

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: Fiscal Year 2014/2015 Atlantic Scallop Research Set-Aside

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-NEFSC-2014-2003822

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.454, Unallied Management Projects

Dates: Complete proposals/applications must be received on or before 5 p.m. EDT on Monday, December 2, 2013. Proposals received after the established deadline will be rejected and returned to the sender without consideration. For proposals submitted through Grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication will be the basis of determining timeliness. The proposal must be validated by Grants.gov in order to be considered timely. PLEASE NOTE: It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline.

For those without access to the Internet, one signed original and two hard copy applications must be postmarked or received by the established due date for the program at the following address: Cheryl A. Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, ATTN: 2014/2015 Atlantic Scallop Research Set-Aside Program. Use of U.S. mail or another delivery service must be documented with a receipt. (Note that late-arriving hard copy proposals provided to a delivery service on or before 5:00 p.m. on the closing date for applications will be accepted for review if the applicant can document that the proposal was provided to the guaranteed delivery service by the specified closing date and time and if the proposal is received by Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) no later than 5 p.m., two business days following the closing date.)

No facsimile or electronic mail proposals will be accepted. March 1, 2014, should be used as the proposed start date on proposals, unless otherwise directed by the Program Officer.

Funding Opportunity Description: NMFS, in coordination with the New England Fishery Management Council (Council), is soliciting Atlantic Sea Scallop (scallop) research proposals to utilize scallop Total Allowable Catch (TAC) that has been set-aside by the Council to fund scallop research endeavors through the 2014/2015 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program. No federal funds are provided for research under this notification. Rather, proceeds generated from the sale of RSA quota will be used to fund research activities and compensate vessels that participate in research activities and/or harvest set-aside quota.

Projects funded under the Scallop RSA Program must enhance the knowledge of the scallop fishery resource or contribute to the body of information on which scallop management decisions are made. Priority will be given to scallop research proposals that investigate research priorities identified by the Council, which are detailed under the Program Priorities section of this announcement.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The Scallop RSA Program was established through the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to address scallop research priorities identified by the Council. NMFS, in coordination with the Council, is soliciting proposals for scallop research to be conducted under the 2014/2015 Atlantic Sea Scallop RSA Program. Set-aside quota will be awarded to successful applicants.

B. Program Priorities

Projects funded under the Atlantic Sea Scallop RSA Program must enhance the understanding of the scallop resource or contribute to scallop fishery management decisions. Priority is given to funding research proposals addressing the following topics:

2014/2015 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Priorities

HIGHEST (not listed in order of importance):

1. An intensive industry-based survey of each of the relevant scallop access areas (Closed Area I, Closed Area II, Nantucket Lightship, Delmarva, and Hudson Canyon). The primary objective of these surveys would be to estimate total allowable catches (TACs) under the rotational area management program if the data from these surveys are available by August of the prior fishing year. Areas scheduled to be open in the following fishing year generally have a higher priority than other areas.

2. Identification and evaluation of methods to reduce the impact of the scallop fishery with respect to bycatch. This would include projects that determine seasonal bycatch rates, characterize spatial and temporal distribution patterns as well as, the associated discard mortality rates of yellowtail flounder, and other key bycatch species.

3. An intensive industry-based survey of areas that may be candidate access areas in the future (i.e., open areas with high scallop recruitment or closed areas that may open to fishing in the future, such as groundfish mortality closed areas or current habitat closed areas).

4. Broad, resource wide industry-based survey of entire scallop resource area.

MEDIUM (not listed in order of importance):

5. Other resource surveys to expand and/or enhance survey coverage in areas that have the potential to be important resource areas, but which currently have a lack of comprehensive survey coverage.

6. Research to support the investigation of loggerhead turtle behavior in the

Mid-Atlantic (via satellite tagging or other means) to understand their seasonal movements, vertical habitat utilization, and how and where interactions with dredge gear are occurring. This priority topic also includes monitoring of scallop dredge and trawl operations, and the development of further gear modifications if monitoring should indicate current designs are not eliminating the threat or harm to sea turtles or are resulting in unacceptable scallop catch loss.

7. Research aimed at describing the occurrence as well as understanding the mechanisms of processes that affect scallop product quality and marketability (i.e., scallops with grey meats or evidence of disease). Research should also include evaluation of the potential magnitude of impacts on scallop mortality from scallops due to quality issues.

8. Research examining whether chemicals, water quality, and other environmental stressors effect reproduction and growth of scallops (i.e., jet fuel, pesticides, ocean acidification, etc.).

9. Studies aimed at evaluation of the mortality of sea scallops from predation (i.e. starfish, dogfish, etc.).

10. Studies aimed at addressing issues that were identified as research priorities in the 2010 50th Stock Assessment Workshop including incidental gear mortality, discard mortality, and seasonal growth of scallops.

10a. Development of a procedure to fit discarded scallops, which have a different length frequency from the rest of the population, into the assessment model.

10b. Evaluation of the effect of the four-inch rings on incidental mortality. Now that a larger fraction of small scallops are traveling through the mesh, examine whether incidental mortality has increased or are the scallops relatively unaffected.

10c. Exploration and evaluation of various methods to express the variation in the Habitat Camera (HabCam) abundance data.

10d. Examination of historical patterns of the “whole stock,” including the manner in which the spatial patterns of scallops and the fishery have changed over time.

10e. Estimate incidental mortality by running HabCam or an Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV) along dredge tracks

10f. Calculation of stock-recruit relationships for various sub-sections of the stock, smaller areas than just Mid-Atlantic Bight (MAB) and George’s Bank (GBK) to look for possible patterns or relationships.

10g. Further refinement of the estimate of the extent of scallop habitat relative to that of the survey.

10h. Age archived scallop shells from the 1980s and 1990s.

10i. Continue to look at patterns of seasonality in weight of the meats and gonads, and timing of spawning.

OTHER PRIORITIES (not listed in order of importance):

Other scallop biology projects, including studies aimed at understanding recruitment processes (reproduction, larval and early post-settlement stages), growth, and natural mortality (including predation and disease).

11. Investigation of variability in dredging efficiency across habitats, times, areas, and gear designs to allow for more accurate quantitative estimates of scallop dredge impacts on the seabed and development of practicable methods to minimize or mitigate those impacts.

12. Habitat characterization research including (but not limited to): video and/or photo transects of the bottom within scallop access areas, closed scallop areas, and in comparable fished areas that are both subject and not subject to scallop fishing before and after scallop fishing commences (BACI or before after control impact dredge impact studies); identification of nursery and over-wintering habitats of species that are vulnerable to habitat alteration by scallop fishing; and other research that relates to habitats affected by scallop fishing, including, but not limited to, long-term or chronic effects of scallop fishing on marine resource productivity, other ecosystem effects, habitat recovery potential, and fine scale fishing effort in relation to fine scale habitat distribution. In particular, projects that directly support evaluation of present and candidate EFH closures to assess whether these areas are accomplishing their stated purposes and to assist better definition of the complex ecosystem processes that occur in these areas.

13. Scallop and area management research, including but not limited to: evaluation of ways to control predation on scallops; research to actively manage spat collection and seeding of sea scallops; social and economic impacts and consequences of closing areas to enhance productivity and improve yield of sea scallops and other species; and estimation of factors affecting fishing power for each limited access vessel.

14. Develop methodologies or alternative ways for the scallop fleet to collect and analyze catch and bycatch data on a near real-time basis (i.e., collection of scallop meat weight and quality data, specific bycatch information, etc. Potential ideas include but are not limited to: concepts like a “Study Fleet”, electronic monitoring, dockside monitors, bag tags, etc.).

