



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

12 December 2013

Mr. P. Michael Payne, 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. 18182
(Marilyn Mazzoil,
Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute
at Florida Atlantic University)

Dear Mr. Payne:

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). Ms. Mazzoil is requesting authorization to conduct research on bottlenose dolphins during a five-year period. The proposed activities previously were authorized under permits 779-1339, 14157, and 15631.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit, as requested.

RATIONALE

Ms. Mazzoil proposes to conduct research on bottlenose dolphins in Florida year-round. The activities would occur in waters along the east coast of Florida from Jupiter to Fernandina Beach. The objectives are to continue a long-term study documenting bottlenose dolphin (1) abundance, (2) distribution and occurrence patterns, (3) demography, (4) social organization and behavior, and (5) genetic signatures and contaminant concentrations.

Ms. Mazzoil and co-investigators seek authorization to observe, photograph, and conduct focal follows on bottlenose dolphins from various stocks (see the Take Table). Those animals could be of any age class or either sex. Researchers would use small vessels (6–8 m in length) to obtain good quality photographs at distances of 6–9 m. They also would conduct focal follows at distances of 25–50 m for up to 6 hours. During those observations, the boat would be positioned at a distance close enough to document but far away enough not to interfere with natural behavior. Research activities would cease if the activity appears to interfering with pair bonding, nursing, or feeding. If a male exhibits agitation (i.e., tail slapping, chuffing, or swiftly approaching the vessel) while the

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researchers are observing mating behavior, they would terminate any close follow and maintain a non-interfering distance to observe the behavior. Researchers also would make every effort to maneuver the boat on the periphery of any mating unit to minimize interference with herding behavior. Photo-id images would be shared with other researchers in the region and would be available via OBIS-SEAMAP.

In addition, Ms. Mazzoil could biopsy sample up to 350 bottlenose dolphins per year using a rifle at distances of 6–9 m. Those takes also would include biopsy dart misses and obtaining partial samples. Researchers could sample individual dolphins up to two times per year but no more than three times during the five-year period. Researchers would not biopsy sample calves less than 2 years of age or dolphins in small groups with those calves. Dependent calves greater than 2 years of age would be sampled only once during the five-year period. Samples would be analyzed to determine sex, genetic signatures, and contaminant concentrations by researchers at the Georgia Aquarium, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Hollings Marine Laboratory, and Southeast Fisheries Science Center. To minimize disturbance, researchers would target individuals within small (< 6 dolphins), loose-knit groups for biopsy sampling. They also would avoid biopsy sampling emaciated dolphins and those dolphins that appear compromised (i.e., dolphins that float for long intervals, are wheezing, having difficulty submerging, have sunburnt or blistered skin, and/or exhibit "pause-motion breathing" (movement ceases when surfacing to extend time for respirations)). Furthermore, the researchers would cease biopsy sampling activities if the animals display avoidance behavior (e.g., repeated and prolonged dives, rapid changes in direction or speed, repeated tail slapping, or chuffing behavior).

Ms. Mazzoil's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) currently is reviewing the proposed research protocols. Once the IACUC has approved the protocols, she will forward the approval to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The Commission supports the long-term research and therefore recommends that NMFS issue the permit, as requested.

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,



Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.
Executive Director