

Comment: A paper recently published in *Conservation Biology* offers some insight into the issue of lethal removal of predators. This paper provides a decision matrix for assessing the need to kill abundant wildlife to protect endangered species prey. The paper concludes that unless the interaction situation is caused by a limited number of individuals, and no other preventative measures are available, lethal control of the abundant native species should not be considered. If culling cannot be supported as a measure contributing to the recovery of endangered species, it surely cannot be justified to mitigate losses of farm stock.

Response: NMFS is not considering the merits of culling pinniped populations to protect farm stock.

Comment: All letters included specific mention of the Task Force's deliberations regarding the use of lethal force to control/prevent seal depredation. Commenters supported the Task Force's three criteria that should be met to justify the lethal taking of individual seals presumed to be depredating salmon pens. It was noted that current conditions in the industry would not fit the criteria included in the Task Force Report.

Response: Comment noted.

Comment: During the interim exemption program of the MMPA, the killing of depredating seals was allowed under certain conditions if the lethal taking was reported to NMFS. Popular news media reports suggest that fishers admitted killing an estimated 300 animals per year; however, only two official reports of kills were filed with NMFS during the 5-year program. Given the potential under-reporting of intentional lethal takes of seals during the interim exemption period, a letter suggested that any program authorizing growers under certain conditions to shoot seals within cages is likely to be abused. Furthermore, some growers demonstrate an impressive array of deterrents, while others employ relatively few measure; therefore, non-lethal deterrence has not received a valid test of effectiveness. Intentional lethal deterrence is not warranted at this time.

Response: Comment noted.

Comment: The Task Force Report states that seal-fish farm interactions seem to be most frequent during February when harbor seals have redistributed to the south of Maine. Ice seals may be the actual culprits during this season, and their behavior might warrant different predator control strategies than would harbor and gray seals. Although a portion of the harbor seal population shifts southward during

winter, harbor seals remain the most abundant seal species in Maine during February.

Response: Ice seals (harp, hooded, and ringed seals) occur in the Downeast region in winter, but attacks on the pens by these species have not been reported. It is conceivable that a seal may be misidentified; for example, a juvenile harp seal may be mistaken for a harbor seal. Although deterrence of ice seals may require different strategies, specific measures have not been explored.

Comment: One economic consideration related to predator control that is not addressed in the Task Force Report is the cost of rehabilitating wounded seals. Costs include fees for personnel, transportation, feed, veterinary supplies, and services.

Response: Section 101(a)(4) of the MMPA authorizes the deterrence of marine mammals to prevent damage to private and public property, including fishing gear and catch, so long as deterrence measures do not result in the death or serious injury of marine mammals. Minor injury that may result from deterrence measures would not require rehabilitation.

Comment: Under the Interim Exemption for Commercial Fisheries (MMPA section 114), intentionally killing depredating seals was used to classify fisheries. Incidental takes of seals should also be considered. Predator nets pose a risk of injury and mortality through entanglement of harbor and gray seals.

Response: Aquaculture facilities are classified in Category III in the current list of fisheries under MMPA section 118 because the likelihood of serious injury or mortality of marine mammals incidental to net pen operations is considered remote.

Comment: Avian predators, such as loons and cormorants, are frequently observed near the net pens, and their attacks may contribute to the stresses experienced by the penned fish.

Response: Comment noted.

Comment: More needs to be known about the effects of acoustic deterrence devices on harbor porpoises. No additional acoustic devices should be permitted in the area until more is known about how harbor porpoises use the inshore waters.

Response: Comment noted. NMFS is currently trying to develop a consistent policy for activities that introduce noise in the oceans.

Comment: California sea lions are numerous and can be easily trained. Individual sea lions could be trained to refrain from attacking the salmon in the pens while protecting the pens from rival pinnipeds. The sea lion could be

domesticated to serve the growers. Also, the Task Force report states that the presence of dogs is of no benefit with regard to predation control; however, some breeds of water dogs may be trained enter the water to deter would-be predators.

Response: NMFS acknowledges the need for creative approaches to mitigate pinniped damage at fish farms.

Comment: Several salmon pen sites established near traditional seal haulouts report having no remarkable seal predation problems. There seems to be no correlation between the location of pens with respect to haul-outs and the levels of predation.

Response: The Task Force discerned no significant relationship between predation rates and proximity to haulouts. Site fidelity, prey availability, and other uncontrollable factors would confound any attempt to restrict siting of net-pens with respect to haulouts. The Task Force recommended research to investigate relationships between predation rates and location of haul-outs but made no recommendations regarding the siting of aquaculture operations.

