

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

[I.D. 031198B]

**Incidental Take of Marine Mammals; Taking of Ringed Seals Incidental to On-Ice Seismic Activities**

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

**ACTION:** Notice of issuance of letters of authorization.

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) as amended and with implementing regulations, notification is hereby given that letters of authorization to take ringed and bearded seals incidental to on-ice seismic operations in the Beaufort Sea off Alaska were issued on March 16, 1998, to BP Exploration, Western Geophysical, and Northern Geophysical of America, all of Anchorage, AK.

**DATES:** These letters of authorization are effective from March 16, 1998, through May 31, 1998.

**ADDRESSES:** The applications and letters are available for review in the following offices: Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910, and Western Alaska Field Office, NMFS, 701 C Street, Anchorage, AK 99513.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Kenneth R. Hollingshead, NMFS, (301) 713-2055 or Brad Smith, Western Alaska Field Office, NMFS, (907) 271-5006.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Section 101(a)(5)(A) of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) directs NMFS to allow, on request, the incidental, but not intentional, taking of small numbers 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 by NMFS and regulations are issued. Under the MMPA, the term "taking" means to harass, hunt, capture, or kill or to attempt to harass, hunt, capture or kill marine mammals.

Permission may be granted for periods up to 5 years if NMFS finds, after notification and opportunity for public comment, that the taking will have a negligible impact on the species or stock(s) of marine mammals and will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of the species or stock(s) for subsistence uses. In addition, NMFS must prescribe

regulations that include permissible methods of taking and other means effecting the least practicable adverse impact on the species and its habitat and on the availability of the species for subsistence uses, paying particular attention to rookeries, mating grounds, and areas of similar significance. The regulations must include requirements pertaining to the monitoring and reporting of such taking. Regulations governing the taking of ringed and bearded seals incidental to on-ice seismic surveys were published on February 2, 1998 (63 FR 5277), and remain in effect until December 31, 2002.

**Summary of Request**

NMFS received requests for letters of authorization on February 24, 1998, from Northern Geophysical; February 26, 1998, from BP Exploration (Alaska); and May 20, 1997 (as amended on December 22, 1997, and March 3, 1998), from Western Geophysical. These letters requested a take by harassment of a small number of ringed and bearded seals incidental to the described activity.

Issuance of these letters of authorization are based on findings that the total takings by this activity will have a negligible impact on the ringed and bearded seal stocks of the Western Beaufort Sea and that the applicants have met the requirements contained in the implementing regulations.

Dated: March 16, 1998.

**Patricia A. Montanio,**  
*Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.*  
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BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

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

[I.D. 031098B]

**Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting**

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

**ACTION:** Notice of cancellation of two public meetings.

**SUMMARY:** The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) has cancelled the public meeting of the Special Crustacean Stock Assessment Panel (SAP) that was scheduled for Monday, March 30, 1998, through Wednesday, April 1, 1998. The Council

has also cancelled the public meeting of the Finfish SAP that was scheduled for Monday, April 6, 1998, through Thursday, April 9, 1998. The meetings were announced in the **Federal Register** on March 16, 1998.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Richard Leard, Senior Fishery Biologist, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; telephone: 813-228-2815.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The initial notice published on March 16, 1998 (63 FR 12784). The purpose of these meetings was for the SAPs to develop alternatives for the overfishing criteria as required by the Sustainable Fisheries Act. These alternative and recommendations would be provided to the Council. The meetings will be rescheduled at a future date after NMFS has published the guidelines for National Standard 1 which will define criteria for setting the overfishing thresholds.

Dated: March 17, 1998.

**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. 031698A]

**Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings**

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

**ACTION:** Notice of public meetings.

**SUMMARY:** The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and its advisory entities will hold public meetings.

**DATES:** The Council, and its advisory entities will meet during the week of April 5-10, 1998. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific dates and times.

**ADDRESSES:** The meetings will be held at the Doubletree Hotel, Columbia River, 1401 N. Hayden Island Drive, Portland, OR 97217; telephone: (503) 283-2111.

*Council address:* Pacific Fishery Management Council, 2130 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 224, Portland, OR 97201.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Lawrence D. Six, Executive Director; telephone: (503) 326-6352.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Council meeting will begin on Monday,