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NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
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MEMORANDUM FOR: Eric C. Schwaab
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

Steven Murawski, Ph.D.
Chief Science Advisor for Fisheries

FROM: Ned Cyr, Ph.D.
Director
Office of Science and Technology

James Lecky
Director
Office of Protected Resources

Emily Menashes
Acting Director
Office of Sustainable Fisheries

James W. Balsiger, Ph.D
Regional Administrator
Alaska Regional Office

SUBJECT: Transfer of National Seabird Program to the Office of Science and Technology

This memorandum describes the National Seabird Program and the transfer of responsibilities for its coordination within NMFS headquarters from the Office of Protected Resources to the Office of Science and Technology (ST). This includes the operational, funding, and supervisory aspects of the Program. This memo reflects recommendations made by the Science Board, based on its consideration of the National Seabird Program and its future direction.

Background

NOAA's Fisheries Science Centers and Regional Offices have been working on a broad suite of seabird issues since the early 1980's. This work involves seabird bycatch monitoring and reporting, coordination with other Federal Agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey), addressing Endangered Species Act issues, and collaborative work (with industry and academia) to develop seabird bycatch reduction approaches. The need for

coordination and development of funding sources led to the establishment of a National Seabird Program (NSP) in 2001 by Dr. Hogarth.

The Program addresses NMFS's responsibilities to protect seabirds under the U.S. National Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (NPOA-Seabirds) and Executive Order 13186, "Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds." Dr. Hogarth appointed Kim Rivera (AKR) to serve as the NSP Coordinator under Laurie Allen, then working in the Assistant Administrator's office. When Ms. Allen moved to OPR as its Director, the National Seabird Program moved as well. Dr. Hogarth asked every Science Center, Regional and Headquarters office to designate one staff contact person to work with the National Coordinator.

Activities of the National Seabird Program (NSP)

Coordinator Position and the NSP Team: The NSP continues to be led by a Coordinator (0.5 FTE) and implemented regionally through seabird contacts at each Regional Office, Science Center, and Headquarters office. The Coordinator and the NSP Team also interact with other federal and state agencies, institutions, academia, and numerous stakeholders. Some of the key partnerships are with: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, NOAA Office of International Affairs, Department of State, Washington Sea Grant, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, and various international regional fishery management organizations.

NSP Funding: Before 2004, seabird actions by NMFS were solely funded through existing regional budgets, and were integrated into staffs' current workloads through re-adjustments of existing budgets.

The NSP received its first direct budget in FY 04 as a line item in NMFS's 'Reducing Bycatch' initiative to support needs and priorities identified through NMFS's National Bycatch Strategy. With the inclusion of the Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program (BREP) in the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) reauthorization in 2007, subsequent funding for the NSP was allocated through the BREP funding line item. The NSP is currently one of two 'permanent' allocations in the BREP funding and its budget is managed by the NSP Coordinator. The BREP has also encouraged that international seabird projects be funded through an internal competitive process of cooperation and assistance related to MSA's defined Protected Living Marine Resources as administered by the NMFS International Affairs (IA) office. In 2008, IA contributed some funding to seabird bycatch projects in Russia, Mexico, and Peru.

Since FY 04, the NSP has allocated modest amounts of funding totaling approximately $120K/year to NMFS regions and centers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to conduct projects consistent with the objectives of the NPOA-Seabirds. New mandates, such as those under the 2007 reauthorization of the MSA, have increased the requirements on the NSP over and above present funding levels (Table 1). The NSP recognized that the development of a National Seabird Strategic Plan could help identify NMFS priorities and target funding toward key seabird projects, and would generally elevate awareness regarding the value of seabirds and seabird research to agency leadership.

Table 1. Time course of total funds requested and received (consisting of Coordinator salary, travel, and proposals) by the National Seabird Program.

$K Amt	FY 04	FY 05	FY 06	FY 07	FY 08	FY 09	FY 10	% change since FY 04
Requested	227	253	409	564	564	443	na	>95%
Received	200	227	227	227	229	229	229	15%

Process for Allocating NSP Funds: 'Calls for proposals' are made annually by the NSP Coordinator to the NMFS regions and centers, and proposals are awarded via a simple process based on specified criteria that address NSP objectives. Annual funds have been fully disbursed since FY 04. Project awards are typically small (~$5,000 to $25,000), and are viewed as 'seed' money, encouraging matching funds by the regional budget. Project awards have also been made to non-government groups that engaged in work that met the selection criteria.

Types of Projects:

(A wide array of projects has been conducted using NSP funding.)