C. Program Authority

Statutory authority for this program is provided under sections 303(b)(11), 402(e), and 404(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. 1853(b)(11), 16 U.S.C. 1881a(e), and 16 U.S.C. 1881(c), respectively. The Scallop RSA Program is established through the Scallop FMP (69 FR 35193, June 23, 2004) and implementing regulations at 50 CFR 648.56.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

No federal funds are provided for research under this notification. Rather, funds generated from the sale of landed scallop RSA quota shall be used to cover the cost of research activities, including vessel costs. The Federal Government is not liable for any costs incurred by the researcher or vessel owner should the sale of set-aside quota not fully reimburse the researcher or vessel owner for their expenses. Any additional funds generated through the sale of set-aside landings, above the cost of the research activities, shall be retained by the vessel owner as compensation for the use of his/her vessel.

Amendment 15 to the FMP made several program adjustments that changed how RSA quota is awarded and harvested. RSA TAC is now a set amount of 1.25 million pounds per scallop fishing year. The RSA program was designed to correspond with the biennial framework quota specification cycle, therefore, in 2013, the Federal Funding Opportunity was for 2013/2014 projects. NMFS awarded 37,415 pounds of scallops from the 2014 set-aside. Consequently, under this solicitation there are 1,212,585 pounds available from the 2014 RSA TAC, and 1.25 million pounds available from the 2015 RSA TAC.

All scallop RSA quota awards will be made in pounds of scallops, and will not be associated with a specific fishing area or days-at-sea allocation. RSA quota may be harvested from any area that is open to the scallop fishery (i.e., open access areas and open areas). Applicants should be aware that yellowtail flounder bycatch in the scallop fishery may restrict the harvest of RSA quota in certain times and areas.

In the event that the entire scallop RSA TAC is not fully expended, NMFS may award unused RSA quota to compensate projects due to low scallop prices or to expand a project within its original topic area. In such an instance, a separate notification from the NEFSC Grants Program Office will be made to the applicants of the awarded RSA projects. The notification will explain the process and results will be posted on the NMFS Northeast Cooperative Research website (www.nefsc.noaa.gov/coopresearch).

To apply for set-aside quota, applicants must submit a budget that is based solely on monetary needs, which includes funds necessary to execute the research plan and funds necessary to compensate vessel owners harvesting set-aside quota. Upon project selection, NMFS will negotiate with successful applicants on the specific RSA quota award. Priority will be given primarily to the higher technically ranked proposal, although additional factors such as management relevance, individual project needs, and cost effectiveness may be considered during negotiations. NMFS will establish a common scallop price estimate, based on the best and most recent data available at the time of negotiations, to determine the amount of set-aside necessary to cover research and compensation fishing expenses.

B. Project/Award Period

Proposals may be submitted for research activities that encompass all or part of the 2014 and 2015 scallop fishing years.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a grant or cooperative agreement depending upon the amount of collaboration, participation, or involvement by NOAA in the management of the project. Examples of substantial involvement may include but are not limited to, proposals for collaboration between NOAA scientists and a recipient scientist. Funding for contractual arrangements for services or products for delivery to NOAA is not available under this notice.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

1. Eligible applicants include, but are not limited to, institutions of higher education, hospitals, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, state, local, and Native American tribal governments, Federal agencies and institutions are not eligible to receive Federal assistance under this notice. Additionally, employees of any Federal agency or Regional Fishery Management (RFM) Council are ineligible to submit an application under this program. However, RFM Council members who are not Federal employees may submit an application.

2. DOC/NOAA supports cultural and gender diversity and encourages women and minority individuals and groups to submit applications to the RSA program. In addition, DOC/NOAA is strongly committed to broadening the participation of historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges, and universities, and institutions that work in underserved areas. DOC/NOAA encourages proposals involving any of the above institutions.

3. DOC/NOAA encourages applications from members of the fishing community and applications that involve fishing community cooperation and participation.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

None Required

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

1. Research proposals submitted under the 2014/2015 Atlantic Sea Scallop RSA Program must be received within the application submission period to be eligible for consideration.

2. Proposals for different and distinct projects must be submitted separately in accordance with the format requirements in Section IV.B. Multiple stand-alone projects in the same proposal will not be accepted.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application information is available at <http://www.grants.gov>. Electronic copies of the Standard Forms for submission of research proposals may be found on the Internet in a PDF (Portable Document Format) version at <http://www.ago.noaa.gov/acquisition/standard.html>. Delays may be experienced when registering with grants.gov near the end of a solicitation period. Therefore, NOAA strongly recommends that you do not wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through grants.gov. Applicants without Internet access may contact Cheryl Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, by phone 508-495-2070, fax 508-495-2004, or email cheryl.corbett@noaa.gov. To apply for this NOAA Federal Funding Opportunity, go to <http://www.grants.gov>, and use the following funding opportunity #: NOAA-NMFS-NEFSC-2014-2003822.

B. Content and Form of Application

Should a recipient wish to include a coversheet with his/her proposal, the coversheet should summarize key information already contained in detail within the proposal. Such information might include, for example, the program name, date, applicant name, project title, project duration, principal investigator(s), program priorities addressed, and funds requested broken down by research, compensation, and total value.

Applications must adhere to the provision under "Applications" and the seven requirements under "Required Elements" and must be submitted by the stated deadline. Failure to follow these provisions will result in proposals being returned to the applicant without review.

1. Applications

a. Applications submitted to the 2014 Scallop RSA Program must include a Standard Form 424 (Application for Federal Assistance), including a detailed budget using Standard Form 424A, (Budget Information--Non-Construction Programs), Standard Form 424B (Assurances--Non-Construction Programs), Commerce Department Form CD-511, (Certification Regarding Lobbying), and if applicable, Standard Form SF-LLL (Disclosure of Lobbying Activities). These forms are available at <http://www.ago.noaa.gov/acquisition/standard.html>. These forms should be submitted through the www.grants.gov website. Applicants submitting hard copy must include one signed original and two signed unbound copies of the application (including supporting information).

b. The Standard Form SF424 must include the estimated monetary value of the entire project, including costs of compensation fishing and research project costs. This value must be recorded under item 18. Estimated Funding (e) "Other" on the SF424.

c. The Standard Form SF424A must report the total value under "Non-Federal."

d. Applicants must identify the specific research priority or priorities to which they are responding. If the proposal addresses more than one priority, it should list the priority that most closely reflects the objectives of the proposal first. Each application must address only one research investigation. If an application does not fulfill a priority category, it must be clearly stated in the application. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NMFS as to the relative merits of the project described in the application.

2. Required Elements

Proposals should be limited to 12 pages, excluding item "e" below. The format may vary, but must include:

a. A narrative project description to include project goals, and objectives. Funding objectives should be simple and understandable; as specific and quantitative as possible; clear as to the "what and when," but avoiding the "how and why;" and attainable within the time, funding, and resources available. Proposals should be accomplishment oriented and identify specific performance measures, describing how investigators foresee research results being used in the management and/or science arena to enhance the understanding of the scallop resource or contributing to the body of information on which management decisions are made (see Section I.B.). The main body of the narrative should be a clear statement of the work to be undertaken and include: (1) Project design and management, including who is responsible, expected products, and participants other than applicant; (2) project year, or years, including the duration (starting on the first day of the month and ending on the last day of the month); (3) names and affiliations of the principal investigator(s) (PI); (4) contribution and relevance of the proposed work; and (5) a summary of the existing state of knowledge related to the project;

b. A detailed budget, including a description of the funds needed to execute the research plan and compensate vessels that harvest set-aside quota. The budget must include a breakdown of research costs including labor, vessel contracts, equipment, supplies, and overhead, as applicable. The proposal must state how the proceeds from the sale of compensation fishing activities, including those derived from incidental catch, will be divided between the vessel and applicant. Proposals must provide a description of the safeguards that will be used to ensure that the TAC set-aside will not be exceeded;

c. A list of any federal regulations that the applicant needs to have waived and a brief justification for such a waiver;

d. Each proposal must identify the activities for the vessel(s) participating in the project, including research and compensation fishing activities. All vessel(s) selected by the applicant to participate in the study should be listed in the proposal, if possible;

