



MAY 20 2010

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: Supplemental Environmental Assessment of the Program for Decreasing or Eliminating Predation of Pre-weaned Hawaiian Monk Seal Pups by Galapagos Sharks in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC), Protected Species Division (PRD), Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program (HMSRP), Honolulu, Hawaii

LOCATION: French Frigate Shoals, Hawaii

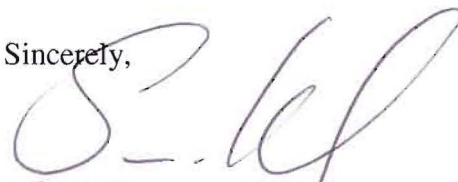
SUMMARY: The purpose of this Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) is for NMFS to consider the potential environmental impacts of using specific additional methods and equipment, in certain identified locations, that were not included in the March 2009 Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) discussion of activities to reduce Galapagos shark predation on pre-weaned Hawaiian monk seal pups at French Frigate Shoals (FFS).

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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 Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) 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,


for Paul N. Doremus, Ph.D.
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure



**Supplemental Environmental Assessment of the Program for Decreasing or
Eliminating Predation of Pre-weaned Hawaiian Monk Seal Pups by Galapagos
Sharks in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands
Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC)
Protected Species Division (PSD)
Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program (HMSRP)
Honolulu, Hawaii**

May 2010

**Lead Agency: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center**

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) is for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to consider the potential environmental impacts of additional methods which were not included in the March, 2009 Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) of activities to reduce Galapagos shark predation on pre-weaned pups at French Frigate Shoals (FFS).

The scope of the proposed research is using an additional fishing method to remove Galapagos sharks, which are preying on pre-weaned pups. The new fishing method would not increase the number of sharks taken, but may increase the chances of successfully removing up to 40 Galapagos sharks over a 2-year period, as analyzed in the PEA. The new method under consideration is a vertical 'surprise net' which is deployed remotely from when the desired target (in this case, Galapagos shark) is within the arc of the net. The activity would be conducted exclusively at FFS.

This analysis presents information on the anticipated effects to the physical environment resulting from the proposed activity, as well as potential effects to the biological environment, including marine mammals, sea turtles, Galapagos sharks, other fishes, seabirds, and corals. With mitigation measures in place to prevent seal and turtle entanglements, no significant impacts would occur.

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1 Purpose and Need

1.1 Background

In March 2009, the Protected Species Division, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program (HMSRP) prepared a programmatic environmental assessment analyzing activities expanding its program for decreasing or eliminating shark predation on Hawaiian monk seal pre-weaned pups in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. A component of the action was on pup/Galapagos shark interactions within French Frigate Shoals. In response to the dire circumstances facing the Hawaiian monk seal population, the programmatic analysis presented a set of strategies to decrease or eliminate predation on pre-weaned pups, especially at Trig islet, the Gins, and other islets within the atoll.

As discussed at Section 1.10 of the PEA, the PEA anticipated preparation of supplementary NEPA analysis for any site or project specific actions that may be added to the program that were not specifically covered under the PEA or another analysis and that might have environmental impacts not previously considered. Since that PEA was prepared, HMSRP has identified a modified tangle net fishing gear that may be deployed in specific areas of French Frigate Shoals under identified conditions to more effectively target predatory Galapagos sharks. Although not identified and discussed in the PEA, the proposed use of the modified tangle net fishing method is consistent with the overall program parameters identified. As well, since the PEA was completed, nothing has substantially changed in the environment for any resource analyzed. Consequently, this supplemental EA is linked to and tiers from the PEA. This SEA incorporates by reference the PEA, while appropriately examining site, deployment, and equipment specific proposals consistent with the PEA. This SEA is prepared to provide a detailed analysis of site-specific impacts for the gear and deployment methodologies presented.

The overall program of which this action is a part has been evaluated in several Environmental Assessments in support of Monument permit applications and consultations per the Endangered Species Act. These are listed in Section 1.4 of the PEA, and incorporated by reference here.

In addition to the assessments listed in the PEA, the following assessment was conducted.

- **Environmental Assessment for Issuance of Two Conservation and Management Permits...for Conducting Shark Deterrent and Removal Activities in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.**

NMFS received the following permits from the Monument for activities related to the shark predation program:

- **Shark deterrent deployment at FFS 2009, permit number PMNM-2009-002, which covered deployment of electromagnetic Shark Shields, magnets attached to foam floats, recordings of boat and outboard engine noise broadcast from underwater speakers, and a permanently anchored small boat.**
- **Shark deterrent deployment at FFS 2008, permit number PMNM-2008-045, which covered deployment of electromagnetic Shark Shields, magnets attached**

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to foam floats, recordings of boat and outboard engine noise broadcast from underwater speakers, and a permanently anchored small boat.

- **Shark removal at FFS 2007, permit number PMNM-2007-025, which covered monitoring of shark activity and shark removal by various fishing methods, including hand line, harpooning, bottomset, and drumline.**

This SEA includes the following type of actions:

- **Use of a surprise net to catch Galapagos sharks near pupping beaches at Trig Island, FFS.**

1.2 Description of action

The Protected Species Division, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS, Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program (HMSRP) proposes to add a fishing method using a ‘surprise net’ for catching Galapagos sharks to the existing suite of fishing and deterrent methods already being used to decrease or eliminate shark predation on pre-weaned Hawaiian monk seal pups. The action will not increase the total number of sharks to be removed under the existing PEA.

1.3 Need for Action

The overall need for action to decrease shark predation on Hawaiian monk seal pups was stated in part 1.1 of the PEA, and remains unchanged for purposes of the immediate action. Part 1.1 of the PEA is incorporated by reference.

The specific need for this action is to achieve removal of predatory Galapagos sharks in an efficient manner while minimizing harm to marine resources. Fishing methods used through 2008 (all fishing was suspended in 2009) had low catch rates, were time intensive for limited staff, and did not necessarily catch the specific predatory individual immediately after its predatory behavior had occurred. The proposed tangle net fishing methodology was developed as a means to capture harbor and grey seals in Europe, animals that are notoriously wary of human presence and therefore extremely difficult to capture on shore for research. HMSRP anticipates that the method, as modified, will also be successful catching sharks swimming close to shore.

1.4 Goal and Objectives

The overall goal of this component of the Hawaiian monk seal research program remains as stated in part 1.2 of the PEA, namely to reduce or eliminate losses of pre-weaned pups to shark predation in the NWHI. If reached, this goal will contribute to 1) reducing the rate of population decline and 2) increasing the potential for population recovery by raising the probability that more seals reach breeding age.

The primary objective to meet this goal is to:

Decrease total losses of pre-weaned pups to shark predation to 0 to 2 per year or 5% of the annual cohort, whichever is less. Shark incidents on pre-weaned pups average zero cases per year for other monk seal subpopulations in the NWHI, HMSRP believes that a maximum loss of 2 pups or 5% of the annual cohort, whichever is less, is reasonable given the expected asymptotic nature of extinguishing pup predation at FFS by Galapagos sharks.

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The specific goal of the project is to successfully deploy the surprise net and capture Galapagos sharks observed preying on, or attempting to prey on Hawaiian monk seal pups.

1.5 Scope of Analysis

1.5.1 Temporal Scope and Actions Included

This SEA provides the detailed descriptions of an additional method to remove Galapagos sharks, and evaluates potential effects of using the new method. This methodology may be used individually, or in various combinations with methods already in use, which have been described and evaluated the PEA. This methodology included in this SEA will not increase the number of sharks taken, evaluation of which was also included in the PEA.

The PEA has no termination date; and was intended to provide the basis for long-term continuation and potential expansion of existing mitigation and research activities, as well as to provide the foundation to evaluate the effectiveness of actions intended to maintain and improve survival of pre-weaned pups. Similarly, this SEA has no termination date and will remain current, as long as individual projects are conducted as described in Chapter 2 and the actual impacts associated with implementation remain within the range of impacts as identified in Chapter 3. Per NOAA policy, any Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) resulting from this SEA will be reviewed for consistency and appropriateness at least every 5 years.

1.5.2 Permit Requirements

Any action conducted within the land and waters of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (Monument) must be conducted under a permit issued by the Monument. As an agency action, issuance of permits must comply with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other applicable laws. The intent of this SEA is to provide sufficient analysis of informed decision making by NMFS PIFSC, and to provide the foundation for any permits issued by the Monument. The Monument may use the SEA in whole or in part for NEPA compliance in issuing permits (40 CFR 1506.3).

This SEA will also document the analysis and process for compliance with NEPA for considering grants to Joint Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Research (JIMAR) to assist in conducting the work within this program.

Two species listed under the Endangered Species Act (endangered Hawaiian monk seals and threatened green turtles) occur in the action area, and consideration of the effects on these species is required according to Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 U.S.C. 1536(a)(2)). The effects of human presence in the area to conduct all predation reduction activities were considered in a Biological Opinion issued by the NMFS Office of Protected Resources on June 30, 2009. The effects of existing fishing methods to reduce shark predation were considered in an informal consultation with the NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) in May 2008. At that time, PIRO concurred with PIFSC that the activities may affect but were not likely to adversely affect the above listed species. For the proposed action of this SEA, PIFSC will seek PIRO concurrence on a similar determination. No action will occur prior to issuance of this concurrence (with mitigating measures as appropriate).

1.5.3 NEPA Compliance for Implementation of Actions within the Program

Any site-specific and/or project-specific actions that would be added to the program and not specifically covered under this SEA, the PEA, or other NEPA documents, and that would potentially have environmental considerations (adverse impacts) not evaluated in this SEA or the PEA, will need additional appropriate NEPA analysis via additional supplements (40 CFR 1502.9) or a new NEPA analysis.

Any site-specific or project-specific actions not covered in this SEA or another NEPA document and that would not have any additional environmental considerations can be addressed in the research project implementation plan and protocol for the specific project. Possible examples include computer modeling and data analysis.

A categorical exclusion memorandum per NAO216-6 Section 5.05(b) would not be appropriate for any short-term or long-term projects or activities not consistent with this SEA because NAO216-6 Section 5.05c states: “The preparation of an EA or EIS will be required for actions that would otherwise be excluded if they involve a geographic area with unique characteristics, are the subject of public controversy based on potential environmental consequences, have uncertain environmental impacts or unique or unknown risks, establish a precedent or decision in principle about future proposals, may result in cumulatively significant impacts, or may have any adverse effects upon endangered or threatened species or their habitats.”

This program, as currently implemented and as proposed, has many activities conducted within the geographically unique Monument, both on land and in the near offshore area. In addition, some of the efforts are experimental in nature, but necessary to at least try to recover the reproductive potential of the Hawaiian monk seal subpopulations in the NWHI, with a variety of known and uncertain risks. The Hawaiian monk seal is highly endangered, with fewer than 1,200 individual animals remaining, and the population is continuing to decrease for reasons that are known, as well as speculated based on scientific evidence. Therefore, a categorical exclusion would not be appropriate for activities conducted within the current and/or proposed program.

1.5.4 Spatial Scope and Species Included

This SEA includes conducting research and management activities at French Frigate Shoals, Hawaii, which will be the only geographic area considered. More specifically, the activity will occur at Trig, Gin, and/or Little Gin Islands, FFS.

Species considered are the ESA listed Hawaiian monk seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*) and green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), and the three incidental fish species most likely to be included in the net are during deployment: Pacific threadfin (Hawaiian name moi) *Polydactylus sexfilis*; rudderfish (Hawaiian name nenu) *Kyphosus cinerescens*; and mountain bass (Hawaiian name aholehole), *Kuhlia sandvicensis*.

The primary target of the fishing activity, Galapagos shark (*Carcharhinus galapagensis*) was considered in the PEA, and the additional fishing method will not increase the number of Galapagos sharks taken. Therefore, Galapagos sharks will not be considered further in this SEA.

1.6 Scope of Decisions to be Made

The Responsible Program Manager (RPM; the Director of the PIFSC) will use this SEA and associated PEA to make the following decisions:

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1. Might the proposed action of using a surprise net to catch Galapagos sharks near the identified pupping beaches within FFS, as described, have significant impacts requiring analysis in an Environmental Impact Statement?
2. Should the PIFSC use a surprise net among the suite of fishing methods to minimize or eliminate Galapagos shark predation on pre-weaned Hawaiian monk seals in the NWHI in support of Endangered Species Act (ESA) recovery requirements?

This SEA and associated PEA will be used as the basis for PIFSC decisions regarding financial support of the program, as well as components of the program submitted by application for necessary permits from the Monument for the monk seal and shark work evaluated in this SEA. Galapagos sharks are not regulated under either the Marine Mammal Protection Act or ESA, but under the Monument permit. Therefore, this SEA, and associated PEA will provide documentation and analysis to support decisions the Monument must make regarding a permit requested by the program. This SEA and the 2009 PEA may be used, in whole or in part, by the Monument for their decision-making.

1.7 Consistency with Monument Mission and Necessary Findings for Permit Approval

On December 4, 2000, President William Clinton established the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve (Reserve) by Executive Order 13178 (E.O.). Within this order, the Department of Commerce was tasked with managing the Reserve in accordance with a number of principles. The seventh principle included:

The Reserve shall be managed to further restoration and remediation of degraded or injured Reserve resources.

Later, in June 2006, President George W. Bush created the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Monument by Presidential Proclamation (proclamation) under authority granted the president by the Antiquities Act of 1906. Jurisdictional authority for managing the Monument is shared by the Secretary of Commerce, acting through NOAA, and the Secretary of Interior, acting through USFWS. This proclamation did not overturn Executive Order 13178. Also, per the Proclamation, actions taken within the Monument must be permitted by the Monument prior to implementation, based on the impacts evaluated by the action entity and consideration of ten findings identified in the proclamation.

This program meets these mandates (E.O. and proclamation) and their associated principles and findings because the Hawaiian monk seal population endemic to the Hawaiian Archipelago, including the NWHI, has decreased precipitously since the 1950s, and is currently decreasing at more than 4% per year. In support of these mandates, the Monument has helped seek funding to expand the study of Galapagos sharks and its associated ecosystem at FFS and has funded and permitted research on shark tagging conducted by HIMB. In addition, the Monument has provided direct support in FY08 and FY09, which included logistical support through ship time in the NWHI. The Monument has also provided advice over time to ensure that predation studies are consistent with the mandates. The Monument has committed to facilitating the processing and issuance of necessary permits for shark removal and deterrence to protect pre-weaned pups in a timely manner (R .Kosaki PIFSC Workshop II, *pers. comm. November 2008*). Furthermore, HMSRP will attempt to provide additional population data on the Galapagos sharks at FFS if an application for a permit

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for expanded fishing effort is submitted in the future and permission is granted by the Monument (Section 2.2.2).

This SEA and associated PEA fulfills the NEPA requirements for any decision necessary to issue a permit from the Monument at any time regarding any NMFS application that includes actions evaluated within this SEA and the PEA.

1.8 Alternatives Not Considered in Detail

All alternatives not considered in detail were described in Section 1.9 of the PEA, which is incorporated by reference. This SEA does not add any other alternatives not being considered.

2 Affected Environment and Alternatives

Nothing has substantially changed in the environment for any resource analyzed in the PEA since the PEA was completed. Therefore, the affected environment from the PEA is incorporated by reference here. Specifically, this chapter incorporates:

- description of the affected environment;
- description of the PEA's No Action alternative;
- description of the SEA's proposed action alternative.

2.1 Affected Environment

2.1.1 French Frigate Shoals (FFS)

FFS was described in detail in Section 2.1.3. of the PEA, which is incorporated by reference. The action will occur at three specific sites within FFS, Trig Island, Gin Island, and Little Gin Island.

2.1.1.1 Trig Island

Trig Island (Fig. 1) is located just inside the north reef of FFS, about 2.3 miles east of Tern Island. Trig is an unvegetated sand islet that varies somewhat in area and configuration seasonally according to sand movements within the atoll. As of late 2009, it was approximately 360 m long, and varied in width between ~20 m and ~50 m. Most of the island's immediate surroundings comprise a 30-40 m extent of sand or coral rubble bottom at a maximum depth of approximately 5 m. Farther out than 40 m the bottom drops to a depth of ~20 m, with live coral heads separated by sand channels. The exception is the northeast corner of the island, where deep water and live coral heads occur in close proximity to Trig. The island is used for basking and nesting by green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), haulout and pupping by Hawaiian monk seals (*Monachus schauinslandi*), and nesting by up to three seabird species: black-footed albatross (*Phoebastria nigripes*), masked booby (*Sula dactylatra*), and brown noddie (*Anous stolidus*).



Figure 1. Trig Island, French Frigate Shoals (white bar = 100m)

2.1.1.2 Gin Island

Gin Island is located along the inner, southwestern reef of FFS, approximately 10 miles southeast of Tern Island. The sand island measures approximately 150m x 100m, and has been unvegetated for several years. The area immediately surrounding the island varies from shallow sandy bottom, to coral rubble. The island is used for basking and nesting by green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), haulout and pupping by Hawaiian monk seals (*Monachus schauinslandi*), and nesting by three seabird species: black-footed albatross (*Phoebastria nigripes*), masked booby (*Sula dactylatra*), and brown noddy (*Anous stolidus*).

2.1.1.3 Little Gin Island

Little Gin Island is located along the inner, southwestern reef, approximately 10 miles southeast of Tern Island. The sand island is measures approximately 400 m x 75 m and is generally unvegetated, though occasional seedlings of *Boerhavia repens* and *Portulaca lutea* sprout, only to be generally overwashed seasonally. The area immediately surrounding the island varies from shallow sandy bottom, to coral rubble, with a deeper sandy bottom inlet on the west side. The island is used for basking and nesting by green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), haulout and pupping by Hawaiian monk seals (*Monachus schauinslandi*), and nesting by up to three seabird species: black-footed albatross (*Phoebastria nigripes*), masked booby (*Sula dactylatra*), and brown noddy (*Anous stolidus*).

2.1.2 Critical Habitat

The action area includes Hawaiian monk seal critical habitat, the establishment and extent of which were described in Section 2.1.11 of the PEA, which is incorporated by reference. Actions authorized, funded, or carried out by federal agencies that may have an impact on critical habitat must be consulted upon in accordance with section 7 of the ESA, regardless of the presence of Hawaiian monk seals at the time of impacts. Impacts on these areas that may affect primary constituent elements such as prey availability must be considered when analyzing whether habitat may be adversely modified.

2.2 Description of Alternatives

This SEA evaluates the impacts of the proposed action (Alternative 2, Current Program, Adding Surprise Net to Fishing Methods). The other alternative (Alternative 1, No Action, Continuation of Current Program including Expanded Bottomset Methods) will be briefly discussed here, but most of the information and evaluation regarding that alternative will be incorporated by reference from the PEA.

2.2.1 Alternative 1: Description of the Current Program including Shark Removal by Expanded Bottomset Method (No Action Alternative)

Description and evaluation of this alternative was delineated in section 2.2 of the PEA, which is incorporated by reference. This alternative includes methods of shark deterrence (2.2.1.2. and 2.2.1.3. of the PEA), limited shark fishing (2.2.1.4. of PEA), and expanded bottomset fishing (2.2.2.

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of PEA). Under this alternative, existing methods to decrease Galapagos shark predation on monk seal pups would continue, as adapted and modified as necessary. Procedures would continue to include monitoring Galapagos shark activity and behavior, deploying devices to deter presence of Galapagos sharks, removing Galapagos sharks by various fishing techniques, and continually evaluating fishing techniques.

2.2.2 Alternative 2: Continue the Current Program, Adding Shark Removal using a Surprise Net (Proposed Action)

NMFS proposes to continue the actions described in the no action alternative with the addition of surprise net methodology for shark capture. Deployment methods will incorporate measures to mitigate against environmental effects, as stated below in 2.2.2.2 and 3.2.

2.2.2.1 Description of Equipment


The surprise net to be used by PIFSC will be based upon a system developed by scientists at the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), Scottish Oceans Institute, University of Saint Andrews, Scotland (Figure 2). Faced with difficulties capturing animals in some situations and the desire to minimize disturbance, SMRU developed a radio-controlled net deployment apparatus. This technology was created to enable the subtle deployment of tangle-nets in front of animals in shallow nearshore areas, and is used to capture harbor seals and grey seals, which are very wary of human presence and readily flee into the water at human approach. The device is a barrier/tangle net which is compressed into a long, horizontal, submerged tube anchored along the bottom, and deployed in an arc enclosing a prescribed area of shoreline or nearshore waters. The bottom of the net is weighted, and the top of the net is a hose which can be inflated with air and which is attached to portable air cylinders. Inflation of the hose is controlled remotely via solenoid switches and valves between the cylinders and the hose. When the hose is inflated the top of the net rises quickly (and surprisingly...hence the moniker) from the bottom to the surface, trapping the desired animals between the arc of the net and the shore. The target animals will become tangled if they attempt to swim through the net, or if they remain untangled they can be captured by pulling the net in to shore.



Project "Net Surprise"

Moss, Simon E.W. 1; McConnell, Bernie 1; Hall, Ailsa J. 1; Hubert, Phillippe 2
 (1) Sea Mammal Research Unit, Scottish Oceans Institute, University of St. Andrews, Scotland.
 (2) Prove Systems, Tayport.

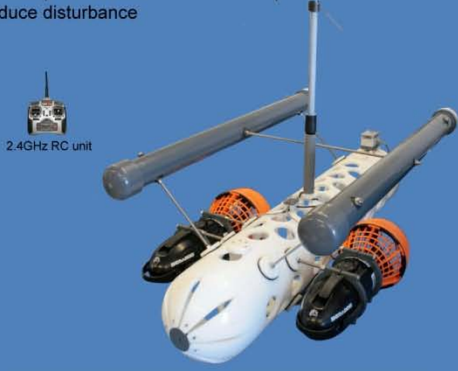
Both passive and active techniques have been developed for at-sea live capture of seals for research purposes. Passive tangle-netting can be effective, chance of success, although unpredictable, increases with increasing soak time, but so does risk of drowning. Active tangle-netting can be very successful, capturing more than one animal at a time. However, active techniques pose risks to animals and equipment. Animals can also become wary of capture boats, and in areas where they have been persecuted are already very wary. More importantly unsuccessful capture attempts causes disturbance with no gain. Faced with difficulties capturing animals in some situations and the desire to minimize disturbance we have developed a small, radio-controlled semi-submersible net deployment vehicle to enable the subtle deployment of tangle-nets in front of animals on haulout. Animals are then disturbed from haulout into the waiting net. The "Net Surprise" consists of a central 350mm diameter deployment tube on which are mounted two underwater succors that provide thrust. Buoyancy is provided by two 110mm diameter PVC tubes from which the deployment tube hangs and on which the receiver is mounted. Using standard radio control equipment the "Net Surprise" can be piloted from range (currently tested to ~500m) to pass a haulout and deploy a tangle-net. Future refinements will include the incorporation of GPS and depth sounder to enable the device to follow either a predetermined track and/or depth contour to a haulout and automatically deploy the net. These refinements will enable the device to run entirely below the surface with only a small antenna projecting above the water.



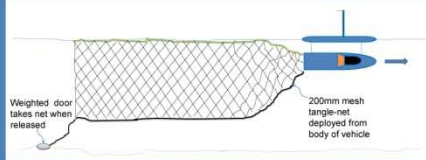
STAGE 1

Radio-controlled semi-submersible net deployment vehicle

- Approach haulouts undetected
- Subtle net deployment
- Catch representative of haul out composition
- Reduce disturbance



2.4GHz RC unit

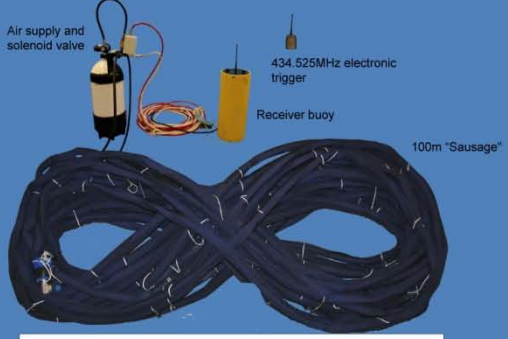


Weighted door takes net when released
200mm mesh tangle-net deployed from body of vehicle

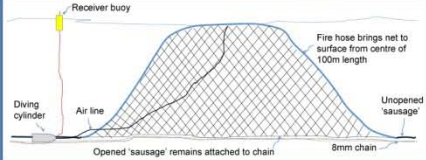
STAGE 2

Remotely triggered inflatable tangle-net

- Redevelopment of Norwegian (Seal Catching Sausage)
- Deploy around haulout
- Allow animals to habituate to the system
- Trigger from range
- Approach once animals are entangled
- Allows targeting of individuals



Air supply and solenoid valve
434.525MHz electronic trigger
Receiver buoy
100m "Sausage"



Receiver buoy
Diving cylinder
Air line
Fire hose brings net to surface from centre of 100m length
Unopened 'sausage'
Opened 'sausage' remains attached to chain
8mm chain

Figure 2. Prototype Surprise Net (Stage 2 Only)

The PIFSC version of the surprise net consists of a central 350mm diameter deployment canvas or heavy mesh tube containing the tangle net. The deployment tube is attached to a heavy (8mm) anchor chain of equal length to the tube, and the ends may be attached to Danforth anchors on the shore to increase stability. The tube is held together longitudinally by velcro. Each tube (and therefore each surprise net) is 30 m long (note, much shorter than the 100m depicted in Fig 2). The tangle net (folded within the tube) is constructed of nylon, multifilament fiber (4" diameter stretch mesh), suspended from a 2" diameter inflatable hose. Each end of the hose is attached to a diving cylinder (also encased in the deployment tube) via air line and a regulator and pressure relief valve. The diving cylinder supplies air to provide thrust and quick deployment of the tangle net. Receivers with small antennae are connected to the diving cylinders via solenoid valves, and can be remotely triggered from the beach using standard radio equipment. The height of the net will be 5 m from bottom chain to surface float line. Precise location of the receiver is to be determined, either attached to a floating buoy or on the shore.

The PIFSC version will not include a remote-controlled deployment vehicle (Stage 1 in Fig. 2); the net will be deployed manually.

2.2.2.2 Deployment methods

The deployment tube will be used in discrete areas of the nearshore habitat in islet sectors where sharks have been observed to patrol or pursue pups. The tube will be laid by hand or via small boat in a semi-circle configuration, arcing out approximately 5-10m from the shoreline, with each end on shore. Up to two tubes may be deployed at once. The duration of deployment at any one location will vary according to the amount and locations of observed predatory shark activity, but will not exceed 72 continuous hours. At times when no personnel are present at the deployment site, all valves will be shut to prevent accidental deployment. The tube will be removed from the water if inclement weather and accompanying higher currents and/or wave surge is forecast.

Specific sites of deployment will vary according to the location of mother/pup seal pairs, which will determine the vicinity in which predatory sharks are patrolling. At Trig Island, based on observed predatory events in past years, we anticipate most activity to be at the southeast area of the island (Fig. 3).



Figure 1. Trig Island Showing Typical Surprise Net Deployment Site (Red Dots Inscribe 30m Arc of Net)

Deployment at Gin Island will most likely be on the west or northwest side of the island.
Deployment at Little Gin will likely occur on the west side of the island

All deployments will occur on sandy bottom or coral rubble bottom. No living coral will be within the arc of the net. If mother/pup pairs (and patrolling sharks) are adjacent to deep water or living

coral areas, we will deploy the net at the sandy/coral rubble area in closest proximity to the mother/pup pair. Because the height of the net will be 5 m all deployment will be in water no deeper than 5 m.

2.2.2.3 Triggering Net and Shark Capture

The surprise net will be triggered by personnel on shore only when a Galapagos shark which has exhibited predatory behavior is within the arc of the net. Predatory behavior has been defined in Appendix 6 of the PEA, incorporated by reference here. Moreover, the net will not be triggered if any seals or turtles are within the arc of the net, either in the water or on shore. If the net surrounds a shark, or if the shark becomes entangled, the net will be pulled in to shore from the ends manually by field personnel. The shark will be euthanized with a 0.44 caliber bang stick. Post catch procedures will follow those described in 2.2.2.6. of the PEA, incorporated by reference here.

2.2.3 Native Hawaiian Practices and Participation

Hawaiian cultural protocols, based on practitioner input, will be included in all shark removal efforts. NMFS has conducted numerous group and individual meetings with Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners and advisors to incorporate appropriate actions into proposed shark fishing activities and to ensure that shark removal and disposal of remains are in keeping with Hawaiian cultural practices. Ongoing consultation with Hawaiian practitioners will advise fishing personnel on traditional fishing techniques, along with the feasibility for an on-site practitioner to conduct activities, including collection of shark parts for cultural use remains to be determined. If a Hawaiian practitioner is on site, his/her observational activities related to shark removal efforts and monk seal population assessment will be in accordance with the guidelines outlined in existing permits from NMFS and the Monument. NMFS has also added a native Hawaiian as a member of the Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team to improve cultural components of all Hawaiian monk seal recovery efforts.

