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 Issuing a Scientific Research and Enhancement Permit to the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program to Include Hot Branding, Unmanned Aircraft Systems, and Vaccinations

**LOCATION:** U.S., high seas, and foreign EEZ waters

**SUMMARY:** The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposes to issue a permit to the NMFS Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program (MMHSRP) for takes of marine mammals under NMFS jurisdiction for enhancement and research, pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (MMPA; 16 U.S.C. 1361 et seq.) and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq., and the Fur Seal Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 1151 et seq.). The permit would be valid for five years and would authorize the MMHSRP to continue to conduct emergency response of ESA-listed marine mammals, entanglement response and health-related research on marine mammals, and collection, receipt, transfer, import, export, analysis, and curation of marine mammal parts.

The Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the MMHSRP (NMFS 2009a) evaluated the MMHSRP’s entire program, including various enhancement and research activities permitted by NMFS and conducted by government employees, stranding agreement holders, and researchers. The analyses and conclusions in that PEIS are still valid as applied to the MMHSRP activities covered under the proposed new 5-year permit. Relevant sections of the PEIS are incorporated by reference in this EA pertaining to the majority of permitted activities previously analyzed. The EA focuses its analysis on three activities not analyzed in that PEIS: (1) hot branding, (2) unmanned aircraft system (UAS) use, and (3) vaccinations.
The environmental review process 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) including the supporting environmental assessment (EA) is enclosed for your information.

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed 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,

Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure