

subsistence communities provided the mitigation measures required under the authorization are implemented. Because the activity is the same conducted in 1996, and no new impacts on the environment have been identified, a new EA is not warranted and therefore, the preparation of an EIS on this action is not required by section 102(2) of NEPA or its implementing regulations. A copy of the EA is available upon request (see ADDRESSES).

NMFS notes that the responsibility for reviewing an activity under NEPA belongs primarily to the responsible Federal agency, if that activity is Federal, federally-funded, or federally-permitted. The MMS of the U.S. Department of the Interior has responsibility for leasing and subsequent exploration and development activities under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act. As a result, MMS published draft and final EISs under NEPA regarding leasing of offshore oil and gas exploration in this area (Lease Sale Area 144). Seismic surveys are covered under those documents. In addition, a multi-agency NEPA document is currently under development by the Corps of Engineers. This document will analyze the proposal for oil and gas development at Northstar and the alternatives to that proposal. A notice of NEPA scoping was published for public comment in November 1995; a draft EIS is planned for release later this year. Presumably, an analysis of concerns regarding potential future oil and gas industry and other environmental issues will be found in this document.

Consultation

Under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, NMFS has completed consultations on the issuance of this authorization.

Conclusions

NMFS has determined that the short-term impact of conducting seismic surveys in the Western Beaufort Sea will result, at worst, in a temporary modification in behavior by certain species of cetaceans. While behavioral modifications may be made by these species of cetaceans to avoid the resultant noise, this behavioral change is expected to have a negligible impact on the animals. The number of potential incidental harassment takes will depend on the distribution and abundance of marine mammals (which vary annually due to variable ice conditions and other factors) in the area of seismic operations. Due to the distribution and abundance of marine mammals during the projected period of activity and the

location of the proposed seismic activity in waters generally too shallow and distant from the edge of the pack ice for most marine mammals of concern, the number of potential harassment takings is estimated to be small (see 62 FR 19553, April 22, 1997 for potential levels of take). In addition, no take by injury and/or death is anticipated, and the potential for temporary or permanent hearing impairment will be avoided through incorporation of the mitigation measures described in the authorization.

Because bowhead whales are east of the seismic area in the Canadian Beaufort Sea until late August/early September, seismic activities are not expected to impact subsistence hunting of bowhead whales prior to that date. After September 1, 1997, BPXA will initiate aerial survey flights for bowhead whale assessments, and take other actions to avoid having an unmitigable adverse impact on subsistence uses. Appropriate mitigation measures to avoid an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of bowhead whales for subsistence needs is the subject of consultation between BPXA and subsistence users. As a result of discussions between the two parties, a Conflict and Avoidance Agreement is, at this time, near completion. This Agreement consists of three main components: (1) Communications, (2) conflict avoidance, and (3) dispute resolution.

Summer seismic exploration in and near the Northstar Unit has a small potential to influence seal hunting activities by residents of Nuiqsut. However, NMFS believes that because (1) the peak sealing season is during the winter months, (2) the main summer sealing is off the Colville delta (west and inshore of Northstar), and (3) the zone of influence by seismic sources on beluga and seals is fairly small, the 1997 BPXA seismic survey will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of these stocks for subsistence uses.

Since NMFS is assured that the taking will not result in more than the incidental harassment (as defined by the MMPA Amendments of 1994) of small numbers of certain species of marine mammals, would have only a negligible impact on these stocks, will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of these stocks for subsistence uses, and would result in the least practicable impact on the stocks, NMFS has determined that the requirements of section 101(a)(5)(D) have been met and the authorization can be issued.

Authorization

Accordingly, NMFS has issued an IHA to BPXA for the above described seismic survey during the 1997 open water season provided the mitigation, monitoring and reporting requirements described in the authorization are undertaken.

Dated: July 11, 1997.

Patricia A. Montanio,

Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 071097E]

Caribbean 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 Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Council) and its Administrative Committee will hold meetings.

DATES: The meetings will be held on August 11-13, 1997.

ADDRESSES: All meetings will be held at the Caravelle Hotel, in Christiansted, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Council Address: Caribbean Fishery Management Council, 268 Muñoz Rivera Avenue, Suite 1108, San Juan, PR 00918-2577.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Caribbean Fishery Management Council; telephone: (787) 766-5926.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Council will hold its 92nd regular public meeting to discuss the First Amendment to the Coral Fish Fishery Management Plan, among other topics.

