



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

2 March 2015

Ms. Jolie Harrison, Chief
Permits and Conservation Division
Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225

Re: Permit Application No. 18881
(Texas Sealife Center)

Dear Ms. Harrison:

The Marine Mammal Commission (the Commission), in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit application with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (the MMPA). Texas Sealife Center (TSC)¹ is seeking authorization to conduct research on bottlenose dolphins in coastal waters of Texas during a five-year period.

TSC proposes to harass, observe, photograph, conduct focal follows, and biopsy sample bottlenose dolphins of both sexes and various age classes (see the take table for specifics). The purposes are to continue a long-term study of bottlenose dolphins to investigate (1) abundance, stock structure, and other demographics, (2) distribution, foraging ecology, and habitat use, (3) disease and health, and (4) human interactions. If the dolphins exhibit a strong adverse reaction (e.g., directed chuffing and tail slapping)², researchers would cease their activities and immediately move away from them. Researchers would be required to not position the vessel between a female and her calf, and they would refrain from biopsy sampling calves less than 2 years of age and females with a calf of any age. In addition, the researchers would refrain from sampling dolphins if a neonate is present within the group, if the dolphins display evasive behavior (i.e., prolonged diving, underwater exhalation, underwater course changes, or rapid swimming at the surface), or if the group primarily consists of previously sampled dolphins.

Initially, UHCL–EIH will lead the biopsy sampling activities. Its Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee has reviewed and verbally approved the research protocols. UHCL–EIH will

¹ Researchers from the University of Houston Clear Lake–Environmental Institute of Houston (UHCL–EIH), Texas A&M University Galveston, and Texas A&M University Corpus Christi would conduct the activities in collaboration with TSC.

² They did indicate that it may be necessary to approach the dolphins more than once, but no more than three times, to determine if the dolphin is reacting to the vessel, other dolphins, or other circumstances (e.g., recent group split or join, close social interactions, other boats, or other organisms).

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provide the signed approval before initiating any activities. TSC and its collaborators would coordinate their activities not only with one another but with the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Southeast Fisheries Science Center as well.

For all of these reasons, the Commission believes that the proposed activities are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA and therefore recommends that NMFS issue the permit, as requested. Kindly contact me if you have any questions concerning the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,



Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.
Executive Director