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

MAY 15 2013

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 The Issuance of Scientific Research Permits for Research on Humpback Whales and Other Cetaceans

LOCATION: Pacific waters off Hawaii

SUMMARY: The proposed action is the amendment of three scientific research permits to authorize incidental harassment and vessel surveys for behavioral observations, photo-identification, underwater photography and videography of Insular Hawaiian false killer whales *(Pseudorca crassidens) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)*. The permit amendments are necessary because the existing permits include authorization under the MMPA to take false killer whales in Pacific waters off Hawaii. Insular Hawaiian false killer whales were listed as endangered under the ESA in November 2012; therefore, the permit holders now require authorization under the ESA to take Insular Hawaiian false killer whales. Issuance of the original permits, which authorize aerial surveys, vessel surveys for behavioral observations, photo-identification, underwater photography and videography, collection of sloughed skin and feces, sampling whale blows, passive acoustic recordings, export and re-import of parts, tags attached by suction cup or by implanting darts, barbs, or a portion of the tag into the skin and blubber, biopsy sample collection, and acoustic playbacks on humpback whales and other cetacean species, was analyzed in an Environmental Assessment completed in 2010. Impacts from these activities would continue to 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 permits would be valid through the expiration dates of the original permits. All three permits expire July 31, 2015.

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RESPONSIBLE
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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