UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: *Environmental Assessment on the Issuance of an Incidental Harassment Authorization to the National Science Foundation and Antarctic Support Contract to Take Marine Mammals by Harassment Incidental to a Low-Energy Marine Geophysical Survey in the Ross Sea, January to April 2015*

LOCATION: Selected regions of the Ross Sea (located north of the Ross Ice Shelf) in International Waters with a focus on the Whales Deep Basin trough (encompassing the region between 76 to 78º South, and between 165 to 170º West)

SUMMARY: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposes to issue an Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) for the take, by Level B harassment only, of marine mammals during a low-energy marine geophysical (i.e., seismic) survey in the Ross Sea, January to February 2015. NMFS has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) titled *Environmental Assessment on the Issuance of an Incidental Harassment Authorization to the National Science Foundation and Antarctic Support Contract to Take Marine Mammals by Harassment Incidental to a Low-Energy Marine Geophysical Survey in the Ross Sea, January to April 2015*, and prepared an independent Fining of No Significant Impact (FONSI). In the EA, NMFS incorporated by reference the National Science Foundation (NSF) and Antarctic Support Contract's *Initial Environmental Evaluation/Environmental Assessment to Perform Marine Geophysical Survey, Collect Bathymetric Measurements, and Conduct Sediment Coring by the RVIB Nathaniel B. Palmer in the Ross Sea*. NMFS has determined that the impact of issuing the IHA and conducting the low-energy marine seismic survey in International Waters in the Ross Sea, may result, at worst, in a temporary modification in behavior of small numbers of several species of marine mammals. No injury, serious injury, or mortality is anticipated to result from this activity, nor is it authorized. NMFS has further determined that this activity will result in a negligible impact on the affected species or stocks.

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RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: Donna S. Wieting
Director
Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1315 East-West Highway, Room 13821
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-427-8400

The environmental review process including the analysis and determinations made during the IHA application and issuance process has led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. A copy of the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) prepared by NMFS, the supporting EA, and the NSF document incorporated by NMFS, are enclosed for your information.

Although NMFS is not soliciting comments on this EA/FONSI, we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents.

Please submit any written comments to the responsible official named above.

Sincerely,

TRONVIG.KRISTEN.A.1365886012

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for Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure