Dated: January 9, 2001.

Gwellnar Banks,

Management Analyst, Office of the Chief Information Officer.

[FR Doc. 01–1374 Filed 1–16–01; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–JT–S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 010901C]

Marine Mammals: Draft Environmental Assessment on Allocating Gray Whales to the Makah Tribe for the years 2001 and 2002

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of availability and request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces the availability of a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) that examines the environmental consequences of issuing the International Whaling Commission (IWC) quota for gray whales to the Makah Tribe for the years 2001 and 2002. NMFS has not identified a preferred alternative in this draft EA and is soliciting comments on the draft EA. The Draft EA considers four alternatives regarding the issuance of the IWC quota to the Makah Tribe.

DATES: Comments on the EA must be received by February 16, 2001. A public hearing on this draft EA will be held in Seattle, WA on Thursday, February 1, 2001, at 6:00 p.m. The public hearing will be held at the Sand Point Magnuson Park Auditorium, 74th Street Entrance, 7400 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, Washington.

ADDRESSES: Comments on the draft EA should be addressed to Cathy E. Campbell, NOAA/NMFS, Office of Protected Resources, 13th Floor, 1315 East-West Hwy, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Mark the outside of the envelope with ''Comments on Makah EA.'' Comments received over the Internet or by electronic mail will not be accepted. Copies of the EA and directions to the public hearing may be obtained over the internet at http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot—res/prot—res.html under ''New Arrivals''.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Cathy Campbell, 301–713–2322.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Prior to the 1997 Annual International Whaling Commission (IWC) Meeting, NMFS formally analyzed the environmental impacts of a decision to support or not support whaling, and to determine whether an annual subsistence quota of up to five Eastern Pacific gray whales would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. A draft EA was distributed for public comment on August 22, 1997. After reviewing and addressing the comments received, NMFS issued a final EA and Finding of No Significant Impact on October 17, 1997.

At its 1997 annual meeting, the IWC approved a quota of 620 gray whales for an aboriginal subsistence harvest during the years 1998 through 2002. The basis for the quota was a joint request by the Russian Federation (for a total of 600 whales) and the United States (for a total of 20 whales). In 1998 and 1999, NOAA granted an allocation of up to five whales a year to the Makah Indian Tribe, whose subsistence and ceremonial needs had been the foundation of the U.S. request to the IWC.

U.S. Congressman Jack Metcalf, Breach Marine Protection, and several other plaintiffs brought a lawsuit, *Metcalf* v. *Daley*, in October 1997, alleging that the U.S. Government had violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Whaling Convention Act, and other statutes. In September 1998, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington ruled in favor of the U.S. Government on all issues.

On June 9, 2000, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned one aspect of that decision, ruling that the 1997 EA should have been completed before the U.S. and the Makah Tribe entered into a cooperative agreement. That agreement had provided that, if the Tribe prepared an adequate needs statement documenting a cultural and subsistence need to harvest gray whales, NOAA would request a quota of gray whales from the IWC. Two judges on a three-judge panel held that the timing of the EA, which was completed after the 1996 agreement was signed and before the 1997 annual meeting of the IWC, may have predisposed the preparers to find that the whaling proposal would not significantly affect the environment. The Court ordered NOAA to set aside that finding and comply with NEPA under circumstances that would ensure an objective evaluation of the environmental consequences of the gray whale harvest.

Following the Court action, NOAA rescinded its cooperative agreement with the Makah Tribe on August 11, 2000. NOAA subsequently set the gray whale quota for 2000 at zero (65 FR 75186, December 1, 2000), pending completion of its NEPA analysis.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that federal agencies conduct an environmental analysis of their actions to determine if the actions may affect the environment. Accordingly, NMFS prepared a draft EA that explores the environmental consequences of four alternatives: (1) Granting the Makah Tribe the IWC quota with restrictions to target the hunt on migrating whales (similar to the 1999 regime); (2) Granting the Makah Tribe the IWC quota with restrictions that would allow a limited hunt on the gray whale summer feeding aggregation; (3) Granting the Makah Tribe the IWC quota without time-area restrictions; and (4) (No Action) - not granting the Makah Tribe the IWC quota.

The draft EA was prepared in accordance with NEPA and implementing regulations at 40 CFR parts 1500 through 1508 and NOAA guidelines concerning implementation of NEPA found in NOAA Administrative Order 216–6.

NMFS is soliciting public comments on this draft EA. Oral and written comments may be presented at the public hearing [see **DATES** and **ADDRESSES**]. Written comments on the draft EA may also be sent to the previously listed address by February 16, 2001. Further details or a copy of the EA can be obtained from the internet address above [see **ADDRESSES**].

Special Accommodations

The public hearing will be physically accessible to those with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other aids should be directed to C. Campbell at least 10 days prior to the hearing date (see **ADDRESSES**).

Dated: January 10, 2001.

Wanda L. Cain,

Acting Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 01–1354 Filed 1–11–01; 3:33 pm]

BILLING CODE: 3510–22–S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 120400B]

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic; Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS); request for comments.

