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

APR 30 2012

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 for Issuance of Scientific Research Permit No. 14118 for Cetacean Research in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans

LOCATION: Atlantic and Pacific Oceans

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes to issue Scientific Research Permit No. 14118 to authorize harassment of ESA-listed humpback, fin, and sei whales and non-listed Eastern gray, minke, and short- and long-finned pilot whales. Harassment would result from close vessel approach for behavioral observations, photo-identification, tagging, tracking and monitoring, photography and video both above and under water, collection of sloughed skin, and passive acoustic monitoring. Multiple research objectives would be addressed using data from scientific instruments (tags) attached to whales, including: (1) long-term movement and habitat use studies using satellite/GPS/depth tags, (2) medium-term acoustic studies using an audio recording package to examine transmitted and received sound, and (3) extended fine-scale behavioral ecology studies using multi-sensor data recording packages. Impacts from these activities would be short-term and minimal to individual animals and negligible to the species. A biological opinion concluded that the proposed action would not likely jeopardize the continued existence of the species and would not likely destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat. The permit would be valid for five years.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL:

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Acting Director, Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
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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 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

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