



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

MAR 11 2004

Dear Reviewer:

In accordance with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, we enclose for your review the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) for a Regulatory Amendment to the Fishery Management Plan for the Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region (Management Measures to Implement New Technologies for the Western Pacific Pelagic Longline Fisheries). This FSEIS supplements the "Final Environmental Impact Statement, Fishery Management Plan Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region", issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on March 30, 2001 (FEIS). This FSEIS provides background on and analysis of the need for the regulatory action, the objective of the action, the management measures to be included, and the effect of the action on protected species.

The proposed action is to revise management measures for the fisheries managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region, with the objective of achieving optimum yields from these fisheries while avoiding the likelihood of jeopardizing the continued existence of sea turtles or other endangered species. The range of alternatives, which focuses on the management of the Hawaii-based longline fishery, includes time/area closures, as well as allowing a limited model shallow-set swordfish fishery. Under most alternatives, including the preferred alternative, the model swordfish fishery would be required to use circle hooks with mackerel bait, which in combination have been found to reduce the level of interactions between longline gear and leatherback and loggerhead turtles by 67 percent and 92 percent respectively, in Atlantic Ocean experiments. In addition, the document considers non-regulatory off-site conservation actions to improve recruitment in sea turtle populations that are affected by the longline fisheries managed under the fishery management plan.

Additional copies of the FSEIS and/or copies of the 2001 FEIS may be obtained from Dr. Samuel Pooley, at the address below or by phone at (808) 973-2937. Requests for such copies should indicate whether a paper copy or electronic copy on CD is preferred. Copies of both the 2001 FEIS and this FSEIS are also accessible through the Internet at <http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/pir/>.

The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council and NMFS also announce their intent to apply alternative procedures approved through the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) that will allow for expedited completion of this FSEIS. This expedited schedule is needed to ensure that adequate turtle conservation regulations remain in place after the current regulations expire on April 1, 2004, pursuant to Court order. In accord with the alternative procedures, comments or questions on the FEIS submitted during the 10-day public comment period must be received by March 29, 2004. The 10-day period is shorter than the standard 30-day wait period for FSEISs as approved by CEQ. The alternative procedures were requested by NOAA on November 14, 2003, and approved by CEQ on November 20, 2003.

Comments or questions on the FSEIS submitted during the 10-day public comment period must be received by March 29, 2004. Comments may be submitted to Samuel Pooley, Ph.D., Acting



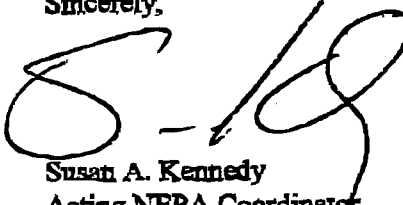
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Regional Administrator, Pacific Islands Region, NMFS, NOAA, 1601 Kapiolani Blvd, Suite 1110, Honolulu, HI 96814 . Comments may be submitted by facsimile (fax) to 808-973-2941. Electronic comments may be submitted by e-mail to FEIS040021@noaa.gov, include in the comment subject line the following FSEIS identifier: "FSEIS Pelagics". A copy of your comments should be submitted to me by mail to the NOAA Strategic Planning Office (PPI/SP), SSMC3, Room 15603, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910; by fax to 301-713-0585; or by e-mail to nepa.comments@noaa.gov.

NMFS is not required to respond to comments received as a result of the issuance of the FSEIS. However, comments received will be reviewed and considered for their impact on the issuance of a record of decision (ROD). The ROD will be made available publicly following final agency action.

Sincerely,



Susana A. Kennedy
Acting NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure