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**NEW, ONE-STEP REGISTRATION SYSTEM REDUCES PAPERWORK
AND FINANCIAL BURDEN ON SOUTHEAST FISHERMEN**

In continued efforts to streamline procedures and eliminate redundant paperwork and fees required of fishermen, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) will combine two regulatory requirements into a one-step process that allows fishermen to simultaneously apply for federal fishing permits and register fishing vessels that encounter marine mammals. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is an agency of the Commerce Department.

"NOAA Fisheries is committed to improving customer service and reducing financial requirements of fishers," said Bill Hogarth, director for NOAA Fisheries. "This streamlined registration process allows fishermen to help us monitor interactions with marine mammals without burdening them with duplicate registrations and fees."

Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, commercial vessels with certain gear types that might incidentally encounter or harm marine mammals while fishing must register with the Marine Mammal Authorization Program (MMAP). The program is designed to monitor and minimize fishing impacts on marine mammal populations.

Beginning in 2003, commercial fishers with active federal permits will no longer need to submit an MMAP registration form, renewal form, or processing fee to receive or validate their MMAP certificate. The permit renewal and MMAP registration has been combined. NOAA Fisheries will identify the gear types affected by the MMAP, and the agency will automatically issue MMAP certificates to fishers.

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Registered fishermen that hold a MMAP certificate are not penalized for incidentally harming or killing marine mammals during fishing activities if they report such incidents, comply with marine mammal conservation measures, and carry an observer on board if requested by the agency.

The MMAP categories of fishing gear are based on historic and potential impacts of the fisheries to the health of marine mammals. The fisheries that must register under the MMAP (Category I and II) in 2003 include segments of the gillnet, longlining, trap/pot, trawl, purse seine, haul/beach seine, stop net, and pound net fisheries. Among the more than 50 fisheries that are not required to register under the MMAP (Category III) are the calico scallop, shrimp, and butterfish trawls. All vessel owners or operators, regardless of the fishery category, must continue to report all incidental injuries and mortalities of marine mammals.

NOAA Fisheries will automatically process registrations for the 2003 MMAP authorizations based on the southeast federal commercial fishery permitting system, and fishers are not required to take any action.

To learn more about the MMAP and to view a list of commercial fisheries according to category, please visit the following web site:

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR2/Fisheries_Interactions/2002_LOF.pdf

For more information, contact Teletha Griffin, 9721 Executive Center Drive North, St. Petersburg, FL 33702; (727) 570-5312.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. To learn more about NOAA, please visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

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