

false killer whale group size, a factor that will significantly impact the resulting abundance estimates. A robust assessment of population trend will require additional data and inclusion of environmental variables that influence false killer whale distribution and the proportion of the population represented within the survey area during each survey period.

Comment 21: The HLA notes that the draft false killer whale SAR updates the Insular Stock population estimate to 167 based upon an unpublished paper by Bradford *et al.*, which concludes that the population size of the Insular Stock of false killer whales in certain study areas has consistently ranged between 144 and 187 animals over a 16-year period. However, in reporting 167 as the population size for the Insular Stock, the Draft SAR states that the Bradford *et al.* annual estimate “represents only the animals present in the study area within that year.” HLA suggests that, if the reported 2015 abundance estimate of 167 applies only to a study area that is smaller than the range of the Insular Stock of false killer whales, then the actual abundance of the entire Insular Stock must be some amount *higher* than 167. HLA states that they are unable to sufficiently comment on this issue because the Bradford *et al.* paper is unpublished and not available for public review.

Response: NMFS notes that although the abundance estimates provided in Bradford *et al.* are limited to the number of animals in the survey area in each survey year, they are still the best available estimates of population size. The new estimates account for many sources of potential bias, and although we expect that limiting estimates to the surveyed area for a given year does likely result in an under estimation of abundance in years when the surveyed area is smaller than the stock area, we do not have sufficient information to correct annual estimates for the extent of the survey area. NMFS feels the use of estimates derived from the best available data spanning 15 years of surveys is far better than use of catalog size, the previous metric for the minimum population estimate (Nmin) in the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) insular false killer whale SAR. Further, the Nmin derived from the new mark-recapture estimates meets the definition of Nmin provided within the GAMMS (NMFS 2016). Although cited as “in review,” the Bradford *et al.* paper was reviewed by the Pacific SRG at its 2017 meeting and is currently in review for journal publication.

Comment 22: The HLA incorporates by reference its more specific comments

on previous draft SARs related to: (1) The assignment of a recovery factor to the pelagic stock of false killer whales, and continues to maintain that NMFS should apply a recovery factor to the pelagic stock that is greater than 0.5; (2) the 2010 Hawaiian Islands Cetacean Ecosystem and Assessment Survey (HICEAS) and the assumptions made by NMFS based upon the data from that survey, and assert that NMFS has inappropriately withheld acoustic data that should be publicly disclosed and reported; and (3) NMFS’ assumption that the insular stock of false killer whales has declined is speculative.

Response: NMFS reiterates its responses to these comments from previous SARs. Specifically: (1) Reanalysis of existing datasets to derive more precise estimates does not constitute an increase in population size. There are only two EEZ-wide estimates of abundance (484 from a 2002 survey and 1,540 from a 2010 survey). These estimates may not be directly compared due to changes in group size enumeration methods between those surveys. For this reason, the current status of pelagic false killer whales is unknown. (2) NMFS has not made any attempt to withhold the acoustic data from the HICEAS 2010 survey. It can be made available by request. NMFS has used the HICEAS 2010 data for a variety of analyses, including the development of automated routines to detect and classify false killer whale and other species’ sounds, to assess false killer whale sub-group spatial arrangements, and other projects. There were many changes in array hardware during the survey, complicating streamlined analyses of these data, such that a full-scale analysis of this dataset for abundance is not appropriate, efficient, or cost-effective at this time. (3) NMFS makes no assumption that MHI insular stock abundance has declined in recent years. The minimum estimate reflects the number of individuals enumerated during the stated period and may reflect not only changes in actual population abundance, but also changes in encounter rates due to survey location or animal distribution.

Dated: July 6, 2018.

Donna S. Wieting,

*Director, Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 2018-14811 Filed 7-10-18; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Coral Reef Conservation Program; Notice of Intent; Scoping Period Announcement

AGENCY: Office for Coastal Management (OCM), National Ocean Service (NOS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce (DOC).

ACTION: Notice of intent; announcement of public scoping period and request for written comments.

SUMMARY: The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Office for Coastal Management announces its intention to prepare a programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) for its Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP), which is managed out of NOAA’s National Ocean Service in Silver Spring, MD, and implemented in coastal areas and marine waters of Florida, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Gulf of Mexico, Hawaii, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, the U.S. Pacific Remote Island Area, and targeted international regions including the wider Caribbean, the Coral Triangle, the South Pacific, and Micronesia. Publication of this document begins the official scoping period that will help identify issues and alternatives to be considered in the PEIS.

DATES: Written comments on the intent to prepare a PEIS will be accepted on or before Wednesday, August 15, 2018.

