

Finding of No Significant Impact
NOAA's Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center
Coral Reef Ecosystem Division
2005-2010 Activities

NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216-6 (revised May 20, 1999) contains criteria for determining the significance of the impacts of a proposed action. In addition, the Council on Environmental Quality regulations at 40 CFR 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 others. The significance of this proposed action (Alternative 2) 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 result in impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse?

After three years of implementing activities under the CRED, no significant adverse environmental impacts have been identified and elevated for further NEPA review. The purpose of the proposed CRED program will collect data and conduct mapping that will be used to develop coral reef protection and restoration plans, as well as remove derelict fishing nets and other marine debris that not only cause substantial damage to coral reefs when they become ensnared, but also kill marine mammals, sea turtles, crustaceans, diving sea birds, and other marine species when then become entangled.

2. Can the proposed action be expected to jeopardize the sustainability of any target species that may be affected by the action?

The purpose of the proposed program is to protect and restore the target species of coral, while providing critical data and mapping so that other agencies may also take actions that protect and restore coral reefs.

3. Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to jeopardize the sustainability of any non-target species?

The propose program will actually improve habitats for coral reef-dependent species while also removing derelict fishing nets that kill species identified in question 1, improving population sustainability.

4. 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 Magnusen-Stevens Act and identified in FMPs?

The proposed project will improve and restore coral reefs, fragile and critical components of ocean and coastal habitats, and will improve EFHs as identified in the Western Pacific Bottomfish and Seamount Fisheries Groundfish, Precious Corals, the Crustacean Fisheries, and Pacific Coral Reef Fisheries FMPs.

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

No negative impacts to public health and safety are associated with CRED activities, as the public will not be in the areas of activity.

6. Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to adversely affect endangered or threatened species, marine mammals, or critical habitat of these species?

Most coral reef environments are themselves considered as critical habitat to the species found in the ecosystem. The impacts of the management program to these environments will be positive and very beneficial. Research, monitoring, restoration types of activities may occur in areas where marine turtles, and certain marine mammals like the Hawaiian Monk Seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*) are found and considered as part of the ecosystem. Any research conducted under the CRED must comply with all rules and regulations that protect marine mammals and endangered or threatened species. Removing derelict fishing nets will also protect Hawaiian monk seals, sea turtles, and other listed species that can become entangled.

7. 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.)?

The proposed program will improve biodiversity in the coral reef ecosystems by providing critical data and providing for protective and restorative actions by NOAA and other agencies. Removing derelict fishing nets and other marine debris will also protect coral reefs and associated species.

8. Are significant social or economic impacts interrelated with natural or physical environmental effects?

Coral reefs provide substantial economic benefits by providing crucial habitats for many commercial fish and other marine species and provide important recreational opportunities. Removing marine debris also protects many species that provide important social and economic values. There are no negative social or economic effects.

9. To what degree are the effects on the quality of the human environment likely to be highly controversial?

No such issues have been raised since CRED's origination.

10. 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?

CRED activities are conducted in the Pacific United States. The coral reef environments may be considered both unique and fragile. Many actions may occur in these geographic areas that cover large areas of the shorelines and oceans. The purpose of the activities is to provide short-to long-term scientific monitoring, mapping and actions that provide protective benefits. No actions are for exploitation purposes.

11. To what degree are the effects on the human environment likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks?

While there is much to be learned about coral reef ecosystems, the CRED does not envision the use of experimental techniques where impacts and consequences would be unknown to the research or management community.

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

CRED activities are designed to have no significant adverse environmental impacts. From a programmatic standpoint, implementation of the CRED activities over the years should result in positive improvements to coral reef environments through a better understanding of coral reef ecosystems. As monitoring, mapping, and removing marine debris would not cause any adverse impacts individually or if conducted many times as evaluated in EA sections 4.2.2, 4.3.2, and 4.4.3, there is no potential for cumulative adverse impacts associated with the proposed actions as described, with the mitigation measures identified in EA section 4.6, now or in the future, wherever the actions would be taken.

13. 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 historic resources?

The proposed action will not adversely affect any entity listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will the proposed action cause the loss of or destroy any significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

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

No. Any activities involving the possibility of inadvertent spreading invasive species requires taking sufficient precautionary measures, such as for diving activities, all diving gear is rinsed in a bleach solution at the end of each day in the field, and vessels and all gear are sanitized before each departure from port.

15. Is the proposed action likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration?

There is little probability that any actions will result in significant negative impacts to coral reef resources. There is a probability that certain management techniques to limit human-related impacts to coral reefs will lead to greater regulation to further formally protect coral reefs and their associated values and resources.

16. Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to threatened a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment?

No. Three years of CRED activities have indicated no violation of environmental laws and regulations. In some cases, the funded projects may lead to improvements to such laws (e.g., revisions to rules and regulations in specific Marine Protected Areas or Coral Reserves) as that is the intention of the program to provide sound scientific information in support of better management of coral reef resources.

17. 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?

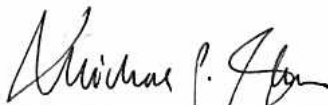
No. See answers to questions 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7.

Finding of No Significant Environmental Impact

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has prepared the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Coral Reef Ecosystem Division (CRED) of the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center. The proposed action is the implementation of CRED activities whose purpose is to provide scientific understanding of coral reef ecosystems consistent with the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 and the National Coral Reef Action Strategy.

Consequently, this EA will be used to streamline the overall CRED NEPA review process and eliminate duplicative documentation. The EA will be reviewed every five years in order to ensure that its impact analyses remain current. If not, the EA will be revised as needed. Additionally, each newly proposed project will be reviewed in order to determine whether or not its potential environmental impacts have been adequately addressed in this EA. This review will be conducted by the completion of the NEPA Project Review Checklist contained in Attachment 1 of the FONSI. If this review determines that the proposed project type and its environmental impacts have been analyzed in the EA, no further NEPA documentation will be completed for that project and the completed Checklist will be included with the other records for that grant award. If the project type or impacts are not analyzed in this EA, the proposed project will be the subject of an individual NEPA review. Depending upon the degree of the project's potential impacts, this review could involve either the preparation of a categorical exclusion memorandum, an environmental assessment, or an environmental impact statement.

In view of the information presented in this document and the analysis contained in the attached Environmental Assessment prepared for the 2005-2010 Activities of the Coral Reef Ecosystem Division of NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, it is hereby determined that the proposed actions will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment as described above and in the Environmental Assessment. In addition, impacts to potentially affected interests and areas, including national, regional, and local, have been addressed to reach the conclusion of no significant impacts. Accordingly, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this action is not necessary.



Director, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center

6/16/05

Date

Attachment 1: NEPA Checklist for Proposed Actions

NOAA Environmental Check List for Proposed Actions *

Date:

Name:

Project Number:

Detailed project description: (please be as specific as possible; include breakdown of tasks, scope of project, schedule (for example, date construction begins, duration of activities, completion date), budget, points of contact, and any permits required):

PROVIDE PROJECT DESCRIPTION IN THIS SPACE

CONDITION FOR PROPOSED ACTIONS	Response		
	Yes	No	Need Data
<p>1. Is the project covered in this EA</p> <p>Consider whether the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The project type is addressed but the applicant is using equipment or methodology not covered in the EA B. The project type is not covered and requires individual review 			
<p>2. Is the action likely to be inconsistent with any applicable, State, Indian tribal, or local law, regulation, or standard designed to protect any aspect of the environment?</p> <p>Consider whether the action is likely to have effect that would be inconsistent with such authorities as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State and territorial coastal zone management plan ; • State and territorial management plan or regulations that apply to coral reefs and associated habitats or the resources contained therein <p>Also consider whether the applicant has consulted with the respective resource management agency that has authority over the proposed work area and whether the action is likely to need a permit under another authority related to environmental protection.</p>			
<p>3. Is the action consistent with priorities identified by National Marine Sanctuaries, National Parks and Monuments for projects being conducted in Federal waters?</p> <p>Consider whether the project addresses the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All necessary permits have been obtained from the relevant federal agency for the project • The relevant agency has identified this project as a priority, • The project complements ongoing conservation activities conducted by that federal agency • The project will provide information to appropriate resource managers needed to improve management and conservation efforts 			
<p>4. Is the action likely to have results that are inconsistent with locally desired social, economic, or other environmental conditions?</p>			

<p>Consider whether the action is likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change the use of park land; • Change the use of prime farm lands; • Change the use of a floodplain; • Alter a wetland; • Modify zoning patterns of coral reefs such that the use of certain locations by fishermen, tourists, and stakeholders is restricted or prohibited • Be located on or near a wildlife refuge, a designated wilderness, a wild and science river, a National Natural Landmark, a National Historic Landmark, designated open space, or a designated conservation area or near any other environmentally critical area and have adverse environmental impacts on these areas; • Have adverse visual, social, atmospheric, or other effects on such a critical areas even though it is NOT located on or near the area. 			
<p>5. Is the action likely to result in the, release and/or disposal of toxic, hazardous, or radioactive materials, or in the exposure of people to such materials?</p> <p>Consider whether the action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is likely to involve the use of chemicals other than those identified in the EA for tagging and capture of coral reef organisms that either 1) are known to have detrimental effects on target species, non-target species or the habitats occupied by these species; or 2) have not been previously used and for which the impacts are unknown. • Is likely to result in the release and/or disposal of toxic materials into coral reef environments such as laboratory wastes (e.g., fixatives), or other hazardous materials. • Has the potential to result in the release and or dispersal of a pathogen, parasite or other disease-causing agent. • Involve the introduction or transplantation of stony corals and other organisms and whether appropriate provisions have been made to ensure that the species are 1) native organisms originally obtained from the local area; 2) they are of a similar genetic diversity to existing populations found in the project area; and 3) for species that were in culture, precautions have been taken to ensure they are being introduced into the wild without the presence of associated 			