e. Supporting documents, including resumes, letters of intent for vessels to

participate in research activities, and any relevant contracts; and

f. As part of this application process, questions from The Environmental Compliance Questionnaire for NOAA Federal Financial Assistance Applicants, OMB Approval Number 0648-0538, must be answered and submitted with the application. These questions include: A1-A3, A11, A12, B1, C1, D1-D3, E1, E4, F1-F3, F10-F13, H1-H24, H26, H27-H31. This form is located at <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov>. Failure to complete all of the indicated questions with current and relevant information will result in the application being considered incomplete.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Complete proposals/applications must be received on or before 5 p.m. EDT on Monday, December 2, 2013. Proposals received after the established deadline will be rejected and returned to the sender without consideration. For proposals submitted through Grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication will be the basis of determining timeliness. The proposal must be validated by Grants.gov in order to be considered timely. PLEASE NOTE: It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline. For those without access to the Internet, one signed original and two hard copy applications must be postmarked or received by the established due date for the program at the following address: Cheryl A. Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, ATTN: 2014/2015 Atlantic Scallop Research Set-Aside Program. Use of U.S. mail or another delivery service must be documented with a receipt. (Note that late-arriving hard copy proposals provided to a delivery service on or before 5:00 p.m. on the closing date for applications will be accepted for review if the applicant can document that the proposal was provided to the guaranteed delivery service by the specified closing date and time and if the proposal is received by NEFSC no later than 5 p.m., two business days following the closing date.)

No facsimile or electronic mail proposals will be accepted.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applicants will need to determine if their State participates in the intergovernmental review process. This information can be found at the following website: www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc. This information will assist applicants in providing either a Yes or No response to Item 16 of the Application Form, SF-424, entitled "Application for Federal Assistance."

E. Funding Restrictions

1. The research project period may encompass all or part of the 2014 and/or 2015 scallop fishing years (March 1, 2014 – February 28, 2015, and March 1, 2015 – February 29, 2016, respectively). Proposals to fund research started before final approval of the project for TAC set-aside awards are eligible for consideration, but any project expense incurred prior to the final determination is done solely at the researcher's risk.

2. Set-aside quota may only occur from open areas and open access areas. The Council is developing Framework 25, which would supersede the default Framework 24 access area schedule once implemented. Consequently, it is likely that the current access area schedule will change.

3. Set-aside quota awarded under this competition must be harvested by the end of May 2015 or 2016, as determined by the fishing year from which the award was derived, at which point all compensation fishing must cease, regardless if a portion of the set-aside has not been harvested. For example, 2014 set aside quota must be harvested by May 31, 2015.

4. The Federal Government shall not be liable for any costs incurred in connection by any applicant to this announcement or any proposed or selected application or project. Any additional funds, generated through the sale of the fish harvested under the research quota, above the cost of the research activities, shall be retained by the vessel owner as compensation for use of his/her vessel.

F. Other Submission Requirements

1. Applications should be submitted through www.grants.gov. If an applicant does not have Internet access, hard copies should be sent to NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA, 02543. Mark proposals "Attention—2014/2015 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside Program."

2. NOAA employees (whether full-time, part-time, or intermittent) are not permitted to assist in the preparation of an application, except that staff may provide information on program goals, funding priorities, application procedures, and completion of application forms. Because this is a competitive program, NMFS and NOAA employees will not provide assistance in conceptualizing, developing, or structuring proposals, or write letters of support for an application. However, the Council or NMFS contact person may provide assistance to researchers who are seeking vessels to participate in the collection of set-aside species or directly in research projects. NMFS, in consultation with the Council, may decide to hold a meeting with the public to discuss general topics concerning past RSA program accomplishments and ways to enhance communications on funding priorities and associated potential study methods. Such meetings will be publicized by NMFS through a Federal Register notice, and through the public mailing list maintained by the Council office, and through NOAA Cooperative Research website: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/coopresearch/>.

3. NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals that are seeking NOAA federal assistance opportunities, including special fishing privileges. The TAC set-asides were considered under the Environmental Impact Statement for Amendment 15, and are further being evaluated under Frameworks 24 and 25. Applications that propose research and/or compensation fishing that is not within the scope of the NEPA analysis for Amendment 15 and Frameworks 24 or 25

may require the applicant to provide additional information that will serve as the basis for any further analyses.

4. Permits and Approvals

a. If field research will occur in state or federal waters, investigators must secure the appropriate vessel documentation, as determined by the Northeast Regional Office, Sustainable Fisheries Division. Such documentation may include a Letter of Acknowledgment, Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP), Exempted Educational Activity Authorization, or Temporary Possession Letter of Authorization. Investigators will be notified if there is no required or recommended research specific vessel documentation. In order to assist NMFS in determining whether or not the proposed research would require a permit, researchers should briefly address the following:

i. Location and Time of Year - Specify time of year and areas where research will occur (e.g., coordinates, 10-minute squares, closed areas; include map if possible);

ii. Gear Type - Specify type(s) of gear, including mesh size or gear modification (trawl; pot; gillnet; dredge; acoustic gear, including frequency and amplitude);

iii. Effort - Specify the number of vessels, number of tows, length of tows, number of pots, set duration of tended gear, sampling frequency, etc.;

iv. Catch - Specify the anticipated species composition and amount (directed catch and bycatch);

c. If an exemption from Federal regulations is proposed, include a list of the specific regulations, along with a brief justification, for each regulation that needs to be waived. Should the applicant submit a request for an EFP to NMFS, the completed application should be received by NMFS at least 45 days before the requested start date of the proposed research. NMFS may not exempt a vessel from any requirement imposed by any state. Therefore, applicants are urged to discuss with state fisheries agencies any proposed landings in their state(s), and must obtain any additional permits that may be required by such state(s).

d. Successful applicants must obtain compensation fishing permits from NMFS prior to initiating compensation fishing. NMFS will issue letters of authorization to federally permitted scallop vessels as identified by the Project Coordinator, thereby authorizing such vessels to take compensation fishing trips.

e. Projects may not have more than 50 vessels authorized to conduct

compensation fishing at any given time, unless sufficient rationale can demonstrate that more than 50 vessels are needed. In addition, principal investigators and project coordinators should be aware that it may take NMFS up to 4 weeks to process requests to revise the list of vessels that are authorized to conduct compensation fishing.

f. Amendment 15 established a list of scallop management measures from which vessels that are conducting research funded by the scallop RSA program could be exempted via a letter of authorization. These management measures include crew restrictions, seasonal closures in access areas, and the requirement to return to port if fishing in more than one area. The review and issuance of these permits would not entail additional environmental review or public comment beyond that which was conducted for Amendment 15. These authorizations would apply only to dedicated research activities, and would not be available to vessels harvesting scallops for sale.

g. Successful applicants will be required to submit project results in electronic form in accordance with data collection protocols of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) and/or other data base formats as may be required by NMFS.

To apply, please go to <http://www.grants.gov>, and use the following Federal Funding Opportunity # NOAA-NMFS-NEFSC-2014-2003822. Applicants without Internet access may contact Cheryl Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, phone 508-495-2070, fax 508-495-2004, or email cheryl.corbett@noaa.gov.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

NMFS will solicit written technical evaluations from three or more appropriate private and public sector experts to determine the technical merit of the proposal and to provide a rank score of the project based on the criteria set forth below:

1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of the proposed project: This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities. Provide a clear definition of the problem, need, issue, or hypothesis to be addressed. The proposal should describe its relevance to RSA program priorities and detail how the data gathered from the research will be used to enhance the understanding of the fishery resource or contribute to the body of information on which management decisions are made. If not directly related to priorities listed in this solicitation, provide justification why the proposed project should be considered. (25 points)

2. Technical/scientific merit: This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether

there are clear project goals and objectives. Special emphasis will be given to proposals that foster and improve cooperative interactions with NMFS. A clear definition of the approach to be used including description of field work, theoretical studies, and laboratory analysis to support the proposed research in the area and time proposed is important. The time frame for utilizing research DAS and conducting the proposed research should be clearly specified. Activities that take place over a wider versus narrower geographical range, where appropriate, are preferred. (25 points)