- Bycatch assessment and data analysis (AFSC, NEFSC, SEFSC)
- Development of seabird avoidance measures for fishing gear (AFSC, PIRO)
- Seabird data collection on existing NOAA platforms (SWFSC, NWFSC)
- Outreach and education—protected species workshops, seabird identification guides and materials for fishery observers and public (PIRO, NEFSC)

Workshop and Strategic Plan: In January 2009, the NSP Coordinator convened a steering committee to plan and host a National Seabird Workshop. This workshop was the first comprehensive planning exercise for the NSP. The Workshop was held in September 2009, and participants suggested the following major next steps for the National Seabird Program:

1. Create a NOAA report of this workshop;
2. Strengthen the presence of the NSP in headquarters by housing it in an office with which it shared closely aligned content and functions;
3. Create a National Seabird Strategic Plan; and
4. Participate in the FY 2013–2017 planning cycle with the intent of enhanced budget resources.

Science Board Recommendations

At its May 2010 quarterly meeting, the NMFS Science Board received a presentation on the current activities of the NSP and considered a recommendation that the program be transferred to the Office of Science and Technology's Assessment and Monitoring Division (ST4). The Science Board concurred with this recommendation, but required that the program's primary focus shall be on seabirds as ecological indicators, with a secondary focus on seabird bycatch. The Science Board also supported the development and implementation of a National Seabird Strategic Plan, to be coordinated through the Assessment and Monitoring Division.

This requirement for a focus on seabirds as ecological indicators applies to future growth of the NSP and is not intended to change the current focus of the NSP on seabird bycatch, as the current funding is tied to BREP funding. Current and historical funding for the NSP primarily has been dedicated to minimizing seabird interactions with fisheries and enhancing monitoring to detect seabird interactions, as well as implementing national and international seabird policies, many of which address seabird interactions. Although the NSP has been involved in science activities over the years, the NSP has provided a substantial amount of support for management and policy issues related to seabirds, and such management and policy activities (particularly permit and incidental take issues) should remain a focus of the NSP. Until additional funding is made available through budget increases or reprogramming for more ecosystem-related work on seabirds, the NSP will remain focused on bycatch issues. Even after additional funding is made available for ecosystem-related seabird activities, bycatch will continue to be a focus of the NSP.

Transfer of NSP from the Office of Protected Resources to the Office of Science and Technology

Rationale for transfer to ST: One of the recommendations from the NSP workshop in Seattle in September 2009 was to strengthen the headquarters presence and support of the NSP and seabird activities in general. Given that many of the NSP activities in the field occur at Science Centers and address scientific topics under the purview of ST (e.g. observer programs, ecosystem-based science, stock assessment and research surveys), ST is an obvious home for the NSP. Additionally, housing the program for seabirds, another taxa of protected species, at ST is consistent with the development of ST's Protected Species Science program. ST's lead role in the NMFS Ecosystem Science Team and its focus and involvement with budget and strategic planning processes of NMFS science also can provide a strong support base for current and ongoing activities of the NSP. Future growth in the NSP budget will be contingent on NMFS' programmatic science priorities.

Operations: The NSP will reside within the Office of Science and Technology's Assessment and Monitoring Division (ST4) with the coordinator position as a 0.5 FTE. The NSP Coordinator's duty station shall remain in the AKR office. The NSP Coordinator will meet monthly with the ST4 division chief via teleconference, and will keep designated staff apprised of all pertinent NSP activities. ST serves as the administrative home for the NSP.

The NSP Coordinator will work closely and regularly with a steering committee comprising representatives of the appropriate headquarters offices (e.g. SF, PR, IA, HC), the BREP National Coordinator, regional offices, and science centers to implement the NPOA-Seabirds, EO 13186, any other relevant statutes or agency policies, and ultimately a NMFS Seabird Strategic Plan. The purpose of the steering committee will be to ensure that the NSP priorities are consistent with the needs identified from the science centers and regional offices and that field staff are aware of priorities and developments from NMFS headquarters that pertain to the NSP.

Other duties of the NSP Coordinator include, but are not limited to:

- Administering and coordinating all aspects of the annual NSP budget and planning process with the BREP National Coordinator and ST;
- Coordinating with SF to implement seabird-related BREP activities as called for in the MSA Section 316(c);
- Inter-agency coordination with respect to the E.O. 13186 for the Conservation of Migratory Birds;
- Coordinating the development of a Memorandum of Understanding with USFWS as indicated in E.O. 13186;
- Participating and/or advising, in collaboration with IA, on seabird issues relating to Regional Fishery Management Organizations and other international issues involving seabirds;
- Participating as a member of the U.S. delegation to the Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and co-convening CCAMLR's Working Group on the Incidental Mortality Associated with Fishing (WG-IMAF);
- Participating and advising on a inter-agency team working on the possible accession of the United States to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP);
- Consulting as requested with regional offices, science centers, and headquarters offices on seabird issues; and
- Carrying out any other relevant seabird tasks or items as identified by NMFS headquarters.