predators, pathogens or parasites			
<p>6. Is the action likely to adversely affect a significant aspect of the aspect of the natural environment?</p> <p>Consider whether the action is likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affect an endangered or threatened species, or its critical habitat; • Affect a species under consideration for listing as endangered or threatened, or its critical habitat; • Alter a natural ecosystem • Involve the use of a particular gear type (e.g., gill nets, traps, bottom trawls etc.) or other destructive equipment that have been shown to have negative impacts to coral reef habitats and are likely to cause significant impacts to the proposed area of work 			
<p>7. Is the action likely to adversely affect a significant aspect of the sociocultural environment?</p> <p>Consider whether the action is likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cause changes in the ways members of the surrounding community, neighborhood, or rural area live, work, play, relate to one another, organize to meet their needs, or otherwise function as member of society, or in their social, cultural, or religious values and beliefs. Is the action likely to: • Cause the displacement of fishermen or other coral reef user groups • Affect the economy of the community in ways that result in impacts to its character, or to the physical environment; • Affect any cultural practices (e.g., by prohibiting the harvest of a species that is culturally important)? <p>Give special attention to whether the action is likely to have environmental impacts on a minority or low income group that are out of proportion with it impacts on other groups. Consider, for example, whether the action is likely to alter such a group's use of coral reef resources.</p> <p>Also consider possible impacts on historic, cultural, and scientific resources. Think about whether the action is likely to have physical, visual, or other effects on these resources.</p>			

<p>8. Is the action likely to generate controversy on environmental grounds?</p> <p>Consider first whether your action is likely to be controversial in any way. If so, consider whether this controversy is likely to have an environmental element. For example, the decision to locate a marine protected area in a key fishing ground may be controversial to fishermen who rely on that resource for their livelihood, but this is not an environmental issue unless the relocation of fishermen causes increased damage to surrounding habitats due to concentration of fishing effort.</p>			
<p>9. Is there a high level of uncertainty about the action's environmental effects?</p> <p>Consider first whether there is anything you don't know about the action's potential impacts, and then think about whether what you don't know has any significance.</p>			
<p>10. Is the action part of an ongoing pattern of actions (whether under the control of GSA or others) that are cumulatively likely to have adverse effects on the human environment?</p> <p>Consider whether the action is related to other actions with impacts that are individually insignificant but that may, taken together, have significant effects. For example, is the action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of an ongoing pattern of development that could collectively change the quality of the human environment, such as suburbanization, gentrification, or urban renewal? • Part of an ongoing pattern of pollutant discharge, traffic generation, economic change, or land-use change in its locality that could collectively affect health or the condition of the environment. 			
<p>11. Is the action likely to have some other adverse effect on public health and safety or on any other environmental media or resources that are not specifically identified above?</p> <p>Consider whether any of the following apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant will be diving at great depths or in locations characterized by high currents, low visibility and other difficult diving conditions and they do not have the appropriate experience or appropriate dive safety protocols • The applicant is working with pathogens that may or are known to affect public health, and they have not taken precautions to reduce or prevent the potential for release of 			

<p style="text-align: center;">the pathogen into the environment</p> <p>The question is designed to allow you to address any potential environmental effects that may be of concern but don't fall into any of the other categories. It implies that everyone is fallible, and that times change, so that effects that are not recognized as serious may be so identified in the future.</p>			
--	--	--	--

* Checklist adapted from PBS NEPA Desk Guide, October 1999.

The checklist is not completed until all "NEED DATA" issues have been resolved and all blocks are checked either "YES" or "NO." Checking a single block to "YES" does not necessarily mean that an EA must be prepared, and it may be possible to resolve the "YES" answer in another way. For example, disposal of real property to a State agency for historic monument purposes invariably involves historic properties, and thus may affect an aspect of the socio-cultural environment. However, it is probably safe to assume that the process of review under Section 106 of the NHPA will be sufficient to ensure that such effects are not adverse. So rather than completing an EA, you would ensure that your proposed action complies with Section 106 and its implementing regulations.

Principle Investigators are asked to resolve all "NEED DATA" issues and complete the checklist, attaching all supporting documentation; circle the conclusion reached in the "Conclusion" section; add the names of the relevant program staff and representatives below the signature block; then sign and date this document.

Conclusions (Circle One):

1. The action is categorically excluded and requires no further environmental review.
2. The action is categorically excluded but requires further review under one or more other environmental authorities.
3. The action requires an environmental assessment.
4. The action requires an environmental impact statement.

Signature of the Principle Investigator

Date