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The following impacts apply to the alternatives described in Chapter 2. The no action alternative is the current program as described and analyzed in the June, 2009 Environmental Assessment on the Effects of NOAA Fisheries Permitted Scientific Research and Enhancement Activities on the Endangered Hawaiian Monk Seal (Permit No. 10137) and further described in Chapter 2 of the PEA. The proposed action (Alternative 2) is expanding this program to include using a surprise net among the fishing methods.

3.1 Effects of Alternative 1 (No Action)

The potential effects of the no action alternative, namely continuing the existing program of shark deterrence, shark fishing with existing methods, and expanded bottomset fishing, were described in detail in Section 3 of the PEA, which is incorporated by reference. The effects of the no action alternative may in fact be diminished by the proposed action, if the new fishing method proves more efficient in catching sharks than the existing methods.

3.2 Effects of Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)

3.2.1 Potential for Disturbance to Sea Turtles and Monk Seals

The proposed action may result in disturbance to basking sea turtles and monk seals beyond that which would normally occur from existing research and enhancement activities. Commotion on beaches may occur during net retrieval and shark capture, and these activities are likely to be in proximity to mother/pup pairs. Such disturbances would be temporary, and would be documented on data forms identically to disturbances from other activities.

3.2.2 Potential for Entanglement of Sea Turtles and Monk Seals

Very little potential exists that sea turtles or monk seals will be inadvertently entangled by the surprise net. The surprise net will not be triggered if monk seals or sea turtles are on shore or in the water within the arc of the net. Seals and turtles in the water will be readily visible because of water clarity, so no potential entanglement risk exists from hidden or unseen seals or turtles. Some potential exists that seals or turtles will investigate the net once it is triggered, particularly if commotion ensues from a shark capture. Any such animals will be hazed away by field personnel.

The untriggered surprise net will not present any entanglement risk. The deployment tube containing the untriggered net will be thick and relatively inflexible, incapable of twisting into any potentially entangling loops. The area of deployment will be free of wave surge under normal conditions, and the net will be removed if inclement weather is forecast. Air cylinder valves will be closed at times when the net is unattended, preventing accidental deployment.

3.2.3 Potential for Bycatch of Other Fish

The three species of fish most frequently observed in shallow water over sandy bottom areas at FFS, and therefore with the highest likelihood of being within the arc of a triggered surprise net, are: Pacific threadfin (Hawaiian name moi) *Polydactylus sexfilis*; rudderfish (Hawaiian name nenu) *Kyphosus cinerescens*; and mountain bass (Hawaiian name aholehole), *Kuhlia sandvicensis*. Any fish caught by the net will be released by hand as soon as is practicable following capture of the

shark, or immediately if no shark is captured. Most fish caught will be released alive, though some injuries or deaths may result from capture. Some aholehole will be smaller than the 4" mesh size and will swim through the net.

3.2.4 Potential for Entanglement of Turtles or Monk Seals

If receivers are placed on buoyed lines (as opposed to onshore), the lines will include shielding with segments of PVC pipe or modification of the shape of the float buoy to add a rubber, tapered extension, a recent development to prevent cetacean and pinniped entanglement in float buoys. In the highly unlikely event of an entanglement or injury of a monk seal or green turtle would result in immediate cessation of fishing and a review of the methodology to determine any needed adaptations. No entanglement is expected based on known experience with other bottomset gear. The bottomset data includes the 1999 bottomset commercial fishing work conducted at the outer boundary of FFS. That fishery involved 840 hooks set along a bottomline, with no entanglements.

3.2.5 Potential Effects on Benthic Fauna

The triggered net will be retrieved by pulling it in to the beach from either end. During this process, the chain holding down the bottom of the net will drag through the sandy or coral rubble bottom. If the 30 m net were deployed in a perfectly semicircular arc from shore, each net retrieval would drag the chain through approximately 150 square meters of benthic habitat (sand or coral rubble). In practice, the arc of the net is likely to be a segment of a larger circle, which will incorporate less area of bottom. This action could result in injury or death to benthic organisms which are unable to avoid the chain. The most visible such organisms at FFS are sea cucumbers (*Holothuria sp.*). The footprint covered by the retrieval is very small relative to the entire habitat occupied by *Holothuria* within FFS, and the effect on these species will be negligible.

3.2.6 Potential Effects to Endangered Birds and Seabirds

No endangered birds populate FFS. Seabirds nesting in the affected environment are listed in 2.1 of this SEA. The proposed action may disturb some non-nesting birds on the beach in the vicinity of net retrieval. The proposed action will not affect any nesting seabirds, as all nests are further inland on the islands than the immediate shore.

3.2.7 Potential Effects to Coral Reefs/Benthic Habitat

The proposed action will affect the benthic habitat where the net is deployed. Retrieving the net, whether empty or having caught a shark will include dragging a chain, as described in 3.2.5. above. The net will be deployed only over sandy or coral rubble shallow bottom, habitat which is exposed to wave surge and therefore is dynamic and in fairly constant movement. The only potential effects to live coral would result if the undeployed net were to be shifted by storm surge or excessive currents. Each end of the undeployed net will be anchored firmly on shore, so the configuration of any shifting would be constrained by the fixed ends of the 30 m tube, on shore (i.e. very limited scope available for lateral shifting/dragging). The fixed shore anchors will also be sufficiently secure to prevent a Galapagos shark from dragging the net away from its location. In the unlikely event that the shore anchors were dragged by a captive shark, the possibility exists that the chain anchoring the bottom of the net could become fouled on living coral or a section of reef above the sandy bottom. The area of damage to living coral would be limited to the fouling site, as a Galapagos shark is not strong enough to drag a fouled, weighted, 30m net through a living coral

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substrate. As stated in 2.2.2.2. above, we will minimize these potential effects by removing the deployment tube if inclement weather is imminent. Upon first deployment into a new area, we will closely monitor the deployment tube to ensure it is not moving under normal conditions.

3.2.8 Archaeological and Cultural Resources

The proposed action would not affect archaeological or cultural resources, which do not exist at FFS.

3.2.9 Potential to Spread Invasive Species

The proposed action would not create any additional movement to or from the action site. All potential to spread terrestrial invasive species was documented in 3.10 of the PEA, which is incorporated by reference. Because the surprise net will be tested on Oahu, the potential exists for transport of invasive marine species from the MHI to the NWHI. PIFSC will follow disinfectant protocols developed by the Monument for quarantine of diving gear transported into the Monument, as well as transported among different sites within the Monument. Specifically, between testing in the MHI and transport to FFS, the surprise net will be soaked in commercial grade ammonia, soaked in fresh water, and dried.

3.3 Cumulative Effects

The cumulative effects and incremental impacts of HMSRP research and enhancement activities were addressed in 3.11 of the PEA, which is incorporated by reference. The addition of the surprise net method would not change the character of the research or enhancement activities considered in the PEA. However, the surprise nets have been included because they offer a potentially more effective means to remove those specific Galapagos sharks that show predatory behavior towards pre-weaned Hawaiian monk seals. Because surprise nets are deployed around specific targets, the indirect impacts to aquatic resources (e.g., non-predatory Galapagos sharks, turtles) will likely be reduced relative to methods discussed in the PEA. If the surprise nets prove to be a more effective means to reduce predation of pre-weaned Hawaiian monk seals, then there would likely be a small beneficial effect on their population. The use of surprise nets may result in increased adverse impacts to benthic organisms as the associated bottom chain is dragged during retrieval. The substrate within these areas is primarily less sensitive sand and coral rubble. These direct impacts would be short-term, localized to the near-shore area, and have a minimal impact on aquatic resources.

Overall, the proposed action will involve deployment of no more than two surprise nets at any one time. The surprise nets would temporarily impact an area up to approximately 150 square meters. Surprise net deployment would be limited to a 72 hours period. These activities would occur episodically over a two-year period. Surprise nets would be deployed at three sites: Trig, Gin, and Little Gin Islands. These three islands represent a small fraction of shallow water habitat within the 938-square-kilometer area of FFS.

FFS is located within the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Monument and is rarely visited by humans. Past activities in the area include limited amounts of fishing, infrequent tourism, and as a refueling stop for United States military planes during World War II. Because the atoll is open, it is susceptible to marine debris (e.g., derelict fishing gear, plastic bottles) that may wash onto or through area. Presently the area is subject to research and management activities by federal

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resource agencies. Small-scale research and management activities will continue in FFS in the future.

The use of surprise nets during the HMSRP research and enhancement activities will have a less than significant impact on the environment because they will be used on a small scale, for a short duration, and infrequently over the two-year period. Cumulative impacts would be minimized and avoided because FFS is a federally protected area that restricts access.

4 List of Preparers

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Mr. Henderson is a Fishery Biologist with the Protected Species Division of PIFSC. He has been part of the Hawaiian monk seal research program for 28 years, and has extensive experience working with numerous Federal, State, and non-government agencies in matters related to permit requirements inherent to working with an endangered species in areas under several jurisdictions. He has conducted field assessments of seals in all NWHI locations, and has prepared previous environmental assessments compliant with the National Environmental Policy Act with the NMFS Office of Protected Resources.

Finding of No Significant Impact for the Use of ‘Surprise Net’ Technology to Decrease or Eliminate Predation of Pre-weaned Hawaiian Monk Seal Pups by Sharks in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program, Honolulu, Hawaii

National Marine Fisheries Service

May 2010

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Administrative Order 216-6 (NAO 216-6) (May 20, 1999) contains criteria for determining the significance of the impacts of a proposed action. In addition, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 C.F.R. 1508.27 state that the significance of an action should be analyzed both in terms of “context” and “intensity.” Each criterion listed below is relevant in making a finding of no significant impact and has been considered individually, as well as in combination with the others. The significance of this action is analyzed based on the NAO 216-6 criteria and CEQ’s context and intensity criteria. These include:

1) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to cause substantial damage to the ocean and coastal habitats and/or essential fish habitat as defined under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and identified in Fishery Management Plans (FMPs)?

Response: No. The surprise net will be deployed in a very limited area (i.e., three islets) at French Frigate Shoals. Moreover, because the study site is within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, strict measures will be taken to eliminate damage to coral and habitat. Fishing gear will be deployed only over sandy bottom substrate, which will be minimally impacted.

2) Can the proposed action be expected to have a substantial impact on biodiversity and/or ecosystem function within the affected area (e.g., benthic productivity, predator-prey relationships, etc.)?

Response: No. Although using the surprise net will result in more efficient capture of Galapagos sharks preying on Hawaiian monk seal pups, the sharks’ predatory behavior on nursing pups is atypical, having been observed at only one site (French Frigate Shoals), despite monitoring of shark and monk seal behaviors at all other NWHI locations. Galapagos sharks’ typical prey includes demersal fishes and cephalopods. Moreover, data indicate that only a small subset of the Galapagos shark population at FFS is preying on seal pups, and removal efforts will be targeted at these individuals. The proposed activities will therefore have minimal impact on overall Galapagos shark predator-prey relationships.

The activity will also help ensure the continued existence of the FFS subpopulation of Hawaiian monk seals, a critical component of the ecosystem. In 2008, 12 nursing pups died or disappeared (30%) out of 41 births at FFS, with eight of the losses due to Galapagos sharks. This level of mortality cannot be sustained by the seal subpopulation at FFS, where the total subpopulation and annual pup production are projected to continue declining for the foreseeable future due to a consistently unbalanced age structure.

3) Can the proposed action be reasonably expected to have a substantial adverse impact on public health or safety?

Response: No. The surprise net will be deployed in remote areas which are not accessible to the public and will be monitored at all times, so there is no chance that any of the materials could be transported into public areas. The research staff will implement appropriate safety measures and take the necessary precautions to minimize risks while deploying the surprise nets.

4) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to adversely affect endangered or threatened species, their critical habitat, marine mammals, or other non-target species?

Response: No. Potential effects of the surprise net on endangered or threatened species and marine mammals have been evaluated and will cause no adverse impact. Mitigation measures will be in place during all activities. Namely, the surprise net will not be deployed if such species (e.g., Hawaiian monk seals, green turtles), are within the arc of the net, either in the water or on the beach. If a protected species should become entangled, use of the surprise net will be terminated until revised methods are developed.

The surprise net will be deployed only when Galapagos sharks are within the arc inscribed by the net, and will therefore not be actively fishing at other times. The area inscribed by the arc of the net is small ($<150 \text{ m}^2$), and will have very limited bycatch of the few fish species which occur in shallow water ($<5\text{m}$) habitat over sandy bottoms. The mesh size of the net will be large enough to allow small fish to escape. Finally, the surprise net will be retrieved as soon as it is deployed, and any non-target species remaining in the net will be expeditiously released to prevent mortality. The proposed action will have a less than significant effect on protected species. No ecosystem-level effects due to this research are anticipated because the project affects a small sample size of individuals in a localized region, therefore minimizing potential effects on a greater geographic scale.

5) Are significant social or economic impacts interrelated with natural or physical environmental effects?

Response: No. Use of the surprise net is a short-term field activity that would have no impact on social or economic activities in the affected areas.

6) Are the effects on the quality of the human environment likely to be highly controversial?

Response: No. The proposed activity involves small-scale, short-term gear deployment in restricted, remote areas, and will have a minimal effect on the quality of the human environment. The removal of any animal may be considered controversial by certain groups that oppose human intervention to benefit one species over another. Nonetheless, the small beneficial effect of controlling this known source of monk seal pup mortality exceeds the minor controversy of shark removal. The Galapagos shark population in the action area is robust, while the Hawaiian monk seal is at risk of extinction.

7) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to result in substantial impacts to unique areas, such as historic or cultural resources, park land, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas?

Response: No. The proposed activity will occur within a unique area, the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, and is therefore subject to strict measures and conditions of the Monument permitting process. Adhering to these conditions will avoid substantial impacts to the resource.

8) Are the effects on the human environment likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks?

Response: No. The surprise net has been developed and used successfully to capture marine mammals. The PIFSC adaptation and modification of the net to capture sharks presents few additional risks. PIFSC is taking action to mitigate these potential risks by developing protocols to avoid unexpected outcomes (i.e., entanglement of non-target species including humans, injury risk related to capturing shark, entanglement on coral, destruction of habitat). Moreover, deployment of the net will be tested in controlled environs without the presence of sharks prior to any use in the NWHI and mitigation activities will be further refined after the tests.

9) Is the proposed action related to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant impacts?

Response: No. The use of surprise nets is a short-term field activity, minimally affecting existing robust populations of elasmobranchs in the affected geographic areas. Non-target species, including both protected species and other non-target marine organisms, are not anticipated to be affected, therefore avoiding cumulatively significant impacts.

10) Is the proposed action likely to adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources?

Response: No. The proposed activity will occur at great distance from any districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Similarly, no cultural or historical resources are present at the study site. The procedures will not cause loss or destruction of scientific resources.

11) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to result in the introduction or spread of a nonindigenous species?

Response: No. The proposed activity is not expected to result in the introduction or spread of a nonindigenous species. The species involved in the proposed research activities are native to the study regions. Deployment and transfer of both equipment and personnel will be bound by strict quarantine procedures which are delineated as part of the Monument permitting process, to prevent introduction of both terrestrial and marine species. Such procedures have been standard practice for the Protected Species Division for many years within the Monument, as well as within USFWS Refuges prior to creation of the Monument.

12) Is the proposed action likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration?

Response: No. The purpose of the activity is to use more efficient and selective procedures to reduce or eliminate a localized, unique phenomenon. A suite of contingencies has been developed which must be met in order to continue the activity, as well as circumstances which would lead to cessation of predation control measures. The latter circumstances include evidence that shark predation on seal pups were to continue despite deterrent or removal efforts. The research will have little effect on future decisions regarding large-scale predator removal because large-scale predator removal has already been considered and rejected.

13) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment?

Response: No. The proposed activity complies with applicable Federal and state environmental regulations, including applicable permit requirements. Monument permits authorizing the activity will be in place before any research is conducted.

14) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to result in cumulative adverse effects that could have a substantial effect on the target species or non-target species?

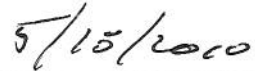
Response: No. This research involves short-term, localized, and highly targeted field activities. These activities would result in minimal impacts on existing robust populations of elasmobranchs in the affected geographic areas. Non-target species, including both protected species and other non-target marine organisms, are not anticipated to be affected. The proposed action would have less than significant impacts both individually and cumulatively on target and non-target species.

DETERMINATION

In view of the information presented in this document and the analysis contained in the supporting Supplemental Environmental Assessment of the Program for Decreasing or Eliminating Predation of Pre-weaned Hawaiian Monk Seal Pups by Galapagos Sharks in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, conducted by Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, Hawaiian Monk Seal Research Program, Honolulu, Hawaii, it is hereby determined that such research will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment as described above and in the supporting Supplemental Environmental Assessment. In addition, all beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action have been addressed to reach the conclusion of no significant impacts. Accordingly, preparation of an EIS for this action is not necessary.



Samuel G. Pooley, Ph.D.
Director, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
Responsible Program Manager



Date