

to review this action and will decide on whether consultation on the issuance of an IHA under section 101(a)(5)(D) of the MMPA is necessary prior to making a final decision.

National Environmental Policy Act

In accordance with section 6.01 of the NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 (Environmental Review Procedures for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act, May 20, 1999), NMFS has determined, based on a programmatic NEPA assessment conducted on the impact of NMFS' rulemaking for the issuance of IHAs (61 FR 15884; April 10, 1996) and the content and analysis of Dr. VanBlaricom's request for an IHA, that the proposed issuance of this IHA to Dr. VanBlaricom by NMFS will not individually or cumulatively result in a significant impact on the quality of the human environment as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, the action of issuing an IHA for these activities meets the definition of a "Categorical Exclusion" and is exempted from further environmental review.

Preliminary Conclusions

NMFS has preliminarily determined that the short-term impact of abalone research, as described in this document and in the application for an IHA, should result, at worst, in the temporary modification in behavior by California sea lions, Pacific harbor seals and northern elephant seals. Dr. VanBlaricom believes the effects of abalone research surveys on SNI are expected to be limited to short term and localized changes in behavior involving relatively small numbers of pinnipeds. While behavioral modifications, including temporarily vacating onshore haulouts, may be made by these species to avoid the presence and nearness of abalone researchers, this action is expected to have a negligible impact on the animals. In addition, no take by injury and/or death is anticipated, and harassment takes will be at the lowest level practicable due to incorporation of the mitigation measures mentioned previously in this document.

Proposed Authorization

NMFS proposes to issue an IHA to Dr. Glenn R. VanBlaricom for the potential harassment of small numbers of Pacific harbor seals, California sea lions and Northern elephant seals incidental to abalone population trend research, provided the previously mentioned mitigation, monitoring, and reporting requirements are incorporated. NMFS has preliminarily determined that the proposed activity would result in the

harassment of small numbers of Pacific harbor seals, California sea lions and northern elephant seals and will have no more than a negligible impact on these marine mammal stocks.

Information Solicited

NMFS requests interested persons to submit comments, information, and suggestions concerning this request (see **ADDRESSES**).

Dated: June 18, 2003.

Laurie K. Allen,

*Acting Director, Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 062003B]

Gulf of Mexico 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 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) will convene a joint public meeting via conference call of the Standing and Special Reef Fish Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC).

DATES: The meeting will be via conference call on July 10, 2003, beginning at 10 a.m. EDT.

ADDRESSES: Listening stations will be available at the following locations:

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive, North, St. Petersburg, FL 33702, Contact: Peter Hood at 727-570-5305;

National Marine Fisheries Service, Panama City Laboratory, 3500 Delwood Beach Road, Panama City, FL; Contact: Gary Fitzhugh at 850-234-6541, extension 214.

Council address: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 3018 U.S. Highway 301 North, Suite 1000, Tampa, FL 33619.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steven Atran, Population Dynamics Statistician, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; telephone: 813-228-2815.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The SSC will be convened to review and comment on a proposed Amendment 21 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management

Plan (FMP) to extend the time period for the Madison/Swanson and Steamboat Lumps marine reserves beyond their June 16, 2004 expiration date.

The Madison/Swanson and Steamboat Lumps marine reserves were implemented on June 19, 2000 with a 4-year sunset provision. The Madison/Swanson site is approximately 115 square nautical miles in size and is located about 40 nautical miles southwest of Apalachicola City, FL. Steamboat Lumps is approximately 104 square nautical miles in size and is located about 95 nautical miles west of Tarpon Springs, FL. Within each area, fishing is prohibited for all species except for highly migratory species, i.e., tunas, marlin, oceanic sharks, sailfishes, and swordfish. These marine reserves were created primarily to protect a portion of the gag spawning aggregations and to protect a portion of the offshore population of male gag. The areas are also suitable habitat and provide protection for many other species, such as scamp, red grouper, warsaw grouper, speckled hind, red snapper, red porgy, and others. If action is not taken to continue the reserves, they will cease to exist after June 16, 2004.

A copy of the agenda can be obtained by contacting the Council (see **ADDRESSES**).

Although non-emergency issues not contained in the agenda may come before the SSC for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA), those issues may not be the subject of formal action during this meeting. Action will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in this notice and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under section 305 (c) of the MSFCMA, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency.

The listening stations are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Anne Alford at the Council (see **ADDRESSES**) by July 3, 2003.

Dated: June 20, 2003.

Richard W. Surdi,

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

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