SUMMARY: The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) intends to prepare a DEIS to assess the impacts on the natural and human environment of the dolphin and wahoo fishery and of the management measures proposed for this fishery under the draft Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. The purpose of this notice is to solicit public comments on the scope of the issues to be addressed in the DEIS.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on the scope of the DEIS and requests for additional information on the management measures proposed for the management of dolphin and wahoo in the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico should be sent to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, One Southpark Circle, Suite 306, Charleston, SC 29407-4699; phone: 843-571-4366; fax: 843-769-4520.

DATES: Written comments on the scope of the issues to be addressed by the DEIS should be received by the Council by February 16, 2001.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kim Iverson, 843-571-4366, or Steve Branstetter, 727-570-5305.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The South Atlantic Council is jointly preparing with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf of Mexico Council) and the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Caribbean Council) a draft Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico (FMP) The New England Fishery Management Council and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council are also cooperating in the FMP preparation.

The South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Carribean Councils intend that the FMP take a precautionary approach in conserving the dolphin and wahoo fishery resources throughout their range in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea. The FMP would have management objectives for the achievement of optimum yield from the dolphin and wahoo resources and the maintenance of current allocations among user groups. A draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) will be integrated into the draft FMP document.

The DEIS will describe the FMP's proposed management measures and their reasonable alternatives and will assess the environmental impacts of these proposed and alternative measures. Based on considerable previous public input (see reference below to public hearings held to date on a preliminary draft of the FMP/DEIS), the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Councils have already identified a number of proposed FMP measures and their alternatives. The proposed management units for dolphin and wahoo would be defined as the populations of each species throughout their full management range in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean EEZ. Alternative management units considered will include the establishment of three separate units for each species based on each Council's geographical area of jurisdiction. The DEIS will assess the environmental impacts of the FMP's considered options for requiring dealer, vessel, and operator permits to participate in the fishery as well as the effects of any qualifying criteria, such as prior levels of participation in the fishery, for obtaining and maintaining permits. The DEIS will also evaluate the environmental impacts of the FMP's considered alternatives for reporting requirements. The DEIS will assess the impacts of the FMP's proposed and alternative biologically acceptable values, based on either biomass or fishing mortality rates, that define maximum sustainable yield, optimum yield, and overfishing and overfished conditions. The FMP and DEIS will identify and describe essential fish habitat (EFH) and EFH Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH HAPCs) for dolphin and wahoo. The DEIS will assess the environmental impacts associated with the proposed and alternative EFH and EFH HAPCs; EFH/EFH HAPCs alternatives considered may include specific locales that are important to the continued health of the dolphin and wahoo stocks or areas of importance to a critical life stage of these species.

The FMP would establish a framework procedure allowing the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Councils to recommend new management measures and adjustments for existing measures, within specified limits, that could be approved and implemented (under the framework procedure) without having to amend the FMP. Also, the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Councils intend that the FMP provide each Council with the authority to recommend independently the establishment of harvesting restrictions for its respective area of jurisdiction. Such area-specific measures generally would be proposed, approved, and implemented under the FMP's framework procedure. The environmental impacts of measures proposed later under the framework procedure would be assessed at the time of proposal.

To maintain healthy stocks of both dolphin and wahoo in the Atlantic, the South Atlantic Council intends that the FMP initially propose commercial trip limits, recreational bag and boat limits, minimum size limits, and allowable gears for the dolphin and wahoo fishery within its area of the EEZ. The Gulf of Mexico Council is considering several measures that would apply only to the Gulf of Mexico EEZ; these include establishment of specific dates for the fishing year and prohibition of the sale of recreationally caught fish. The DEIS will assess the environmental impacts of all of the FMP's proposed area-specific measures and their considered alternatives.

The DEIS will evaluate the impacts of the FMP's proposed allocation of the majority of the catch to the recreational sector. This allocation is intended to preserve the historical contribution of the recreational sector to the total fishery. To ensure economic stability for the established commercial fishery, the FMP would propose a restriction on or a prohibition of the sale of fish caught in the recreational fishery.

Based on input received during 17 public hearings held to date on a preliminary draft of the FMP/DEIS, the South Atlantic Council intends to prepare a revised draft FMP and to finalize the DEIS covering its environmental impacts. Because of the previous considerable opportunities for public input, the South Atlantic Council has scheduled no specific scoping meetings for the DEIS. However, the South Atlantic Council is requesting written comments on the scope of the issues to be addressed in the DEIS.

Once the South Atlantic Council completes the DEIS, it will submit it to NMFS for filing with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). EPA will publish in the **Federal Register** a notice of availability of the DEIS for public comment. This procedure is pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 40 CFR Parts 1500–1508) and to NOAA's Administrative Order 216-6 regarding NOAA's compliance with NEPA.

The South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Fishery Management

Councils intend to consider public comments received on the DEIS before adopting final management measures for a final FMP. The South Atlantic Council intends to prepare a final environmental impact statement (FEIS) in support of the final FMP. The three Councils would then submit the final FMP/FEIS to NMFS for Secretarial review, approval, and implementation under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. During Secretarial review, NMFS will file the FEIS with EPA for announcement of a final comment period on the FEIS (again, through publication of a notice in the **Federal Register**). This comment period will be concurrent with the Secretarial review period, during which NMFS will invite public comment on the final FMP and proposed implementing regulations (Secretarial review comment periods are announced through publication in the **Federal Register**). NMFS will consider all public comment received during the Secretarial review period, whether on the FMP, FEIS, or proposed regulations, prior to taking final agency action to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the FMP.

Copies of the draft FMP may be obtained by contacting Kim Iverson at the Council (see **ADDRESSES**).

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: January 10, 2001.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 01–1378 Filed 1–16–01; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Docket No. 000202023-1001-02; I.D. No.110200C]

RIN 0648-ZA78

Announcement of Funding Opportunity to Submit Proposals for the Coastal Ecosystem Research Project in the Northern Gulf of Mexico

AGENCY: Center for Sponsored Coastal Ocean Research/Coastal Ocean Program (CSCOR/COP), National Ocean Service (NOS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce (DOC).

ACTION: Announcement of funding opportunity for financial assistance for project grants and cooperative agreements.

SUMMARY: The purpose of this document is to advise the public that CSCOR/COP is soliciting 1-year and 2-year proposals for modeling, monitoring and retrospective studies of coastal ecosystem research in the Northern Gulf of Mexico (N-GOMEX). Funding is contingent upon the availability of Federal appropriations. It is anticipated that projects funded under this announcement will have an August 1, 2001, start date.

DATES: The deadline for receipt of proposals at the COP office is 3 p.m, EST, March 14, 2001. Note that late-arriving applications provided to a delivery service, on or before, March 13, 2001, with delivery guaranteed before 3 p.m.,EST, on March 14, 2001, will be accepted for review if the applicant can document that the application was provided to the delivery service with delivery to the address listed below (see **ADDRESSES**) guaranteed prior to the specified closing date and time; and in any event, the proposals are received in the COP office by 3 p.m. EST, no later than two business days following the closing date.

ADDRESSES: Submit the original and 10 copies of your proposal to Coastal Ocean Program Office (N-GOMEX 2001), SSMCι3, 9th Floor, Station 9700, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. NOAA and COP Standard Form Applications with instructions are accessible on the COP Internet site (http://www.cop.noaa.gov) under the COP Grants Support Section, Part D, Application Forms for Initial Proposal Submission. Forms may be viewed, and in most cases, filled in by computer. All forms must be printed, completed, and mailed to CSCOR/COP with original signatures. Blue ink for original signatures is recommended but not required. If you are unable to access this information, you may call CSCOR/COP at 301-713-3338 to leave a mailing request.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Technical Information: Kenric Osgood, N-GOMEX 2001 Program Manager, COP Office, 301-713-3338/ext 135, Internet: Kenric.Osgood@noaa.gov

Business Management Information: Leslie McDonald, COP Grants Administrator, 301-713-3338/ext 137, Internet: Leslie.McDonald@noaa.gov

See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** under the heading, ELECTRONIC ACCESS, for a listing of web sites pertaining to period hypoxia in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic Access

The following web sites furnish results of studies concerning the periodic hypoxia associated with the northern Gulf of Mexico: http://www.aoml.noaa.gov/ocd/necop/, for results from the Nutrient Enhanced Coastal Ocean Productivity (NECOP) study and, http://www.nos.noaa.gov/Products/pubs—hypox.html for Gulf of Mexico hypoxia reports produced by the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources (CENR). Hard copies of reports from these studies can be obtained from the COP office.

A workshop report, U.S. GLOBEC report No. 19, is available from the following address or homepage: U.S. GLOBEC Coordinating Office, UMCES, Chesapeake Biological Laboratory, P.O. Box 38, Solomons, MD 20688; Phone: 410-326-7370; Fax: 410-326-7341; Internet: fogarty@usglobec.org and http://www.usglobec.org.

A listing of ongoing projects in the northern Gulf of Mexico funded by the COP are provided within the COP Internet Site at http://www.cop.noaa.gov/projects/GMX.htm

Background

Program Description

For complete Program Description and Other Requirements for the COP, see the General Grant Administration Terms and Conditions of the Coastal Ocean Program published in the **Federal Register** (65 FR 62706, October 19, 2000) and at the COP home page.

Coastal regions dominated by large rivers are disproportionately important to the biological production of the world's oceans, primarily because these rivers carry large amounts of ''new'' nitrogen. An important river-dominated coastal ecosystem in the U.S., which supports high primary and secondary production, is the one dominated by the Mississippi River in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Approximately 20 percent of the U.S. commercial fishery landings by dollar value are from the northern Gulf. Major recreational fisheries also exist in this region.

There is a strong relationship between riverine inputs (especially nutrients) and primary production, followed in turn by zooplankton production and fish production in a classic nutrient-phytoplankton-zooplankton-fish (NPZF) food web. Anthropogenic nitrogen loadings from the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico have increased dramatically during the past several decades, which has led to changes in the ecosystem of the northern Gulf, including (1) an initial increase in overall biological production; (2) the annual development of an extensive zone of bottom water hypoxia during the summer stratified period; and (3) an apparent shift from a balanced pelagic/