



## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XF612]

#### **Draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment for Fisheries Research Conducted and Funded by the Southwest Fisheries Science Center**

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

**ACTION:** Notice of availability; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS announces the availability of the draft Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment (SPEA) for Fisheries Research Conducted and Funded by the Southwest Fisheries Science Center. Publication of this notice begins the official public comment period for this SPEA. The purpose of this draft SPEA is to evaluate potential changes in the direct and indirect effects of research previously analyzed in the 2015 Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) and the 2020 SWFSC SPEA, and new or modified research activities along the U.S. west coast and in the Scotia Sea area off Antarctica. Where necessary, updates to certain information on species, stock status, or other components of the affected environment that may result in different conclusions from the 2015 PEA and 2020 SPEA are presented in this analysis.

**DATES:** Comments must be received no later than [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE **FEDERAL REGISTER**].

**ADDRESSES:** Electronic comments on the draft SPEA may be submitted to Elise Kohli, Environmental Compliance Specialist, at [nmfs.swfsc.spea@noaa.gov](mailto:nmfs.swfsc.spea@noaa.gov). Comments sent via email, including all attachments, must not exceed a 10-megabyte file size. Physical comments may be submitted to Aras Zygus, Chief of Staff, at 8901 La Jolla Shores Drive,

La Jolla, CA 92307. NMFS may not consider comments sent to addresses other than the ones provided here.

A copy of the draft SPEA may be obtained by writing to the address specified above, telephoning the contact listed below (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**), or visiting the internet at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov>. Documents cited in this notice may also be viewed, by appointment, during regular business hours at the aforementioned address.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Elise Kohli, [elise.kohli@noaa.gov](mailto:elise.kohli@noaa.gov), (858) 334-2863.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The SWFSC is the research arm of NMFS in the Southwest Region. The purpose of SWFSC fisheries research is to produce scientific information necessary for the management and conservation of living marine resources along the U.S. west coast in the California Current Ecosystem (CCE), throughout the Eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean, and in the Scotia Sea area off Antarctica. SWFSC's research is needed to promote both the long-term sustainability of marine resources and the recovery of certain species, while generating social and economic opportunities and benefits from their use. Primary research activities include: trawl and seine surveys to support assessments of coastal pelagic species and groundfish in the CCE; fish cages to support groundfish biological studies; ecosystem surveys using active acoustic systems and other oceanographic equipment in the CCE; and surveys using unmanned systems in the Antarctic Research Area and CCE.

NMFS has prepared the draft SPEA (EAXX-006-48-1WC-1737064752) under NEPA to evaluate alternatives for conducting and funding fisheries and ecosystem research activities as the primary Federal action. In the draft SPEA, NMFS also evaluates the proposed promulgation of regulations and authorization of marine mammal take incidental to the fisheries research under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

Additionally, the draft SPEA evaluates activities that could result in the incidental take of species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) within the proposed research action area.

The following two alternatives are currently evaluated in the draft SPEA

- *No-Action Alternative* - Conduct Federal Fisheries and Ecosystem Research with Scope and Protocols without changes; and
- *Preferred Alternative* - Conduct Federal Fisheries and Ecosystem Research (including New or Modified Research) with Mitigation for MMPA and ESA Compliance.

The alternatives include a program of fisheries and ecosystem research projects conducted or funded by the SWFSC as the primary Federal action. Because this primary action is connected to a secondary Federal action (also called a connected action under NEPA), to consider authorizing incidental take of marine mammals under the MMPA, NMFS must identify as part of this evaluation “(t)he means of effecting the least practicable adverse impact on the species or stock and its habitat” (section 101(a)(5)(A) of the MMPA [16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*]). NMFS must therefore identify and evaluate a reasonable range of mitigation measures to minimize impacts to protected species that occur in SWFSC research areas. These mitigation measures are considered as part of the identified alternatives in order to evaluate their effectiveness to minimize potential adverse environmental impacts. The action alternatives include mitigation measures intended to minimize potentially adverse interaction with other protected species that occur within the action area. Protected species include all marine mammals, which are covered under the MMPA, all species listed under the ESA, and bird species protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Potential direct and indirect effects on the environment are evaluated under each alternative in the draft SPEA. The environmental effects on the following resources are

considered: physical environment, special resource areas, fish, marine mammals, birds, sea turtles, invertebrates, and the social and economic environment.

NMFS requests comments on the draft SPEA for fisheries research conducted and funded by the NMFS SWFSC. Please include, with your comments, any supporting data or literature citations that may be informative in substantiating your comment.

**Authority:** 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*

Dated: April 28, 2026.

**Kristen Koch,**

*Director, Southwest Fisheries Science Center,*

*National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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