

respondent burden, invites the general public and other Federal agencies to take this opportunity to comment on proposed and/or continuing information collections, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104-13 (44 U.S.C. 3506(c)(2)(A)).

**DATES:** Written comments must be submitted on or before May 5, 2003.

**ADDRESSES:** Direct all written comments to Diana Hynek, Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer, Department of Commerce, Room 6625, 14th and Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20230 (or via the Internet at [dHynek@doc.gov](mailto:dHynek@doc.gov)).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Requests for additional information or copies of the information collection instrument and instructions should be directed to Phil Steele, Department of Commerce, NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service, 9721 Executive Center Drive North, St. Petersburg, FL 33702-2439, (727) 570-5305.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**I. Abstract**

This data collection is needed for the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) to properly implement the referendum procedures specified in Section 407(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*). The Act provides that on or after October 1, 2000, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) may prepare and submit a fishery management plan, plan amendment, or regulation for the Gulf of Mexico commercial red snapper fishery that creates an individual fishing quota (IFQ) program or that authorizes the consolidation of licenses, permits, or endorsements that result in different trip limits for vessels in the same class. These actions can only take place if the preparation of such plan, amendment, or regulation is approved in a referendum, and only if the submission to the Secretary of such plan, amendment, or regulation is approved in a subsequent referendum.

Only a person who held an annual vessel permit with a red snapper endorsement for such permit on September 1, 1996 (or any person to whom such permit with such endorsement was transferred after such date) and vessel captains who harvested red snapper in a commercial fishery using such endorsement in each red snapper fishing season occurring between January 1, 1993, and such date (i.e., September 1, 1996) may vote in the referendums.

**II. Method of Collection**

The Secretary, at the request of the Council, will conduct these referendums. The Secretary has sufficient data, collected under OMB approval 0648-0205, needed to contact persons who held an annual vessel permit with a red snapper endorsement for such permit on September 1, 1996 (or any person to whom such permit with such endorsement was transferred after such date). However, the Secretary does not have such data on the vessel captains who harvested red snapper in a commercial fishery using such endorsement in each specified fishing season. Therefore, the Secretary will use several communication methods to attempt to identify such captains and make them aware of the referendum procedures. One possible communication method that involves data collection would be a request for detailed information from persons with a vessel permit with a red snapper endorsement, regarding vessel captains who harvested red snapper using such endorsement in each specified fishing season.

Prior to each referendum, the Secretary, in consultation with the Council, shall (a) identify and notify all such persons holding permits with red snapper endorsements and all such vessel captains; and (b) make available to all such persons and vessel captains information about the schedule, procedures, and eligibility requirements for the referendum and the proposed individual fishing quota program. Submission of the paper questionnaires would be voluntary.

**III. Data**

*OMB Number:* None.

*Form Number:* None.

*Type of Review:* Regular submission.

*Affected Public:* Business or other for-profit organizations.

*Estimated Number of Respondents:* 200.

*Estimated Time Per Response:* 10 minutes for a response to an initial referendum on preparation; 20 minutes for a response to a subsequent referendum; and 10 minutes per response for any information request regarding vessel captains.

*Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours:* 102.

*Estimated Total Annual Cost to Public:* \$122. (Costs exclude valuation of respondents' time.)

**IV. Request for Comments**

Comments are invited on: (a) whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance

of the functions of the agency, including whether the information shall have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden (including hours and cost) of the proposed collection of information; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including through the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Comments submitted in response to this notice will be summarized and/or included in the request for OMB approval of this information collection; they also will become a matter of public record.

Dated: February 25, 2003.

**Gwellnar Banks,**

*Management Analyst, Office of the Chief Information Officer.*

[FR Doc. 03-5047 Filed 3-3-03; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 3510-22-S**

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[I.D. 013003B]

**Marine Mammals: Final Environmental Assessment of Issuing a Bowhead Whale Subsistence Quota to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission for the Years 2003 through 2007**

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

**ACTION:** Notice of availability.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS announces the availability of an Environmental Assessment (EA), in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), to assess the impacts of issuing the International Whaling Commission (IWC) subsistence quota for bowhead whales to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC) for the years 2003 through 2007. NMFS has identified a preferred alternative in the EA that will grant the AEWC the IWC quota of 255 landed bowhead whales, with an annual strike quota of 67 bowhead whales per year for the years 2003 through 2007, where no more than 15 unused strikes are added to the strike quota for any one year.

**ADDRESSES:** Copies of the EA may be obtained via the Internet (see Electronic Access). Copies of the EA may be requested by writing to Gale Heim,

NOAA/NMFS, Office of Protected Resources, 13th Floor, 1315 East-West Hwy, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Mark the outside of the envelope with "Request for Bowhead EA."

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Chris Yates or Winnie Chan, 301-713-2322.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**Electronic Access**

Copies of the EA may be obtained over the Internet at the Office of Protected Resources Marine Mammal website under "Quick Information Links" at [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot\\_res/overview/mm.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/overview/mm.html). The link is titled "Bowhead Whale Environmental Assessment".

