



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM: Steven Thur, Ph.D.
Acting Director

SUBJECT: Categorical Exclusion for RESTORE Act Science Program Award #NA17NOS4510089, “A decision-support tool for evaluating the impacts of short- and long-term management decisions on the Gulf of Mexico red snapper resource”

NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216-6A, Environmental Review Procedures, requires all proposed projects be reviewed with respect to environmental consequences on the human environment. This memorandum addresses the determination that the activities described below for Project #26244259, “A decision-support tool for evaluating the impacts of short- and long-term management decisions on the Gulf of Mexico red snapper resource”, qualifies to be categorically excluded from further National Environmental Policy Act review.

Project Description

The RESTORE Act Science program is considering funding a three-year project to Florida International University and sub-awardees to develop a management strategy evaluation tool to aid fishery managers and other stakeholders to quantify the risks and trade-offs among the various alternative short- and long-term management decisions on red snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*). Management strategies to be evaluated include biological reference points, harvest control rules, size limits, allocation within and among commercial and recreational sectors, other stakeholder-suggested regulations, and analyses of uncertainty from various causes.

Management strategy evaluation (MSE) uses simulation methods to quantify the risk associated with a suite of potential fisheries management actions. MSE uses an operating model (OM) to simulate the fisheries dynamics and a suite of potential management procedures to be evaluated. A variety of performance measures can be used to compare the outcomes, and then the trade-offs and risks associated with each management procedure can be evaluated. This project will involve workshops with stakeholders to determine critical model structures, performance measures, model inputs and outputs, and the alternative management strategies to be tested. The researchers would then develop, validate and refine the OM. Once the OM is completed they would evaluate the efficacy of the alternative management strategies and regulations through extensive Monte Carlo simulations. This would include evaluations of sensitivity and robustness to sources of uncertainty. The MSE would then be packaged in a user friendly online tool where stakeholders can run scenarios to examine potential effects. The researchers would hold end-user workshops and develop teaching videos and guides to train stakeholders in the use of this decision support tool.



Effects of the Project and Extraordinary Circumstances

All activities (data compilation, analyses, model implementation and user interface and tool development) associated with this project would be conducted in an office setting using existing data, statistical algorithms and software or interviews with experts. All work would be conducted within existing facilities using existing infrastructure. There would be no fieldwork conducted as part of this project. Thus, there would be no uncertain adverse environmental impacts, unknown risks or cumulative impacts associated with this project. Further, the proposed project does not involve air, noise, or water quality impacts; and does not otherwise have a significant impact on the human environment. These activities are not the subject of controversy based on potential environmental consequences and do not establish a precedent or decision in principle about future proposals. In addition, as there are no field activities, there is no impact on geographically- or ecologically-critical areas, (sanctuaries, wetlands, watersheds), National Historic Sites, and no adverse impacts to marine mammals, essential fish habitat or threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat. Low-income and minority populations would not be adversely affected by project activities. Thus, there are no extraordinary circumstances present that may require further analysis in an EA or EIS.

Categorical Exclusion Determination

This action would not result in any changes to the human environment. This project's activities are covered by the E1 Categorical Exclusion, as Defined in Appendix E of the NAO 216-6A Companion Manual. E1, describes activities conducted in laboratories and facilities where research practices and safeguards prevent environmental impacts and fall within the scope of the E1 categorical exclusion, the proposed project is conducted in a laboratory where research practices and safeguards prevent environmental impacts. Cumulative effects are negligible. As such, project activities are categorically excluded from further NEPA review.