

(e) Conducting drilling operations during winter months instead of during the open water season as done in previous years;

(f) Maintaining the CIDS in a cold shutdown mode after completion of drilling in May 1998; and

(g) Not moving the CIDS to Prudhoe Bay during the spring bowhead migration period.

In addition to mitigation proposed by ARCO as part of their application, NMFS will caution ARCO from conducting any activities relating to the operation of the CIDS, to the extent practicable, in the vicinity of ice pressure ridges or other areas where ringed seal lairs may be present.

Monitoring

The monitoring program will consist of two phases:

Phase I-Open Water Season. Arco will utilize trained personnel onboard the various transport vessels to conduct visual observations to locate and assess the behavior of those six species of marine mammals that are known to use the open-water area between Prudhoe Bay and Camden Bay. The monitoring program will commence with the movement of the CIDS to Camden Bay in mid- to late-August 1997 and will end at the time that freeze-up of Camden Bay is complete. Observers will be trained by a marine biologist (approved in advance by NMFS) and an experienced Native marine mammal subsistence hunter. Both of these individuals will accompany the vessels transporting the CIDS and will remain with the CIDS until freeze-up. All marine mammal observations will be provided daily to NMFS.

NMFS proposes, as part of this Authorization, if granted, to also require the above-mentioned monitoring program during debalasting and movement of the CIDS back to Prudhoe Bay, or another location. NMFS, however, will require notification if the CIDS is to be moved to a location other than between Camden Bay and Prudhoe Bay.

Phase II-Ice Season. Although not mentioned in the application, monitoring during the ice-drilling season will also be necessary. However, because of the low expectation of interactions with marine mammals that are under the jurisdiction of NMFS, dedicated observers are not considered necessary. As a result, NMFS proposes to require as part of the Authorization that ARCO instruct the polar bear watchperson to maintain a sightings-and-behavior log for seals that is separate from the Polar Bear Sightings Log. This latter reporting requirement is

mandated by 50 CFR 18.27 and the Letter of Authorization issued to ARCO by the USFWS on May 21, 1997.

NMFS does not propose to require any seal or whale monitoring program during the cold shutdown phase.

Reporting

In addition to daily reporting via radio during the open water season, NMFS proposes to require ARCO to submit two reports, the first to be submitted 60 days after starting oil drilling for the open-water monitoring period. The second report will be required 90 days after completion of activities authorized for marine mammal takings.

Consultation

Under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, NMFS has begun consultation on the proposed issuance of an incidental harassment authorization. Consultation will be concluded upon completion of the comment period and consideration of those comments in the final determination on issuance of an authorization.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

In conjunction with this notice, NMFS has released an EA that addresses the impacts on the human environment from issuance of the authorization and the alternatives to the proposed action. A copy of the EA is available upon request (see ADDRESSES).

Conclusions

NMFS has preliminarily determined that the short-term impact of exploration drilling and related activities in the Beaufort Sea will result, at worst, in a temporary modification in behavior by certain species of pinnipeds, and possibly some individual bowhead or beluga whales. While behavioral modifications may be made by these species of marine mammals to avoid the resultant noise from tugs either towing the CIDS or transporting supplies, or due to drilling activities, this behavioral change is expected to have a negligible impact on the animals.

While 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 activity area, the number of potential harassment takings is estimated to be small. In addition, no take by injury and/or death is anticipated and takes will be at the lowest level practicable due to

incorporation of the mitigation measures mentioned above. No rookeries, mating grounds, areas of concentrated feeding, or other areas of special significance for marine mammals occur within or near the planned area of operations during the season of operations.

Because bowhead whales are east of the area in the Canadian Beaufort Sea until late August/early September, moving the CIDS during August is not expected to impact subsistence hunting of bowhead whales.

Appropriate mitigation measures to avoid an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of bowhead whales for subsistence needs is expected to be the subject of consultation between ARCO and subsistence users.

Proposed Authorization

NMFS proposes to issue an incidental harassment authorization to ARCO for the possible harassment of small numbers of several species of marine mammals incidental to moving a CIDS from Prudhoe Bay to Camden Bay, Alaska and drilling an oil exploration well at that location during the winter 1997/98, provided the above mentioned mitigation, monitoring and reporting requirements are incorporated. NMFS has preliminarily determined that the proposed activities would result in the harassment of only small numbers of ringed seals, bearded seals, spotted seals and, possibly bowhead and beluga whales; will have a negligible impact on these marine mammal stocks; and will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of these stocks for subsistence uses.

