



# MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

21 April 2014

Dr. Tammy Adams, Acting Chief  
Permits and Conservation Division  
Office of Protected Resources  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225

Re: Permit Amendment Application No. 14450  
(Southeast Fisheries Science Center)

Dear Dr. Adams:

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). Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) is seeking to amend permit 14450 to conduct research on cetaceans during a five-year period. The permit expires on 28 February 2019.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit amendment, provided that the current permit conditions remain in effect.

## **RATIONALE**

SEFSC is authorized to conduct research on cetaceans in U.S. and international waters of the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea. Researchers are authorized to conduct aerial and vessel-based line-transect surveys, acoustic sampling, behavioral observations, photo-identification studies, and biopsy sampling. The objectives are to continue a long-term study documenting (1) stock structure and abundance, (2) distribution and movement patterns, (3) habitat use, (4) foraging ecology, and (5) potential interaction with anthropogenic activities.

Researchers propose to instrument with satellite dart tags up to 20 sperm whales, 10 fin whales, 10 humpback whales, 5 North Atlantic right whales, 5 blue whales, and 5 sei whales per year. They would approach the whales at a distance of 5–10 m to attach the tags using either a pneumatic rifle or crossbow. They could approach each animal no more than four times, which would include tag misses and unsuccessful tagging attempts. The tags would include time-depth recorders or data loggers that would record and store time, depth, temperature, wet/dry sensor, and GPS locations. Researchers would tag only adult whales that are not accompanied by a dependent calf.

SEFSC's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee has reviewed and approved the research protocols. Researchers would approach the whales generally at slow speeds. Further, the

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permit already is conditioned such that researchers must exercise caution when approaching animals and must retreat from animals if behaviors indicate the approach may be interfering with reproduction, feeding, or other vital functions. Therefore, the Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit amendment, provided that the current permit conditions remain in effect.

The Commission believes that the activities for which it has recommended approval are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA.

The Commission appreciates the opportunity to comment on this permit application. Kindly contact me if you have any questions concerning the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rebecca J. Lent". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a distinct "Lent" at the end.

Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.  
Executive Director