**Background**

At the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting of the IWC held in October, 2002 the Commission approved a 5-year aboriginal subsistence quota for the take of Western arctic bowhead whales. The quota allows for a combined total of up to 280 whales to be landed in the years 2003 through 2007 by Alaskan Eskimos and Russian natives. For each of these years, the number of bowhead whales struck shall not exceed 67, except that any unused portion of a strike quota from any year shall be carried forward and added to the strike quota of any subsequent year, provided that no more than 15 strikes shall be added to the strike quota for any one year.

The basis for the quota was a joint request by the Russian Federation and the United States for 280 whales (255 for Alaska Eskimos and 25 for Russian natives) over a 5-year period. The annual strike limits and quotas for whales are determined at the beginning of each year after consultation with the Russian government.

At the 54<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the IWC, held in May, 2002 the Scientific Committee reiterated its previous advice for the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock of bowhead whales. That is, it is very likely that a catch limit of 102 whales or less would be consistent with the requirements under IWC regulation.

The International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, under which the IWC operates, is implemented domestically through the Whaling Convention Act (WCA). Under the WCA, NMFS issues a share of the IWC bowhead quota to the AEWG.

Alaska Eskimos have been taking bowhead whales for at least 2,000 years. Alaska Native subsistence hunters take less than one percent of the population of bowhead whales per year. Since 1977, the number of takes has ranged between 14 and 75 per year.

NEPA requires that Federal agencies conduct an environmental analysis of the effect of their proposed actions on the environment. Although all quotas under the WCA are issued on an annual basis, NMFS evaluated the effects of issuing them over a 5-year period. A draft EA was distributed for public comment on December 9, 2002. The EA analyzed four alternatives:

*Alternative 1* - Grant the AEWG a quota of 255 landed bowhead whales over 5 years (2003 through 2007), with an annual strike quota of 67 bowhead whales per year, where no unused strikes are added to the strike quota for any one year.

*Alternative 2* - Grant the AEWG a quota of 255 landed bowhead whales over 5 years (2003 through 2007), with an annual strike quota of 67 bowhead whales per year, where no more than 15 unused strikes are added to the strike quota for any one year.

*Alternative 3* - Grant the AEWG a quota of 255 landed bowhead whales over 5 years (2003 through 2007), with an annual strike quota of 67 bowhead whales per year, where, for unused strikes, up to 50 percent of the annual strike limit is added to the strike quota for any one year.

*Alternative 4* (No Action) - Do not grant the AEWG a quota.

After reviewing and addressing the comments received, NMFS selected Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative. NMFS issued a final EA and Finding of No Significant Impact on February 23, 2003. The Final EA was prepared in accordance with NEPA, implementing regulations at 40 CFR parts 1500 through 1508, and NOAA guidelines concerning implementation of NEPA found in NOAA Administrative Order 216-6.

Dated: February 26, 2003.

**Stephen L. Leathery,**

*Acting Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[I.D. 022603C]

**Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings**

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

**ACTION:** Notice of public meeting.

**SUMMARY:** The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and its Research Set Aside (RSA) Committee and its Executive Committee will hold a public meeting.

**DATES:** The meetings will be held on Tuesday, March 18, through Thursday, March 20, 2003. On Tuesday, March 18, there will be a Research Set-Aside (RSA) Workshop from noon until 5 p.m. There will be a Dogfish Scoping meeting from 7 pm to 8:30 p.m. On Wednesday, March 19, the Executive Committee will meet from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. The Council will meet from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. The Council will tour the U.S. Coast Guard Museum and hear a presentation on Homeland Defense from 11 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. The Council will meet from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. The Council will then visit the Virginia Marine Science Museum from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. On Thursday, March 20, the Council will meet from 8 a.m. until noon.

**ADDRESSES:** This meeting will be held at the Sheraton Oceanfront Hotel, 36th Street and Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach, VA; telephone: 757-425-9000 or 800-325-3535.

*Council address:* Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 300 S. New Street, Dover, DE 19904; telephone: 302-674-2331.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Daniel T. Furlong, Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council; telephone: 302-674-2331, ext. 19.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Council and NMFS will hold a collaborative workshop from noon to 5 p.m. on March 18, 2003 to discuss the Council's RSA program.

The RSA program is carried out through the cooperation of the Council, NMFS, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. It provides a mechanism to fund research relevant to the Council's and Commission's fishery management plans and to compensate vessels through the sale of fish harvested under specially designated RSA quotas. Research projects have been funded through the RSA in 2002 and 2003, and a notice for solicitation of 2004 projects has recently been published in the **Federal Register** (68, FR 3864, 1/27/2003). The NMFS is currently soliciting proposals for research activities concerning the summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, *Loligo* squid, *Illex* squid, Atlantic mackerel, butterfish, and bluefish fisheries. While the tilefish fishery is part of the RSA program, the Council has voted to set the tilefish RSA quota to zero until a stock assessment has been completed. All research proposals