ADDRESSES: You may submit scoping comments for the CRCP PEIS by any of the following methods:

- *Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:* Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/NOAA-NOS-2018-0077>. Click the “Comment Now!” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- *Mail:* Please direct written comments to Harriet Nash, Deputy Director, NOAA’s Coral Reef Conservation Program, Office for Coastal Management, 1305 East-West Highway, N/OCM6, Room 10404, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

NOAA is preparing a *Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (DPEIS)* for coral reef

conservation and restoration activities implementing NOAA's CRCP throughout the United States, South Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Pacific Island Regions, and priority international areas (*i.e.*, wider Caribbean, Coral Triangle, South Pacific, and Micronesia). It will assess the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts of NOAA's proposed action to continue funding and otherwise implementing coral reef conservation and restoration activities. This will be achieved through its existing programmatic framework and related procedures for implementing the CRCP. The CRCP is implemented consistently with the requirements of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 (CRCA) and Executive Order 13089. Projects implemented or funded by NOAA vary in terms of their size, complexity, geographic location, and NOAA involvement. They often benefit diverse coral species, habitats, and ecosystem types. The CRCP conducts research and monitoring to gather data on the existence and condition of coral reef ecosystems to support conservation and restoration efforts. NOAA implements the CRCP across four of its line offices (*i.e.*, National Ocean Service, Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Environmental Satellite Data Information Service) and in coordination with other federal agencies, state and local agencies, private conservation organizations, and research and academic institutions. A significant amount of this support is administered through grants and cooperative agreements. CRCP activities are prioritized based on available funding and the responsiveness to the priorities in its strategic plan, including jurisdictional needs.

The purpose of this DPEIS is to identify and evaluate the general environmental impacts, issues, and concerns related to the comprehensive management and implementation of the CRCP, including potential mitigation. NOAA anticipates that actual environmental effects will be caused by site-specific, project-level activities implementing the CRCP; therefore, this DPEIS will be used to support tiered, site-specific NEPA reviews by narrowing the scope of environmental impacts and facilitating focused, project-level reviews. NOAA also intends for this DPEIS to establish a tiered environmental decision making framework that will support efficient compliance with other statutes protecting natural resources such as the Endangered Species Act and Marine

Mammal Protection Act. Since the CRCP will use this DPEIS to conduct tiered analyses, this document does not evaluate the environmental impacts of any project-level activities.

Alternatives

NOAA is preliminarily proposing to analyze three program-level alternatives:

- No Action Alternative reflecting the "status quo" management of the CRCP based on minimizing threats.
- Alternative 1: Continued Operation of the CRCP based on minimizing threats with the addition of a framework to further research, test, and potentially implement novel coral restoration intervention techniques to respond rapidly to imminent threats to corals and coral ecosystems.
- Alternative 2: Continued Operation of the CRCP plus implementation of discretionary, standardized conservation and mitigation measures with or without the addition of a framework for novel intervention techniques.

The fundamental distinction between Alternative 1 and the No Action Alternative is that Alternative 1 would adopt a framework that would add novel intervention techniques as tools to respond to imminent threats to corals. The DPEIS will consider the environmental effects of a suite of these intervention strategies, but will not commit to implement any. Implementation would occur through a separate decision making process. The primary distinction between Alternative 2 and the No Action Alternative is that Alternative 2 would call for implementation of not only mitigation measures imposed through statutory and regulatory compliance but also discretionary, standardized conservation and mitigation measures designed to further protect and conserve marine and other environmental resources. Alternative 2 could be adopted with or without a framework for novel intervention strategies.

Preliminary major issues to be addressed in this DPEIS may include: the impact of the CRCP's activities and operations on coral ecosystems; coral species listed as threatened or endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act; other marine and terrestrial resources; and the cumulative effects of the action when considered along with environmental conditions and past, present, and future actions potentially affecting coral and coastal ecosystems and coastal marine resources. The CRCP is also seeking to identify mitigation measures that would be effective at avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating adverse effects of project-

level activities and specifically requests public comment on this issue.

Public Comment

OCM begins this NEPA process by soliciting input from the public and interested parties on the type of impacts to be considered in the DPEIS, the range of alternatives to be assessed, and any other pertinent information. Specifically, this scoping process is intended to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Invite affected federal, state, and local agencies, and interested persons to participate in the DPEIS process.
2. Determine the potential significant environmental issues to be analyzed in the DPEIS.
3. Identify and eliminate issues determined to be insignificant or addressed in other documents.
4. Identify related environmental documents being prepared.
5. Identify other environmental review and consultation requirements.

The official scoping period ends on August 15, 2018. Please visit the CRCP web page for additional information regarding the program: <https://coralreef.noaa.gov/>.

Authority

The preparation of the DPEIS for the CRCP will be conducted under the authority and in accordance with the requirements of NEPA, Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR parts 1500–1508), other applicable regulations, and NOAA's policies and procedures for compliance with those regulations.

Written comments must be received on or before August 15, 2018.

Dated: June 29, 2018.

W. Russell Callender,

Assistant Administrator for Ocean Services and Coastal Zone Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

[FR Doc. 2018–14750 Filed 7–10–18; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–08–P

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Department of the Army

Army Education Advisory Committee; Notice of Federal Advisory Committee Meeting

AGENCY: Department of the Army, DoD.

ACTION: Notice of Federal Advisory Committee Meeting.

SUMMARY: The Department of Defense (DoD) is publishing this notice to announce that the following Federal Advisory Committee meeting of the