

mmhsrp.html. The NMFS regional coordinator will then forward all application materials to the Office of Protected Resources with a letter of concurrence of need. Until further guidance is published, those seeking emergency assistance funding should prepare their proposal packages according to the guidelines outlined in Section III of this document and forward all forms and documentation to the appropriate NMFS Regional Office.

B. Changes from the 2002 Solicitation

As a result of comments received from those who submitted proposals in 2002 and those who took part in the 2002 technical and merit reviews, changes to the solicitation and review processes are being instituted in this competition. Therefore, we encourage applicants who submitted a proposal in 2002, to read this entire document before preparing a proposal for the 2003/2004 cycle.

Four significant changes to the 2003/2004 funding competition include: 3 separate proposal categories that encompass Program goals and funding priorities (see Section I. C. and Section II); all proposal packages for the 2003/2004 award cycle will be sent to NMFS' Office of Protected Resources (see **ADDRESSES**); a new three stage review process, including on-line reviews of each proposal, panel peer reviews of each proposal, and Federal government merit review of each proposal scoring greater than 60 points in either the on-line or peer review (see Section IV); and new review criteria for use by both on-line and peer reviewers (see Section IV).

C. Proposal Categories

For this solicitation, all proposals must fall within one of the 3 following categories: Category A - Recovery or treatment of live stranded marine mammals (i.e., rescue of live stranded marine mammals including treatment, assessment, and/or rehabilitation); Category B - Data collection from living or dead stranded marine mammals (i.e., recovery of stranded marine mammals for collection of Level A, B, or C data, specimen collection, and/or analyses); Category C - Facility operations directly related to the recovery or treatment of stranded marine mammals or collection of data from living or dead stranded marine mammals (i.e., physical plant renovations, maintenance, facility modifications/upgrades, and/or construction).

Successful proposals under Category A will be those that propose to improve live marine mammal stranding recovery or treatment, including, but not limited to: enhancing the rescue and treatment of animals, training of responders and

rehabilitators via development of outreach and educational material or workshops, developing and testing of new or novel techniques for transport, treatment, or reporting, and non-construction operational needs (e.g., equipment, supplies, staffing, printing) related to these activities. Successful proposals under Category B will be those that propose to collect data that will allow researchers to correlate physical, chemical, biological, and marine mammal health parameters towards a better understanding of marine mammal population biology, and non-construction operational needs (e.g., equipment, supplies, staffing, printing) related to these activities. Successful proposals under Category C will be those that propose to meet facility operation needs (e.g., physical alterations to facility, maintenance) for stranding response and recovery or conduct facility upgrades (e.g., renovations, build-outs) in order to enhance existing recovery or treatment areas or increase the ability to collect marine mammal health and environmental data before, during, or after stranding events. According to the statute, preference will be given to facility operation needs and upgrades for those facilities that have established records for rescuing or rehabilitating sick and stranded marine mammals.

The applicant must select only one of the 3 categories that best fits their proposal. We recognize that most projects will have overlap with more than one category; however, applicants must determine which one category best fits the overall goals of the proposed project. For additional guidance on the type of expertise that will be used in evaluating proposals, applicants should refer to Section IV. B. and IV. C. In the 2003/2004 award cycle, no Prescott Grant Program funds will go towards basic scientific research on non-stranded marine mammals (i.e., wild population studies).

D. Program Funding Priorities

Each proposal category has a set of national and regional funding priorities that relate to specific national or regional stranding network needs. All proposals must identify at least one national or regional funding priority that is directly related to the projects goals and objectives. These specific funding priorities are outlined in section II of this document and are not in any rank order.

E. Available Program Funds

This solicitation announces that a minimum of \$1.3M is available for distribution and that a maximum of

\$8.8M may be available for distribution under the 2003/2004 Prescott Grant Program. For the 2003/2004 annual cycle there is \$1.3M from carryover of FY 2002 funds, and possibly up to \$3.76M from FY 2003 appropriations, and up to \$3.76M from FY 2004 appropriations. Applicants are hereby given notice that neither funds for FY 2003 nor FY 2004 have been appropriated, and therefore exact dollar amounts cannot be given. The maximum Federal award for each annual award or emergency assistance award cannot exceed \$100,000 (with a minimum of 25 percent non-Federal cost share), as stated in the legislative language (16 U. S. C. 1421f-1).

In addition to the annual competitive process, \$400K is available from FY 2002 carryover to provide for emergency assistance awards. If appropriations are received for FY 2003 and FY 2004, then additional funds will be set aside for these emergency assistance awards. Of the FY 2003 appropriations, \$200K will be set aside. Additionally, FY 2004 appropriations will be set aside as needed or as indicated by previous usage of the emergency assistance fund. All emergency funds set aside and unused will be carried over for awards in subsequent years.

There is no limit on the number of proposals that can be submitted by the same eligible stranding network participant or authorized researcher during the 2003/2004 annual cycle. However, there are insufficient funds to award financial assistance to every applicant. Multiple proposals submitted must clearly identify different projects and must be successful in the competitive review process. In an attempt to ensure that the greatest number of applicants receive assistance during the 2003/2004 funding cycle, eligible stranding network participants can receive no more than two awards in this cycle. The two awards must be for projects that are clearly separate in their objectives, goals, and budget requests. In addition, if eligible researchers are applying as Principal Investigators, and are not independently authorized under the MMPA Section 112(c), the MMPA Section 104 (see implementing regulations at 50 CFR 216.33-44), the MMPA Section 109(h) (see implementing regulations at 50 CFR 216.22), or the National Contingency Plan for Response to Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events, then they can receive no more than one award in the 2003/2004 cycle.

Eligible stranding network participants and researchers can be identified as Co-Investigators or Cooperators on an unlimited number of