3. Overall qualifications of the project: This criterion assesses whether the applicant, and team members, possess the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. This includes demonstration of support, cooperation and/or collaboration with the fishing industry, and qualifications/experience of project participants. Where appropriate, combined proposals involving multiple principal investigators are preferred versus separate stand-alone proposals on related projects. For proposals involving multiple vessels, special attention will be given to specification of safeguards to ensure that the authorized set-aside will not be exceeded. (15 points)

4. Project costs: This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. Cost-effectiveness of the project is considered. (25 points)

5. Outreach and education: This criterion assesses whether the project involves a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. This includes identification of anticipated benefits, potential users, likelihood of success, and methods of disseminating results. Where appropriate, data generated from the research must be formatted in a manner consistent with NMFS and ACCSP databases. A copy of this format is available from NMFS. (10 points)

B. Review and Selection Process

Following completion of the technical evaluation as described above, NMFS will convene a management review panel, including Council members and technical experts, to review and individually critique the scored proposals to enhance NOAA's understanding of the proposals as they relate to the program priorities enumerated in Section I.B. above. Initial successful applicants may be required, in consultation with NMFS, to further refine/modify the study methodology as a condition of project approval. No consensus recommendations will be made by the management review panel.

C. Selection Factors

The program officer will make recommendations to the Selecting Official based on technical ranking and management reviews. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank technical order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

1. Availability of RSA quota allocation.

2. Balance/distribution of RSA quota:
 - a. Geographically
 - b. By type of institutions
 - c. By type of partners
 - d. By research areas
 - e. By project types
3. Whether this project duplicates other projects currently supported or being considered for support by other NOAA offices.
4. Program priorities and policy factors.
5. Applicant's prior award performance.
6. Partnerships and/or Participation of targeted groups.
7. Adequacy of information necessary to conduct a NEPA analysis and determination.

Key program policy factors (see 4 above) to be considered by the Selecting Official are: (1) The time of year the research activities are to be conducted; (2) the ability of the proposal to meet the applicable experimental fishing requirements; (3) redundancy of research projects; and (4) logistical concerns. Therefore, the highest scoring projects may not necessarily be selected for an award. All approved research must be conducted in accordance with provisions approved by NOAA. Unsuccessful applications will be returned to the submitter. Successful applications will be incorporated into the award document.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Review of proposals will occur during the 3 months following the date given in this announcement that the proposals are due to NMFS. Initiation of approved RSA project activities should begin during the spring of 2014 for most projects. March 1, 2014, should be used as the proposed start date on proposals, unless otherwise directed by the Program Officer.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that their applications have been recommended for selection to the NOAA Grants Management Division. This notification is not authorization to begin project operations. An official notification of selection, signed by the NOAA Grants Officer, is the authorizing document that grants the set aside award and allows compensation fishing to begin. These notifications will be issued via email to the Authorizing Official and the Principal

Investigator of the project. Successful and unsuccessful applicants will be notified either electronically, or in written hardcopy.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. The DOC Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements are set forth in the Federal Register notice of December 17, 2012 (77FR 74634) and are applicable to this solicitation. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-12-17/pdf/2012-30228.pdf>.

Applicants should furnish sufficient information to assist proposal reviewers in assessing the potential environmental consequences of supporting the project. NOAA National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) staff must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by NEPA, for applicant projects or proposals that are seeking NOAA federal assistance opportunities, including special fishing privileges. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following websites: www.nepa.noaa.gov, www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6.pdf, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/ceq_regulations/regulations.html. Consequently, applicants are required to provide, under the description of program activities, detailed information on the activities to be conducted. This shall include locations, sites, species and potentially effected habitat, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns which may exist (e.g. the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems, etc.). Applicants may be requested to assist NOAA in drafting an Environmental Assessment if it is determined such an assessment is required.

Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts associated with their proposed research activities. Failure to do so shall be grounds for rejecting an application. In some cases, if additional information is required after an application is selected, set-aside quota can be withheld by the NOAA Grants Officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment on any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

C. Reporting

1. Recipients will be required to submit the following financial and performance (technical) reports. These are to be submitted electronically through the Grants online system. Hard copy submissions will be accepted only if the recipient does not have Internet access. A final Financial Status Reports (SF-425) is required to be submitted to the Grants Officer no later than 90 days after the award expiration.

a. The SF425 must report \$0.00 on every line item and the comment section should read: "This is an RSA grant award which has no federal dollars associated

with it. The final accounting information will be submitted with the final report.”

2. Performance or progress reports are required to be submitted to the NOAA Program Officer semi-annually. These reports will be due no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of an award. The final report is due no later than 90 days after the award expiration. The format of the final report may vary, but the report must contain:

- a. A brief summary of the completion report (200-word or less abstract);
- b. A description of the issue/problem that was addressed;
- c. A detailed description of methods of data collection and analyses;
- d. A discussion of results and any relevant conclusions presented in a format that is understandable to a non-technical audience. This should include benefits and/or contributions to management decision-making;
- e. A list of entities, firms, or organizations that actually performed the work, and a description of how the work was accomplished;
- f. A detailed accounting of the following items is required: All fish caught during compensation fishing and research (including catch by vessels operating under a Letter of Acknowledgment), fish landed, fish sold, and, if applicable, the disbursement of any additional funds generated through the sale of set-aside landings above the costs of the research activities; and
- g. Data from research projects must be submitted in electronic format with appropriate documentation to NMFS, as requested.

3. Vessels operating under an Exempted Fishing Permit or conducting compensation fishing must report each trip to NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in accordance with the vessel monitoring system or Interactive Voice Response system instructions provided by NMFS. Non-compliance with this reporting requirement could be cause for not awarding future NOAA projects.

VII. Agency Contacts

Information may be obtained from Deirdre Boelke, New England Fishery Management Council, phone (978) 465-0492, fax (978) 465-3116, or email dboelke@nefmc.org, or from Cheryl Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, phone 508-495-2070, fax 508-495-2004, or email cheryl.corbett@noaa.gov

for grant related questions, or from Ryan Silva, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, phone (978) 281-9326, fax (978) 281-9135, or email ryan.silva@noaa.gov for compensation fishing/regulatory questions.

VIII. Other Information

Limitation of Liability

In no event shall NOAA or DOC be responsible for application/proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or to provide special fishing privileges. Recipients and subrecipients (subcontractors) are subject to all Federal laws and agency policies, regulations, and procedures application to Federal financial assistance awards.

Freedom of Information Act

DOC regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, "Public Information," which sets forth rules for DOC to make requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the Act. Applications submitted in response to this Federal Funding Opportunity may be subject to requests for release under FOIA. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information which is exempt from disclosure under FOIA, the applicant should identify and bracket such information or data, marking it as "Privileged, Confidential, Commercial, or Financial Information- Limited Use." Based on these markings, the confidentiality of the contents of those pages will be maintained to the extent permitted by law.

The Data/Information Sharing Plan

Environmental data and information, collected and/or created under NOAA grants/cooperative agreements must be made visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users, free of charge or at minimal cost, in a timely manner (typically no later than two (2) years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy or by security requirements.

1. Unless otherwise noted in this federal funding announcement, a Data/Information Sharing Plan of no more than two pages shall be required as part of the Project Narrative. A typical plan may include the types of environmental data and information to be created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; procedures for providing access, data, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. The Data/Information Sharing Plan will be reviewed as part of the NOAA Standard Evaluation Criteria, Item 1 -- Importance and/or Relevance and Applicability of Proposed Project to the Mission Goals.

2. The Data/Information Sharing Plan (and any subsequent revisions or updates)

will be made publicly available at time of award and, thereafter, will be posted with the published data.

3. Failing to share environmental data and information in accordance with the submitted Data/Information Sharing Plan may lead to disallowed costs and be considered by NOAA when making future award decisions.