

Preliminary Identification of Environmental Issues

A principal objective of the scoping and public input process is to identify potentially significant impacts to the human environment that should be analyzed in depth in the EIS. Council and NMFS staff conducted initial screening to identify potentially significant impacts resulting from the proposed action. These impacts relate to the likelihood that overfished stocks will rebuild and, generally, effects stemming from the need to constrain fishing in order to rebuild overfished groundfish stocks. Impacts to the following components of the biological and physical environment may be evaluated: (1) essential fish habitat and ecosystem; (2) protected species listed under the Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act and their critical habitat; and (3) the fishery management unit, including target and non-target fish stocks, and especially overfished groundfish stocks. Socioeconomic impacts are also considered in terms of the effect changes in projected harvests will have on the following groups of individuals: (1) those who participate in harvesting the fishery resources and other living marine resources; (2) those who process and market fish and fish products; (3) those who are involved in allied support industries; (4) those who consume fish products; (5) those who rely on living marine resources in the management area, either for subsistence needs or for recreational benefits; (6) those who benefit from non-consumptive uses of living marine resources; (7) those involved in managing and monitoring fisheries; and (8) fishing communities.

Scoping

A public scoping meeting is scheduled for Sunday, November 2, 2003, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. This scoping session will coincide with the Council meeting and will occur at the same location, the Hilton San Diego/Del Mar, 15575 Jimmy Durante Blvd., Del Mar, CA 92014-1901 (858-792-5200). The primary purpose of the scoping meeting is to focus the analysis on the real issues and concerns of the public (see 40 CFR 1500.5(d) and 40 CFR 1501.7). Public comment also may be made during the November Council meeting (November 3-7, 2003), under the agenda when the Council will consider the proposed action. The agenda for this meeting will be available from the Council website or by request from Council offices in advance of the meeting (see **ADDRESSES**). The agenda will also identify the room in which the Sunday scoping meeting

will occur. Written comments on the scope of issues and alternatives may be submitted as described under **ADDRESSES**.

NMFS invites comments and suggestions on the scope of the analysis to be included in the environmental impact statement for Amendment 16-3. The scope includes the range of alternatives to be considered and potentially significant impacts to the human environment that should be evaluated in the EIS. In addition, NMFS is notifying the public that, in conjunction with the Council, it is beginning a full environmental analysis and decision-making process for this proposal so that interested or affected people may know how they can participate in the environmental analysis and contribute to the final decision.

A draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) will be prepared for comment later on in the process. The comment period on the DEIS will be 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency's notice of availability appears in the **Federal Register**. It is very important that those interested in this proposed action participate at that time.

To be the most helpful, comments on the DEIS should be as specific as possible. Comments received during the scoping process, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for public inspection.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are accessible to people with physical disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Carolyn Porter at 503-820-2280 at least five days prior to the scheduled meeting date.

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

Dated: September 5, 2003.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 052803A]

Taking Marine Mammals Incidental to Specified Activities; Oceanographic Surveys at the Storegga Slide, Norwegian Sea

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

ACTION: Notice of issuance of an incidental harassment authorization.

SUMMARY: In accordance with provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) as amended, notification is hereby given that an Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) to take small numbers of marine mammals, by harassment, incidental to conducting oceanographic surveys at the Storegga Slide off the west coast of Norway in the Norwegian Sea has been issued to Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (LDEO).

DATES: Effective from August 28, 2003, through August 27, 2004.

ADDRESSES: The application, a list of references used in this document, and/or the IHA are available by writing to the Acting Chief, Marine Mammal Conservation Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225, or by telephoning the contact listed here.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sarah C. Hagedorn, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, (301) 713-2322, ext 117.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Sections 101(a)(5)(A) and (D) of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) direct the Secretary of Commerce to allow, upon request, the incidental, but not intentional, taking of marine mammals by U.S. citizens who engage in a specified activity (other than commercial fishing) within a specified geographical region if certain findings are made and either regulations are issued or, if the taking is limited to harassment, a notice of a proposed authorization is provided to the public for review.

Permission may be granted if NMFS finds that the taking will have a negligible impact on the species or stock(s) and will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the