

From 2005–2016, NMFS issued three permits authorizing the retention of releasable marine mammals (rehabilitated animals cleared for release back to the wild) for public display purposes under section 104 of the MMPA and NMFS’ implementing regulations at 50 CFR part 216. A permit was required for placement of releasable stranded animals (as opposed to non-releasable animals, which NMFS places in accordance with an administrative process rather than a permit) because NMFS views retention of a releasable marine mammal as the functional equivalent of a take from the wild (*i.e.*, the animal would have otherwise been released and would presumably have contributed to the wild population). These three permits were based upon NMFS’ interpretation of the regulations at 50 CFR 216.27(b)(4), which state the NMFS OPR Director may require use of a rehabilitated marine mammal for public display purposes in lieu of animals taken from the wild. The three previous permit applicants were not required to request an actual “take” of animals from the wild, as the placement of a releasable animal was considered in lieu of such take.

However, NMFS received numerous public comments on the three issued permits asserting that permits to retain releasable marine mammals are in direct contradiction to the purpose of Title IV and section 109(h) of the MMPA, which mandate the rescue and rehabilitation of stranded marine mammals with the goal of releasing the animals to the wild when feasible. Commenters specifically expressed concerns that the process for assessing the actual impact of a take from the wild was largely circumvented.

After evaluation and reconsideration of this permit process and as a result of public comments on the three permits issued, NMFS has developed a new draft Procedural Directive to clarify its interpretation of MMPA regulations and procedures for authorizing releasable rehabilitated marine mammals to be retained for purposes of public display.

In the Procedural Directive, NMFS is proposing to no longer issue permits for the specific purpose of obtaining releasable marine mammals from the National Stranding Network for public display. Instead, would-be applicants must apply for a permit to take (collect) from the wild pursuant to the MMPA. In the event NMFS decides to grant such a permit, the NMFS OPR Director may then, at his or her discretion, require that a releasable rehabilitated marine mammal be substituted for capturing an animal from the wild, in accordance with 50 CFR 216.27.

NMFS believes this approach is more consistent with the statutory provisions governing rehabilitation and release of stranded marine mammals (MMPA section 109(h) and MMPA Title IV), which are separate and distinct from the provisions governing issuance of permits for the take of animals from the wild for purposes of public display (MMPA section 104).

Dated: November 6, 2017.

Donna S. Wieting,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648–XF772

Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee Meeting

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of open public meeting.

SUMMARY: This notice sets forth the proposed schedule and agenda of a forthcoming meeting of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC). The members will discuss and provide advice on issues outlined under **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** below.

DATES: The meeting will be held November 28 and 29, 2017, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., and November 30, from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Sheraton Silver Spring Hotel, 8777 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20910; 301–589–0800.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Heidi Lovett, MAFAC Assistant Director; 301–427–8034; email: Heidi.Lovett@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: As required by section 10(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, 5 U.S.C. App. 2, notice is hereby given of a meeting of MAFAC. The MAFAC was established by the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary), and, since 1971, advises the Secretary on all living marine resource matters that are the responsibility of the Department of Commerce. The complete charter and summaries of prior meetings are located online at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ocs/mafac/>.

Matters To Be Considered

This meeting time and agenda are subject to change.

The meeting is convened to hear presentations and updates and to discuss policies and guidance on the following topics: The importance of timely data for fisheries resiliency; Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force efforts on the conservation and restoration of salmon and steelhead; aquaculture; citizen science; NMFS communications, outreach, and FishWatch; and the budget outlook for FY2018. MAFAC will discuss various administrative and organizational matters, and meetings of subcommittees and working groups will be convened.

Special Accommodations

The meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Heidi Lovett; 301–427–8034 by November 15, 2017.

Dated: November 9, 2017.

Jennifer Lukens,

Director for the Office of Policy, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648–XF773

Meeting of the Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of open public meeting.

SUMMARY: This notice sets forth the proposed schedule and agenda of a forthcoming meeting of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee’s (MAFAC’s) Columbia Basin Partnership Task Force (CBP Task Force). The CBP Task Force will discuss the issues outlined in the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** below.

DATES: The meeting will be held December 5, 2017, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on December 6, 2017, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Davenport Grand Hotel, 333 Spokane Falls Blvd., Spokane, WA 99201; 509–458–3330.