

United States ratify the Convention and enact implementing legislation (notice published October 19, 2005, at 70 FR 60795). With the enactment of implementing legislation in the form of the WCPFCIA in January 2007, and, following action by the President, the need to fulfill the immediate obligations of the United States under the Convention, NMFS seeks to build on the earlier scoping process and is accepting additional comments on the scope of issues to be included in this EA.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*; 16 U.S.C. 5501 *et seq.*; 16 U.S.C. 973 *et seq.*; Pub. L. 109-479, 120 Stat. 3575.

Dated: February 20, 2007.

James P. Burgess,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 011107D]

Incidental Take of Marine Mammals; Taking of Marine Mammals Incidental to Conducting Precision Strike Weapons Testing and Training by Eglin Air Force Base in the Gulf of Mexico

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

ACTION: Notice of issuance of a letter of authorization.

SUMMARY: In accordance with provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), as amended, notification is hereby given that a letter of authorization (LOA) to take four species of marine mammals, by harassment, incidental to testing and training during Precision Strike Weapons (PSW) tests in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM), a military readiness activity, has been issued to Eglin Air Force Base (AFB).

DATES: This authorization is effective from February 20, 2007, through February 19, 2008.

ADDRESSES: The application and LOA are available for review in the Permits, Conservation, and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or by contacting one of the individuals mentioned below (See **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Kenneth Hollingshead or Candace Nachman, NMFS, (301) 713-2289.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 101(a)(5)(A) of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) directs NMFS to allow, upon 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.

Authorization, in the form of annual LOAs, may be granted for periods up to five 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 marine mammals incidental to PSW testing and training within the Eglin Gulf Test and Training Range in the GOM, were published on November 24, 2006 (71 FR 67810) and remain in effect from December 26, 2006 through December 27, 2011. The four species that Eglin AFB may take in small numbers during PSW testing and training are Atlantic bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), Atlantic spotted dolphins (*Stenella frontalis*), dwarf sperm whales (*Kogia simus*), and pygmy sperm whales (*Kogia breviceps*).

Issuance of the annual LOA to Eglin AFB is based on findings made in the preamble to the final rule that the total takings by this project would result in no more than a negligible impact on the affected marine mammal stocks or habitats and would not have an unmitigable adverse impact on subsistence uses of marine mammals. NMFS also finds that the applicant will meet the requirements contained in the implementing regulations and LOA, including monitoring and reporting requirements. Without any mitigation

measures, a small possibility exists for one bottlenose dolphin and one spotted dolphin to be exposed to blast levels from the PSW testing sufficient to cause mortality. Additionally, less than two cetaceans might be exposed to noise levels sufficient to induce Level A harassment (injury) annually, and as few as 31 or as many as 52 cetaceans (depending on the season and water depth) could potentially be exposed (annually) to noise levels sufficient to induce Level B harassment in the form of temporary (auditory) threshold shift (TTS).

While none of these impact estimates consider the proposed mitigation measures that will be employed by Eglin AFB to minimize potential impacts to protected species, NMFS has authorized Eglin AFB to lethally take one marine mammal, two marine mammals by Level A harassment, and up to 53 marine mammals by Level B harassment (TTS) annually. However, the proposed mitigation measures described in the final rule (71 FR 67810, November 24, 2006) and the LOA are anticipated to reduce potential impacts to marine mammals in both numbers and degree of severity. These measures include a conservative safety range for marine mammal exclusion; incorporation of aerial and shipboard survey monitoring efforts in the program both prior to and after detonation of explosives; and a prohibition on detonations whenever marine mammals are detected within the safety zone, may enter the safety zone at the time of detonation, or if weather and sea conditions preclude adequate aerial surveillance. This LOA will be renewed annually based on a review of the activity, completion of monitoring requirements, and receipt of reports required by the LOA.

Dated: February 20, 2007.

James H. Lecky,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Science Advisory Board (SAB); Meeting

AGENCY: Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of Open Meeting.