The Council will convene on August 12, 1997, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., through August 13, 1997, from 9:00 a.m. to noon, approximately.

The Administrative Committee will meet on August 11, 1997, from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., to discuss administrative matters regarding Council operation.

The meetings are open to the public, and will be conducted in English. Fishers and other interested persons are invited to attend and participate with oral or written statements regarding agenda issues.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. For more information or requests for sign language interpretation and/or other auxiliary aids please contact Mr. Miguel A. Rolón, Executive Director, (see ADDRESSES) at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Dated: July 11, 1997.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 97-18864 Filed 7-16-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[I.D. 071097D]

Western 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 Western Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will hold its 66th meeting.

DATES: The meeting will be held August 5-7, 1997, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., each day.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the King Kamehameha Hotel, Kailua-Kona, HI; telephone: (808) 329-2911.

Council address: Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1405, Honolulu, HI 96813.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kitty M. Simonds, Executive Director; telephone: (808) 522-8220.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The SSC will discuss and may make recommendations to the Council on the following agenda items:

1. Pelagic fishery issues, including:
 - a. Status of the fishery;
 - b. Pelagic fisheries research;
 - c. Management issues for the western central Pacific Ocean;
 - d. Bycatch/incidental take issues (albatross, turtles, sharks), marine mammal interactions with Hawaii pelagic fisheries; and
 - e. Small pelagic fisheries catch data and the impact of ocean recreation activities on akule and opelu;
2. Lobster management, including:
 - a. Report on 1997 lobster season guidelines, observer program, NMFS

annual research cruise, and mandatory Vessel Monitoring System for data transmission and catch reporting.

b. Regulatory inconsistencies with Main Hawaiian Islands; and

c. Discussion of areas not included in the fishery management plan (Northern Mariana Islands, Palmyra, Johnston, Kingman);

3. Precious Corals management including:

a. Status of the fishery at Makapuu; and

b. Draft amendment for framework process;

4. Report on Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund;

5. Hawaii bottomfish issues, including:

a. Status of the fishery and the State of Hawaii's plan for dealer reporting,

b. Status report on Department of Land and Natural Resources' regulations for overfished Main Hawaiian Islands onaga and ehu fisheries and Federal considerations,

c. Northwestern Hawaiian Islands bottomfish management system including draft amendment for Mau Zone limited entry, Task Force report, and status of new entry into the Hoomalu Zone; and

d. Hawaii Bottomfish Plan Team/Advisory Panel recommendations;

6. Ecosystem and Habitat issues, including:

a. Final region-wide coral reef assessment,

b. Report on progress with draft amendments for Essential Fish Habitat,

c. Bathymetric mapping of Pacific Insular Areas,

d. Summary of recent activities in Hawaii, Guam and Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands; and

e. Advisory Panel recommendations;

7. Progress on Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements, including draft amendments to fisheries management plans regarding:

- a. Essential Fish Habitat,
- b. Bycatch;
- c. Overfishing;
- d. Fishing sectors; and
- e. Fishing communities; and
8. Other business as required.

Special Accommodations

This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Kitty M. Simonds, (808) 522-8220 (voice) or (808) 522-8226 (fax), at least 5 days prior to meeting date.

Dated: July 11, 1997.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 97-18806 Filed 7-16-97; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[I.D. 070997B]

Western 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 Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold a meeting of its Native and Indigenous Rights Advisory Panel.

DATES: The meeting will be held on August 14-15, 1997, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Pakalana/Anthurium Room, Ala Moana Hotel, 410 Atkinson Drive, Honolulu, HI; telephone: 808-955-4811.

Council address: Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, 1164 Bishop St., Suite 1405, Honolulu, HI 96813.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kitty M. Simonds, Executive Director; telephone: 808-522-8220.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Council's Native and Indigenous Rights Advisory Panel will hold a meeting to discuss the history and characteristics of the Alaska Community Development Quota Program, recent Federal legislation authorizing the establishment of a Western Pacific Community Development Program and other issues related to indigenous fishing rights and practices in the Council's area of jurisdiction.

Special Accommodations

This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Kitty M. Simonds, 808-522-8220 (voice) or 808-522-8226 (fax), at least 5 days prior to meeting date.

Dated: July 11, 1997.

Bruce C. Morehead,

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