must meet all applicable DOC grant requirements. One copy of the initial application, submitted electronically or by surface mail, must be received by NOAA on or before the date established in the DATES section above.

One original and two signed copies of the final application, complete with all required Federal financial assistance forms (SF-424, SF-424A, SF-424B, CD-511, CD-512, and, if applicable, CD-346 and/or SF-LLL) must be received by NOAA on or before the date established in the DATES section above.

a. Eligible activities: Eligible activities are those that support the Strategy's goal of Reducing the Adverse Impacts of Fishing and other Extractive Uses on Coral Reefs and incorporating these objectives into existing or new Federal fishery management plans. While first priority will be given to proposals for coral reef activities in the Council's jurisdiction, proposals for complementary activities of high conservation value within state waters that are fully coordinated with appropriate state, territory or commonwealth management authorities will also be accepted. Proposed activities should be in addition to those currently supported by NMFS and should not replace support for existing Council staff. The following represent priority activities for funding:

(1) Studies that identify, map and characterize important essential fish habitat, habitat areas of particular concern, and spawning populations in U.S. coral reef ecosystems. Special priority will be given to studies associated with coral reef areas that are currently, permanently, or seasonally closed to fishing or that may merit inclusion in an expanded network of no-take ecological reserves. Eligible activities would include multi-beam or sidescan sonar mapping and characterization of such areas on deeper coral reefs, banks and beds;

(2) Monitoring reef fish stocks in existing no-take marine reserves and reference sites on coral reefs in the Council's jurisdiction to evaluate the effectiveness of reserves;

(3) Studies needed to develop proposals to reduce over-fishing of coral reef resources, including compilation of existing background information on currently unassessed coral reef fishery stocks, or targeted assessments of such coral reef fishery stocks for which overfishing is strongly suspected;

(4) Studies needed to identify adverse effects of fishing and fishing gear on