



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

Public Meeting on a Permit Application from Georgia Aquarium

Import of 18 beluga whales from
Russia into the United States for
Public Display

October 12, 2012

Welcome and Introductions

- P. Michael Payne, Chief, Permits and Conservation Division – Moderator
- Jennifer Skidmore, Biologist, Permits and Conservation Division

Meeting Logistics

- Registration Table
 - Sign In
 - Speaker Cards
 - Written Comments
- Order of Speakers based on assigned number
- Length of Comments
- Timekeeper
- Location of Microphones
- No Breaks
- Restrooms

Purpose of the Meeting

- Give the public the opportunity to provide oral comments on
 - the Georgia Aquarium application and
 - the associated draft environmental assessment
- Not a forum to engage in a debate regarding the application
- Will answer questions regarding the permit and NEPA processes
- Will not answer specific questions about the application or draft EA

Georgia Aquarium Application

- Requests authorization to import 18 beluga whales from the Utrish Marine Mammal Research Station in Russia to the United States for the purpose of public display
- Animals were previously captured from the Russian Sea of Okhotsk
- Animals would be imported and the legal responsibility of the Georgia Aquarium
- Some animals would be transported to other U.S. partner facilities under breeding loan agreements. These facilities include:
 - Sea World of Florida
 - Sea World of Texas
 - Sea World of California
 - Shedd Aquarium

Introduction to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)

- The MMPA prohibits the take or import of marine mammals; however,
 - There is an exemption for public display
 - Permits may be issued for wild capture or import
- Public Display Requirements
 - Maintains facilities open to the public on a regularly scheduled basis;
 - Offers a program of education or conservation based on professional standards; and
 - Is registered and holds an exhibitor's license issued by USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

MMPA Permit Process

Relevant MMPA Issuance Criteria (§ 216.34) :

- Proposed activity is humane and does not present any unnecessary risks to the health and welfare of marine mammals
- Proposed activity by itself or in combination with other activities, will not likely have a significant adverse impact on the species or stock
- The applicant has adequate:
 - expertise, facilities, and resources to accomplish the described objectives and activities
 - qualifications, facilities, and resources for the proper care and maintenance of the marine mammal
- Any requested import or export will not likely result in the taking of marine mammals beyond those authorized by the permit

MMPA Permit Process

Relevant MMPA Permit Restrictions (§ 216.35) :

- Original take and import must be conducted in a humane manner, and in compliance with the Acts and any applicable foreign law (and CITES)
- At the time of taking or import, marine mammals may not be
 - pregnant or lactating
 - unweaned or less than eight months oldunless specifically authorized in the permit
- Persons who require state or Federal licenses to conduct activities authorized under the permit must be duly licensed when undertaking such activities

NEPA Process

National Environmental Policy Act

- The purpose of NEPA is to:
 - Assess of the environmental effects of proposed federal actions prior to making decisions
- NEPA requires that NOAA Fisheries:
 - Consider the potential environmental consequences of their proposed actions;
 - Consider reasonable alternatives to those actions in their decision making processes to minimize those consequences; and
 - Provide opportunities for public involvement
- The Federal Action is the proposed issuance of a permit
- 2 Alternatives:
 - No Action: Deny application
 - Proposed Action: Issue permit with standard conditions

NEPA does not dictate the decision to be made by NOAA Fisheries

Public Comment

- The application and Environmental Assessment may be reviewed at:
http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/georgia_aquarium_belugas.htm
- Written comments may be turned in at the speaker sign-in desk
- Written comments may be submitted electronically at [regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov)
Docket Number: [NOAA-NMFS-2012-0158](https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NMFS-2012-0158)
- Comments can be viewed by the public on [regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov)
- The public comment period ends on **October 29, 2012**

Steps in Process

Submission of Application: June 15, 2012

Public Comment Period opened: August 30, 2012

Public Meeting: October 12, 2012

Public Comment Period closes: October 29, 2012

Next Steps:

A transcript of meeting will be posted on our website when available.

All comments will be reviewed and considered.

Substantive comments will be addressed.

EA will be revised as necessary and finalized.

Decision on the application will be made.

Oral Comments

This is your last chance to turn your 'speaker card' in at the speaker sign-in desk and get your speaker number.

- Look at your speaker number and be prepared to line up at a microphone when the current speaker number is 4 before your number
 - Odd numbers – left microphone
 - Even numbers – right microphone
- Signs and costumes are not allowed in the meeting room.
- No cheering, heckling, or other disruptions. Please be respectful of the speakers.
- The time limit for each speaker is: