



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM: Mary Erickson  
Director, National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science

SUBJECT: Categorical Exclusion for Project # RASP15-54 “Cooperative spawning aggregation monitoring program for the Gulf of Mexico: an assessment of existing information, data gaps and research priorities”

NAO 216-6, Environmental Review Procedures, requires all proposed projects to be reviewed with respect to environmental consequences on the human environment. This memorandum addresses the determination that Project # RASP15-54, “Cooperative spawning aggregation monitoring program for the Gulf of Mexico: an assessment of existing information, data gaps and research priorities,” qualifies to be categorically excluded from further National Environmental Policy Act review.

### **Project Description**

This project will compile and evaluate existing information on spawning aggregations in the Gulf of Mexico as the basis to design a cooperative, Gulf-wide conservation and monitoring program focused on fish spawning aggregations (FSAs). The investigators will first compile existing biological and fisheries information for Gulf of Mexico species known or likely to form FSAs and identify existing datasets and monitoring programs in the Gulf of Mexico that could inform regional monitoring of FSAs. The investigators will then synthesize this information and convene a regional workshop where stakeholders can review it and prioritize a suite of species, habitats, monitoring methods, and areas of research moving forward. The investigators will also engage in a comprehensive outreach and data-sharing program to ensure all data and project outputs are available to inform management. The project will be led by a diverse group of experts representing academia, federal and state government, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from throughout the Gulf of Mexico region. Workshop participants and reviewers of the results of this work will include academics from diverse fields; state, federal, and regional fishery and marine resource managers; and leaders in the fishing and oil and gas industries. The field data required for this project has already been collected. The investigators activities (i.e. identifying existing data and its synthesis) and their proposed workshop will be conducted in an office environment.

### **Effects of the Project**

There will be no field work conducted as part of this project. Thus, project actions will not result in cumulative environmental impacts. In addition, the proposed project does not involve air, noise, or water quality impacts; and does not otherwise have a significant impact on the human environment. No activities will be conducted in areas where children may congregate. 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. There are no uncertain environmental impacts or unknown risks. 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.

**Categorical Exclusion Determination**

As defined in NAO 216-6, Section 6.03c.3(d), this is an applied research project which can be considered a routine NOAA program function with limited or short-term environmental consequences. As such, it can be categorically excluded from the need to prepare an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement.