the following Amendments to the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP: Draft Amendment 6 on the future of shark fishery, providing updates on Amendment 5b on dusky shark management and Amendment 9 on smoothhound shark management and ongoing stock assessment, reviewing Final Amendment 7 on bluefin tuna management measures, as well as discussing the HMS Essential Fish Habitat 5-Year Review. The meeting will also include discussion of the Electronic Technologies Implementation Plan for Atlantic HMS, implementation of 2014 ICCAT recommendations, and updates on the Atlantic HMS Management-Based Research Priorities document and other research activities, among other updates.

Additional information on the meeting and a copy of the draft agenda will be posted prior to the meeting at: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/advisory_panels/hms_ap/meetings/ap_meetings.html.

Special Accommodations
This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Peter Cooper at (301) 427–8503 at least 7 days prior to the meeting.

Alan D. Risenhoover,
Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
Caribbean Fishery Management Council, 270 Muñoz Rivera Avenue, Suite 401, San Juan, Puerto Rico 00918–1903, telephone: (787) 766–5926.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Caribbean Fishery Management Council is considering establishing federal permits for fishing in the U.S. Caribbean exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and is conducting scoping meetings to obtain public comments regarding this matter.

Background
A permitting system provides a comprehensive method to achieve this goal. Permitting supports professionalization of individual fisheries, identifying and acknowledging those fishers dedicated to and reliant upon a specific component of the commercial fishery. Permits also allow for direct communication with fishing entities, enabling focused outreach and education opportunities.

A permitting system allows fishery scientists and managers to gather more accurate data, decreasing both scientific and management uncertainty. Scientific uncertainty can be mitigated to some degree by increasing knowledge of the fishery and the health of the fish populations that support that fishery. A permit system that identifies the universe of fishers operating within a fishing sector and allows tracking of the disposition and characteristics of harvested resources would substantially enhance knowledge of the fishery. Data derived from a comprehensive permit system would also contribute to reducing management uncertainty by providing better estimates of harvesting effort and the timing of harvest, thereby improving management design and responsiveness. More accurate and reliable catch data allows for more informed management.

The absence of a federal permit system, or mandatory federal reporting requirements, has been identified as a major contributor to the lack of fishing effort information in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ. A permitting system would allow better estimates for measuring fishing effort for the Council-managed fisheries while shedding light on the effectiveness of regulations implemented to manage that effort.

Some of the needs and issues that a permitting system could address in the EEZ:
1. Provide accurate and timely data on landings.
2. Allow estimation of catch per unit of fishing effort.
3. Identify spatial and temporal trends in effort, including the relative importance of fishing to individual communities.
4. Manage competing interests for the resource.
5. Identify trends in the health of targeted fish stocks.
6. Quantify the socioeconomic importance of permitted fishing sectors and mitigate negative impacts of management to fishing communities.
7. Provide permitted fishers with a better understanding of their fishery and the opportunities and implications of management to that fishery.

There are many aspects to implementing fishing permits in the U.S. Caribbean exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and many options regarding the design of a permit system. Options for developing and designing a permit system include, but are not limited to:
1. Require commercial fishers to obtain a federal permit to fish in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
2. Require commercial fishers to obtain a commercial fishing license from either Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) to fish in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
3. Require commercial fishers to obtain a federal permit or a commercial fishing license from either Puerto Rico or the USVI to fish in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
4. Require a species/group/ fishery-specific permit in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
5. Require a gear-specific permit in the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
6. Require a dealer permit to purchase fish harvested from the U.S. Caribbean EEZ;
Summary of Request

On April 9, 2014, NMFS received an application from WETA for the taking of marine mammals incidental to the construction of a Central Bay Operations and Maintenance Facility (Project). The purpose of the Project is to serve as the central San Francisco Bay (Bay) base for WETA’s ferry fleet. After NMFS provided comments on the draft IHA application, WETA submitted a revised IHA application on May 15, 2014. NMFS determined that the application was adequate and complete on July 31, 2014. No changes were made for the proposed WETA’s construction Project as described in the proposed IHA except the Project duration was changed to December 1, 2015, through November 30, 2016, from the original June 15 through October 15, 2014, due to funding and other constraints. Please refer to Federal Register notice for the proposed IHA for a detailed description of the project activities.

Comments and Responses

A notice of NMFS’ proposal to issue an IHA to WETA was published in the Federal Register on September 17, 2014 (79 FR 55479). That notice described, in detail, WETA’s activity, the marine mammal species that may be affected by the activity, and the anticipated effects on marine mammals. During the 30-day public comment period, NMFS received comments from the Marine Mammal Commission (Commission), the Sierra Club, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), and 40 private citizens.

All comments specific to WETA’s application that address the statutory and regulatory requirements or findings NMFS must make to issue an IHA are addressed in this section of the Federal Register notice.

Comment 1: The Commission recommends NMFS issue the IHA to WETA, subject to inclusion of the proposed mitigation and monitoring measures described in the proposed IHA. In addition, the Commission recommends that NMFS only authorize in-season adjustments in the sizes of the exclusion and/or disturbance zones (zones of influence) if the size(s) of the estimated zones are determined to be too small.