

Notices

Federal Register

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 040406A]

Taking and Importing of Marine Mammals

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

ACTION: Notice; affirmative finding renewal.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NMFS, (Assistant Administrator) has renewed the affirmative finding for the Republic of Ecuador under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). This affirmative finding will allow yellowfin tuna harvested in the Eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean (ETP) in compliance with the International Dolphin Conservation Program (IDCP) by Ecuadorian-flag purse seine vessels or purse seine vessels operating under Ecuadorian jurisdiction to be imported into the United States. The affirmative finding was based on review of documentary evidence submitted by the Republic of

Ecuador and obtained from the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the U.S. Department of State.

DATES: The renewal is effective from April 1, 2006, through March 31, 2007.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Regional Administrator, Southwest Region, NMFS, 501 West Ocean Boulevard, Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA 90802-4213; phone 562-980-4000; fax 562-980-4018.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The MMPA, 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*, allows the entry into the United States of yellowfin tuna harvested by purse seine vessels in the ETP under certain conditions. If requested by the harvesting nation, the Assistant Administrator will determine whether to make an affirmative finding based upon documentary evidence provided by the Republic of the harvesting nation, the IATTC, or the Department of State.

The affirmative finding process requires that the harvesting nation is meeting its obligations under the IDCP and obligations of membership in the IATTC. Every 5 years, the Republic of the harvesting nation must request an affirmative finding and submit the required documentary evidence directly to the Assistant Administrator. On an annual basis, NMFS will review the affirmative finding and determine whether the harvesting nation continues to meet the requirements. A nation may provide information related to compliance with IDCP and IATTC measures directly to NMFS on an annual basis or may authorize the IATTC to release the information to NMFS to annually renew an affirmative

finding determination without an application from the harvesting nation.

An affirmative finding will be terminated, in consultation with the Secretary of State, if the Assistant Administrator determines that the requirements of 50 CFR 216.24(f) are no longer being met or that a nation is consistently failing to take enforcement actions on violations, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of the IDCP.

As a part of the affirmative finding process set forth in 50 CFR 216.24(f), the Assistant Administrator considered documentary evidence submitted by the Republic of Ecuador or obtained from the IATTC and the Department of State and has determined that Ecuador has met the MMPA's requirements to receive an annual affirmative finding renewal.

After consultation with the Department of State, the Assistant Administrator issued the Republic of Ecuador's annual affirmative finding renewal, allowing the continued importation into the United States of yellowfin tuna and products derived from yellowfin tuna harvested in the ETP by Ecuadorian-flag purse seine vessels or purse seine vessels operating under Ecuadorian jurisdiction. Ecuador's affirmative finding will remain valid through March 31, 2010, subject to subsequent annual reviews by NMFS.

Dated: April 10, 2006.

James W. Balsiger

*Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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