Comment: Government assistance, such as low-rate loans, grants, and practical incentives, is necessary: 1) To ensure non-lethal predator control devices are employed and maintained optimally; and (2) remove the unfair advantage foreign salmon growers appear to have.

Response: If growers formed cooperatives as suggested in the Task Force Report, these organized efforts would facilitate marketing and other business-related aspects related to aquaculture without government assistance. Many variables, such as labor costs, veterinary treatment, environmental regulation, and shipping costs, affect competitiveness in international markets. Thus, governmental funding for predator control devices may not be a complete, or even effective, option.

Dated: March 11, 1997.

Hilda Diaz-Soltero,
Acting Director, Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 97-6545 Filed 3-14-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

[I.D. 030597E]

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting.

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

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold a meeting of its Executive Committee.

DATES: The meeting will be held from March 24-25, 1997. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific dates and times.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at NMFS Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Drive North, St. Petersburg, FL; telephone: (813) 570-5301.

Council address: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, One Southpark Circle, Suite 306, Charleston, SC 29407-4699.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Susan Buchanan, Public Information Officer; telephone: (803) 571-4366; fax: (803) 769-4520; email: susan_buchanan@safmc.nmfs.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Meeting Dates

March 24, 1997, 1:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The Executive Committee will meet to hear the status of the NMFS Sustainable Fisheries Act General Implementation Plan, develop an implementation schedule for Sustainable Fisheries Act Provisions and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Amendments, and discuss how the Council and NMFS can work together to improve data collection.

March 25, 1997, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The Executive Committee will hear a presentation on a Department of the Navy request to the Council, establish guidelines for holding informal meetings with fishermen, review and modify the Council Statement of Organizational Practices and Procedures, discuss the function of Council staff, discuss the status of the calendar year 1997 budget and the calendar year 1999 budget request, discuss planning for future meetings, and address other business.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to the Council office (see **ADDRESSES**) by March 17, 1997.

Dated: March 7, 1997.

Bruce Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 97-6544 Filed 3-14-97; 8:45 am]

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COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMISSION**Public Information Collection Requirement**

AGENCY: Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to Renew Information Collection #3038-0031: Procurement Contracts.

SUMMARY: The Commodity Futures Trading Commission is planning to renew information collection 3038-0031, Procurement Contracts, which is due to expire on June 30, 1997. The information collected consists of procurement activities relating to solicitations, amendments to solicitations, requests for quotations, construction contracts, award of contracts, performance bonds and payment information for individuals (vendors) or contractors engaged in providing supplies or services. In compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, the Commission solicits comments to:

(1) Evaluate whether the collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (2) evaluate the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the collection of information including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (3) enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (4) minimize the burden of the collection of the information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before May 16, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Persons wishing to comment on this information collection should contact the CFTC Clearance Officer, 1155 21st Street NW, Washington, DC 20581, (202) 418-5160.

Title: Procurement Contracts.

Control Number: 3038-0031.

Action: Extension.

Respondents: Businesses.

Estimated Annual Burden: 604 hours.

Issued in Washington, D.C. on March 11, 1997.

Jean A. Webb,

Secretary to the Commission.

[FR Doc. 97-6592 Filed 3-14-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6351-01-M

Public Information Collection Requirement

AGENCY: Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

ACTION: Notice of intent to renew information collection #3038-0019: Stocks of grain in licensed warehouses.

SUMMARY: The Commodity Futures Trading Commission is planning to renew information collection 3038-0019, Stocks of Grain in Licensed Warehouses, which is due to expire on May 31, 1997. The information collected is used to detect potential problem market situations. Without this information the Commission would not be aware of the amount of deliverable grain and ungraded grains in federally licensed warehouses. In compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, the Commission solicits comments to:

(1) Evaluate whether the collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (2) evaluate the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the collection of information including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (3) enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (4) minimize the burden of the collection of the information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before May 16, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Persons wishing to comment on this information collection should contact the CFTC Clearance Officer, 1155 21st Street NW, Washington, DC 20581, (202) 418-5160.

Title: Information Concerning Warehouses.

Control Number: 3038-0019

Action: Extension.

Respondents: Contract Markets.

Estimated Annual Burden: 1,768 hours.

Issued in Washington, D.C. on March 11, 1997.

Jean A. Webb,

Secretary to the Commission.

[FR Doc. 97-6593 Filed 3-14-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6351-01-M

Public Information Collection Requirement

AGENCY: Commodity Futures Trading Commission.