Currently, the NSP Coordinator's other 0.5 FTE is as the Alaska Region Seabird Coordinator. These duties include:

- Coordination of information exchange between the Alaska Fisheries Science Center's (AFSC) Groundfish Observer Program, USFWS, and the Alaska Region office regarding seabird bycatch issues;
- Conducting necessary ESA section 7 consultations with the USFWS on the effects of the groundfish fisheries and the halibut fishery off Alaska on the short-tailed albatross;
- Monitoring and assuring NMFS's compliance with the current Biological Opinions for the groundfish fisheries and the halibut fishery;
- Working with AFSC to coordinate the preparation and implementation of a plan to investigate all options for monitoring the halibut fishery off Alaska for seabird bycatch; coordinating the continued education of the commercial fishing industry regarding the use of effective seabird avoidance measures, albatross identification, and ESA requirements pertaining to the short-tailed albatross;
- Assisting in the review of North Pacific Fishery Management Council and AKR's Sustainable Fisheries Division fishery management proposals to identify protected resources issues that warrant management considerations; and
- Assisting Sustainable Fisheries Division in the drafting and review of proposed and final regulations pertaining to requirements for seabird avoidance measures in the longline fisheries.

Funding: The move of the NSP from PR to ST will not alter the receipt or purpose of BREP (SF-based) funding that NSP has received to date. As in past years, the BREP-seabird allocation

will be transferred to AKR (duty station of the NSP Coordinator) for administration of NSP Coordinator salary, project expenditures, and travel. Both the salary and the project/travel portions of the budget will be transferred directly to AKR from SF. Details of the NSP project award process will be evaluated and streamlined to align with ST processes and protocols. The NSP will work through the planning and budget processes, as all other ST programs do, to request additional budget resources necessary to fulfill its Magnuson-Stevens Act and other requirements.

Reporting/supervision: The Coordinator will report on NSP activities directly to the ST4 division chief or his/her designee. The NSP element will continue to be a part of the Coordinator's performance plan (50%), and the Coordinator will continue to have one direct supervisor responsible for annual performance evaluations, AKR's PRD ARA, currently Ms. Kaja Brix. The AKR will continue to be responsible for all aspects of time and attendance. Ms. Brix will consult with and seek input from ST4 as to the Coordinator's performance of the NSP performance plan element, as well as development of this element in future performance plans.

Summary of Roles and Responsibilities in the National Seabird Program

NSP Coordinator: Lead NMFS's National Seabird Program, overseen by the Office of Science and Technology's Assessment and Monitoring Division Chief.

- Establish and coordinate NSP steering committee
- Coordinate development and implementation of national seabird strategic plan
- Coordinate development of funding proposals for NOAA strategic planning and budgeting process
- Coordinate annual budget and planning process, including development of selection priorities, proposal solicitation and review, project selection, and allocation of funds
- Represent NSP in intra- and inter-agency, regional, national, and international fora supporting both policy and science projects and priorities, as appropriate
- Coordinate with Office of Sustainable Fisheries' Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program Coordinator as required, including on spend plan and budget

Office of Science and Technology: Direct National Seabird Program and the activities of the NSP Coordinator.

- Review and approve products, documents, budget proposals, and decisions developed by NSP Coordinator, as appropriate and applicable
- Integrate NSP into protected species science program
- Incorporate funding for seabirds as ecological indicators in strategic and budget planning activities addressing ecosystem effects, as appropriate
- Provide feedback to the Alaska Regional Office's PR-ARA regarding the NSP Coordinator element component (50% of overall plan) and accomplishments for mid-term and end-of-year performance appraisal

Alaska Regional Office: Serve as formal supervisor and house the duty station of the NSP Coordinator.

- Develop NSP Coordinator's performance plan and conduct performance appraisals, incorporating input from the Office of Science and Technology on NSP coordination performance element
- Conduct administrative functions, such as monitoring and reporting time and attendance and managing travel of NSP Coordinator
- Execute NSP budget, including allocations of funds for projects funded under the NSP's proposal process

Office of Sustainable Fisheries: Continue work with the NSP Coordinator on bycatch-related seabird issues.

- Provide $229K through a permanent transfer from the Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program budget line to the Alaska Regional Office for half-time salary of NSP Coordinator and program support
- Coordinate with NSP Coordinator as required, including on spend plan and budget and seabird bycatch policy issues, to ensure consistency with MSA funding and policy priorities

cc: R. Lent – F/IA
K. Brix -- AKFSC
D. Detlor – F/ST
S. Brown – F/ST
K. Rivera – F/ST
L. Benaka – F/SF
D. Mecum – ARC
P. Hoffman – F/PR