



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

17 January 2017

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. 20455
(Randall Wells, Ph.D.,
Chicago Zoological Society)

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). Dr. Wells is seeking to renew his permit to conduct research on bottlenose and Atlantic spotted dolphins during a five-year period—permit 15543 authorized similar activities.

Dr. Wells proposes to conduct research on bottlenose and Atlantic spotted dolphins in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico. The purpose of the research is to investigate (1) abundance and distribution, (2) foraging ecology, (3) social and genetic structure, (4) movement patterns and habitat use, (5) disease and health, (6) acoustic behavior and hearing, and (7) bioenergetics of dolphins. Researchers would harass, observe/track¹, photograph/videotape², capture³/restrain/handle/release, weigh/measure, record acoustically, mark⁴, sample⁵, instrument⁶, and/or conduct procedures⁷ on numerous dolphins of both sexes and various age classes (see Tables 2 and 3 and the Take Table). Dr. Wells would not target bottlenose dolphin calves less than approximately 1.5 yrs old or females with those calves for capture and release activities. On the rare occasion when calves from 8 months to 1.5 years old are captured unintentionally, procedures and

¹ Including conducting focal follows.

² Including using unmanned aerial systems and conducting photogrammetry.

³ Including using seine and break-away hoop nets.

⁴ With roto tags, fin notching, or freeze branding.

⁵ Including skin, blood, blubber, swabs, exhaled air, feces, urine, milk, and/or a tooth.

⁶ With either suction-cup or dorsal fin-attached tags. Up to two tags per animal would be deployed, including via a new deployment technique for attaching dorsal fin-attached tags on free-swimming animals. The new technique would be tested on dolphin carcasses prior to testing in the field, and field testing would occur on bottlenose dolphins in Sarasota Bay to refine the technique.

⁷ Including conducting auditory evoked potentials, ultrasound, x-ray, lavage, stomach temperature studies with ingestible 'pills', field metabolic measurements with doubly-labeled water and serial blood sampling, and playback studies. Playback studies would include emitting signature and non-signature whistles that would not exceed a source level of 169 dB re 1 μ Pa at 1 m.

sampling would be conducted at the discretion of the veterinarian⁸. If calves less than 8 months old or females with those calves were unintentionally captured, the female-calf pair would be released immediately. For Atlantic spotted dolphins, researchers would not target presumed female-calf pairs, since they cannot be captured at the same time⁹. Further, sampling protocols would be limited for pregnant females in their 2nd and 3rd trimesters (see Tables 2 and 3). Dr. Wells requests up to two bottlenose and two Atlantic spotted dolphin mortalities¹⁰ during the five-year period.

To minimize disturbance, researchers would cease activities if an animal exhibits changes in its swimming behavior (e.g., direction and swim speed, breach, etc.) and/or diving behavior (e.g., time spent at the surface). Vessels would approach animals slowly from the side, would avoid making any sudden changes in speed or pitch, and would not separate females from their calves. They would not set seine nets on groups with calves or when manatees or sea turtles are observed nearby. Any animal that becomes entangled in the seine net would be tended to immediately. If an animal exhibits signs of distress while handled out of the water, it will be returned to the water immediately and monitored by a veterinarian to determine if/when procedures can continue or it can be safely released. If the animal is released, a support boat may be used to track and monitor the animal until normal behavior is observed and the animal is deemed safe. In the event that the veterinarian determines that any animal would benefit from short-term care required to aid in the recovery from capture or an injury, the animal could be transferred to Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium (Mote), following consultation with and approval by the National Marine Fisheries Service. (NMFS). When possible, female-calf pairs and bonded male pairs would be released at the same time.

Researchers would collaborate with personnel at NMFS's Southeast Regional Office, Mote Marine Laboratory, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Clearwater Marine Aquarium, University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, and SeaWorld-Orlando. Mote's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee has reviewed and approved the research protocols. The Commission believes that the proposed activities are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA and recommends that the 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

⁸ This could include (1) no sampling if the veterinarian deemed the calf was too young, in which case both the adult female and calf would be released immediately or (2) reduced sampling if the veterinarian determined the calf was old enough and not exhibiting any signs of stress.

⁹ Atlantic spotted dolphins are captured individually with break-away hoop nets.

¹⁰ By either unintentional mortality or intentional mortality (i.e., euthanasia for humaneness purposes).