

NIST may then accredit laboratories to perform specified testing to satisfy designated foreign or domestic government regulatory (i.e., mandated) requirements. NIST will explore with the National Cooperation for Laboratory Accreditation a cooperative and joint approach for recognizing applicant laboratory accreditors.

The action being taken under this notice addresses both generic and specific NVCASE requirements relating to two sectoral annexes (telecommunications equipment and electromagnetic compatibility (EMC)) of the United States (U.S.)/European Union (EU) Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Mutual Recognition Arrangement for the Conformity Assessment of Telecommunications Equipment. If additional MRAs covering these areas are negotiated between the United States and another country or region, any additional specific requirements will be included under this NVCASE activity.

Sub-program requirements have been developed in accordance with NVCASE regulations and with public consultation.

Public input was obtained at two open meetings on April 27 and April 28, 1999 and from comments received through May 30, 1999.

**DATES:** Applications will be received beginning November 30, 1999.

**ADDRESSES:** Applications for recognition may be obtained from, and returned to, Robert L. Gladhill, NVCASE Program Manager, NIST, 100 Bureau Drive, Mailstop 2100, Gaithersburg, MD 20899-2100, by fax (301) 975-5414, or email at robert.gladhill@nist.gov.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Robert L. Gladhill, NVCASE Program Manager, at NIST, 100 Bureau Drive, Mailstop 2100, Gaithersburg, MD 20899-2100, telefax: (301) 975-5414, email: robert.gladhill@nist.gov

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The NVCASE sub-program to recognize accreditation bodies that accredit laboratories to test telecommunications equipment and/or perform electromagnetic compatibility testing is being established in accordance with the NVCASE Regulations (15 CFR Part 286.2(b)(3)(ii)) and in response to requirements as described in FCC GEN Docket 98-68 (FCC 98-338) adopted on December 17, 1998 and FCC Public Notice DA 99-1640 released August 17, 1999. The generic and specific requirements are also being established pursuant to NVCASE regulations (15 CFR Part 286.5). Public consultation on

these requirements was conducted at two workshops held at the Department of Commerce on April 27 and 28, 1999. These workshops were announced in the **Federal Register** Sol. 64, No. 53/ Friday, March 19, 1999. Follow-up comments were accepted from the public through May 30, 1999.

This program is also being established to support NIST's responsibilities as a designating authority for the United States in both the Telecommunication Equipment and EMC Sectoral Annexes of the U.S./EU MRA (which may be located at <http://www.iep.doc.gov/mra/mra.htm>) and the APEC MRA for Conformity Assessment of Telecommunications Equipment (which may be located at <http://www.apii.or.kr/telwg/mraTG/mraTG-frame.html>).

Telecommunications equipment testing as referenced in this notice covers tests of equipment for network terminal attachment and other equipment subject to telecommunications regulation, including wire and wireless equipment, transmitters, and terrestrial and satellite equipment, whether or not connected to a Public Telecommunications Network. EMC testing relates to measuring the electromagnetic emissions from the product under test, both intended and unintended, and their effect on other products (emissions testing), as well as the effects of electromagnetic emissions from other products on the product under test (immunity testing).

NIST will apply the generic requirements contained in the International Organization for Standardization/International Electrotechnical Commission (ISO/IEC) Guide 58—"Calibration and Testing Laboratory Accreditation Systems—General Requirements for Operation and Recognition," to all applicant accreditation bodies. All laboratories applying to recognized accreditors shall be assessed against the requirements of ISO/IEC Guide 25—"General Requirements for the Competence of Calibration and Testing Laboratories." These generic requirements will be supplemented by specific technical requirements contained in individual NVCASE handbooks, available on request from NIST.

NIST will accept applications from interested accreditation bodies for recognition to accredit laboratories under the U.S./EU MRA or the APEC MRA. Evaluation of an initial group of applicant accreditation bodies for NVCASE recognition will begin on or about December 30, 1999. All accreditation bodies that have submitted a complete application and required fees to NIST by December 15, 1999, will

be included in this initial group. Applications received subsequently will be considered on an as-received basis for evaluation after the initial group of applicants has been considered.

NIST expects to announce recognition of qualified accreditation bodies on or about April 1, 2000. At about the same time, NIST also expects to identify and list an initial group of qualified laboratories for each of the areas noted. Each laboratory listed under the provisions of the U.S./EU MRA or under the APEC MRA will be designated by NIST as a conformity assessment body (CAB).

This notice contains a collection of information requirement subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act. This collection of information has been approved by OMB under the following control Number: 0693-0019.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person is required to respond nor shall a person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act unless that collection of information displays a currently valid Office of Management and Budget Control Number.

Dated: November 19, 1999.

**Karen Brown,**

*Deputy Director.*

[FR Doc. 99-31108 Filed 11-29-99; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 3510-13-M**

## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 111699B]

#### Environmental Impact Statement for Federal Activities to Recover the Cook Inlet, Alaska, Stock of Beluga Whale, Including the Management of a Subsistence Harvest

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

**ACTION:** Notice of intent; scoping meetings; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS announces its intent to prepare a programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on Federal activities necessary to halt the observed decline and promote recovery of the Cook Inlet, Alaska, stock of beluga whale. This will include, but is not limited to, the management of the subsistence harvest by Alaska Natives.

NMFS will hold a scoping meeting to receive public input on structuring the

alternatives and the range of issues to be assessed in the programmatic EIS. In addition to holding the scoping meeting, NMFS is accepting written comments on the same topics.

**DATES:** Written comments must be received by December 30, 1999. A scoping meeting will be held in Anchorage, Alaska at the following time and location: December 16, 1999, 1–5 p.m., Anchorage Federal Office Building, Room 154, 222 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Anchorage, AK.

**ADDRESSES:** Written comments and requests to be included on a mailing list of persons interested in the programmatic EIS should be sent to Mr. Brad Smith, 222 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Box 43, Anchorage, Alaska, 99513, or sent via facsimile to (907) 271–3030. Comments may also be hand-delivered to NMFS at Room 517 in the Anchorage Federal Office Building, 222 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via electronic mail or via the Internet.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Brad Smith, (907) 271-5006.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** A relatively small, isolated stock of beluga whales exists in south-central Alaska. This stock is found primarily in upper Cook Inlet during ice-free periods (April through October), often concentrating near the mouths of rivers. This stock is called the Cook Inlet Beluga (CIB) stock because the entire stock is believed to occur in Cook Inlet during the ice-free period, although its winter range is presently poorly understood. Genetic and distributional analyses by NMFS indicate that the CIB stock is genetically isolated from the four other beluga whale stocks in Alaska and constitutes a distinct population.

Early estimates of stock size, including estimates by Alaska Native hunters, ranged from 1,000 to 2,000 beluga whales. The most recent estimate by NMFS is 347 whales from 1998, indicating a decline of nearly 50 percent below the estimate by NMFS of 653 for 1994. NMFS has proposed that the CIB be designated as a depleted stock (64 FR 56298, 19 October 1999) under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

The MMPA provides an exemption for Alaska Natives from prohibitions on the taking of marine mammals. The CIB stock is hunted by Alaska Natives for subsistence uses, including food and traditional handicrafts. Data collected by Alaska Native Organizations (ANOs) and NMFS indicate subsistence harvest has recently been at unsustainable levels. Subsistence harvests averaged 37 whales per year between 1994 and 1998.

This estimate does not include animals that were struck and lost which may occur at a ratio of 1–2 whales for each whale landed.

The MMPA allows ANOs to enter into agreements with NMFS to conserve marine mammals and provide for co-management of subsistence uses. Several such groups have expressed interest in entering into a co-management agreement with NMFS for the CIB stock. It is possible that such an agreement would include annual harvest levels determined under a harvest management plan, as well as means to allocate the harvest among Native hunters.

The National Marine Fisheries Service may regulate the subsistence hunting of a marine mammal when (1) that marine mammal is designated as depleted under the MMPA, and (2) specific regulations have been promulgated for this management. NMFS has taken separate action to designate the CIB stock as depleted and may, therefore, proceed with regulations to manage the Native harvest.

The National Environmental Policy Act requires preparation of an EIS for any major Federal action that may significantly impact the quality of the human environment. NMFS finds that an EIS is appropriate in this matter.

NMFS will assess the potential impacts of Federal activities necessary to halt the observed decline and promote recovery of the CIB stock of whales, including the management of a subsistence harvest by Alaska Natives. In a review of existing information, NMFS does not find that non-harvest factors, such as degradation of habitat, appear to have caused the rapid decline of the stock; however, NMFS has not conducted research designed specifically to determine the effects of habitat degradation on the stock. NMFS reviewed existing information on fish runs, oil and gas activities, sewage problems, and other sources of contaminants. The existing information suggests that beluga are not stressed by anthropogenic factors in Cook Inlet. The size of fish runs, especially salmon, may have some effect on the population; however, food limitations do not appear capable of causing the declines of beluga noted in recent years. Consequently, the level of harvest between 1994 and 1998 appear to be a significant factor in the observed declines in the population. Therefore, initial recovery actions would likely be directed at developing a subsistence harvest that would be consistent with recovery goals for the stock.

An assessment of the harvest would use a model based on three alternatives:

(1) Maximizing short-term opportunity for subsistence harvests and prolonging the recovery of the stock; (2) maximizing the recovery of the stock by prohibiting harvest until the stock had recovered to optimum sustainable population levels; or (3) allowing an intermediate level of harvest that would provide some subsistence use and promote recovery of the stock faster than alternative (1) but slower than alternative (2).

The cumulative impacts section of the EIS would review the combined impacts of Federal and non-Federal activities on the CIB stock of beluga whale and their habitat. This would include, but not be limited to, the effects of fishing, vessel activities, industrial development, and oil exploration and development. The environmental consequences section of the EIS will also assess the impacts of the various CIB harvest management strategies (as described above) on the human environment. Major issues include the impact of subsistence removals on this stock; the impacts of regulated harvests on the traditional and cultural values of Alaska Natives; methods to allocate a limited harvest among Native groups and individuals; and the social and economic impacts of various population levels of the CIB stock of whales. Scoping for the programmatic EIS begins with publication of this document. To identify the scope of issues that will be addressed in the EIS and to identify potential impacts on the quality of the human environment, public participation is invited by providing written comments to NMFS and attending the scoping meeting. A scoping meeting will be held in Anchorage, Alaska at the following time and location: December 16, 1999, 1–5 p.m., Anchorage Federal Office Building, Room 154, 222 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Anchorage, AK.

### Special Accommodations

The meeting will be physically accessible to people with disabilities. Special accommodations requests, such as requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids, should be directed to Brad Smith (907) 271–5006 at least 5 days before the meeting date.

Dated: November 22, 1999.

### Art Jeffers,

*Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 99–31069 Filed 11–29–99; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 3510-22-F**