Information Solicited

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

Dated: July 9, 1997.

Patricia A. Montanio,

Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 97-18463 Filed 7-14-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 070797D]

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 Ecosystem and Habitat Advisory Panel (E&H-AP).

DATES: The meeting will be held July 29, 1997, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at The Executive Centre Hotel, Room 4003, 1088 Bishop Street, Honolulu, HI; telephone: (808) 539-3000.

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

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The E&H-AP meeting will discuss and may make recommendations to the Council on the following agenda items:

1. Draft Fishery Management Plan (FMP) amendments for Essential Fish Habitat (EFH);
2. Final region-wide coral reef assessment;
3. Summary of recent activities (humpback whale sanctuary, Guam land use, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands Farallon de Medinilla Environmental Impact Statement survey); and
4. 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 8, 1997.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 97-18465 Filed 7-14-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 062797E]

Marine Mammals; Permit No. 837

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

ACTION: Receipt of application for amendment and issuance of amendment.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the National Marine Mammal Laboratory, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NMFS, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, BIN C15700, Seattle, WA 98119-0070, has requested an amendment to Permit No. 837, and an amendment has been issued authorizing the conduct of a portion of the proposed research.

DATES: Written comments must be received on or before August 14, 1997.

ADDRESSES: The amendment request and related documents are available for review upon written request or by appointment in the following office(s): Permits and Documentation Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13130, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (301/713-2289); and

Regional Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668 (907/586-7221).

Written comments or requests for a public hearing on this request should be submitted to the Chief, Permits and Documentation Division, F/PR1, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13130, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Those individuals requesting a hearing should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this particular amendment request would be appropriate.

Comments may also be submitted by facsimile at (301) 713-0376, provided the facsimile is confirmed by hard copy submitted by mail and postmarked no later than the closing date of the comment period. Please note that comments will not be accepted by e-mail or other electronic media.

Concurrent with the publication of this notice in the **Federal Register**, NMFS is forwarding copies of this application to the Marine Mammal Commission and its Committee of Scientific Advisors.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject amendment to permit no. 837, issued on June 4, 1993 (58 FR 33085) is requested under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*), the Regulations Governing the Taking and Importing of Marine Mammals (50 CFR part 216), and the Fur Seal Act of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1151 *et seq.*).

Permit no. 837 authorizes the permit holder to capture, restrain, shear-mark, sample and handle up to 30,000 Northern fur seals (*Callorhinus ursinus*) over a 5-year period, and to collect parts from dead animals. The Permit Holder

now requests the following: 1) biopsy sampling of up to 120 female seals (60 seals on St. Paul, 60 on St. George). A total of 1,200 fur seal pups and 1,200 non-pups may be harassed incidentally during the course of this activity; 2) tissue sampling (i.e., hair, skin, blubber, muscle and liver) of up to 120 already deceased juvenile male seals (60 on St. Paul, 60 on St. George); and 3) capture and recapture of up to 20 adult female seals on Bogoslof Island to study foraging behavior. Each seal will be instrumented with a satellite tag and/or time-depth recorder and VHF transmitter via 5-minute epoxy glue; flipper tagged, weighed, measured, and released. At recapture, the instruments will be removed and the animals will be weighed, measured, administered an enema and released. Some of these seals may be sedated with Valium. At each capture, the seal will be given an intramuscular injection of oxytocin and milk sampled. Up to 2,000 pups and 2,000 non-pups may be incidentally harassed during the course of this activity.

The biopsy portion of the research described in item 1, above, must be conducted during the current summer season, and activities are scheduled to begin on July 5, 1997. This work can only be done during the next two months before the animals are preparing to leave on migration, and a delay in this work will compromise the existing data series on co-dependent parameters also being collected this year. In light of the time constraints and the unique research opportunity that would otherwise be lost, pursuant to Section 104(c)(3)(A) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and 50 CFR 216.33(e)(6) of the MMPA regulations, we issued an amendment to Permit No. 837 authorizing the conduct of the biopsy sampling.

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), an initial determination has been made that the activity proposed is categorically excluded from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Dated: July 3, 1997.

Art Jeffers,

Acting Chief, Permits and Documentation Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 97-18464 Filed 7-14-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F