

**SUPPORTING STATEMENT**  
**SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH, EXEMPTED FISHING, AND EXEMPTED EDUCATIONAL**  
**ACTIVITY SUBMISSIONS**  
**OMB CONTROL NO. 0648-0309**

This request is for revision and extension of a current information collection. Information collections that are already covered under other OMB Control Nos. have been removed.

**A. JUSTIFICATION**

**1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.**

**a. Scientific research plan.** The [Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act](#) (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*) ([MSA](#)), as amended in 2006, authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to conserve and manage fishery resources in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by regulating “fishing.” Most such regulatory functions have been delegated to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Section 3 of the MSA, defines “fishing” as the catching, taking, or harvesting of fish; the attempted catching, taking, or harvesting of fish; any other activity that can reasonably be expected to result in the catching, taking, or harvesting of fish; or any other operations at sea in support of, or in preparation for, any of the aforementioned activities. “Fish” includes finfish, mollusks, crustaceans, and all other forms of marine life other than marine mammals and birds.

Excluded expressly from the definition of fishing, and therefore from the MSA purview, is “scientific research activity which is conducted by a scientific research vessel.” The MSA does not, however, define “scientific research activity” or “scientific research vessel.” NMFS defines, in context, “scientific research activity” and “scientific research vessel” based on review of a research plan, in order to reduce the potential for abuse by using the exemption to obtain marketable fish outside of established fishing seasons or areas, or to otherwise avoid applicable regulations. An accepted convention of any *bona fide* scientific research project is the advance preparation of a written research plan that guides the conduct of the research. NMFS requests the voluntary submission of a scientific research plan, which is acknowledged by a letter of acknowledgment (LOA) from the appropriate NMFS official, to establish a basis for a presumption that an activity in the EEZ is scientific research, and unregulated, as opposed to regulated fishing. Enforcement officers may verify activities outside the research plan or by a vessel without an LOA on site. Researchers following the recommendations of the regulations for scientific research vessels at 50 CFR 600.745 may also avoid occasional confusion and delay caused when a research vessel conducting unannounced research in the EEZ is boarded by enforcement officers to determine whether the vessel is fishing illegally. The determination of an activity as scientific research requires an acceptable standard of reference for researchers and regulators.

The regulations at [50 CFR 600.745\(c\)](#) request (but do not require) that the researcher provide a copy of any cruise report or publication related to the research to help determine the amount of catch. The amount of fish taken in scientific research is of increasing importance. Because these fish are taken outside the regulatory regime, these catches are not considered as part of any

quota, catch limit, harvest guideline, days-at-sea, or other allocation scheme. However, it is important, especially in the case of overfished and/or rebuilding stocks to take the research catch into account as part of the mortality in the fishery. This mortality can then be used as part of the inputs in determining the status of the fishery and the allowable catch in the fishery, as well as determining the cumulative effects of research on the fishery for purposes of analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

**b. Exempted fishing and exempted educational activities.** Section 301 of the MSA sets out national standards for fishery management plans and regulations. Standard one requires that “Conservation and management measures shall prevent overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield from each fishery...” To comply with this standard and effectively manage a fishery, NMFS needs to know the amount and species of fish caught, where caught, and the catch disposition. Exempted fishing, by definition, is fishing outside of the standard regulations. To control this fishing and determine the extent of this fishing, NMFS needs information to determine the justification of granting an exempted fishing permit (EFP) or exempted educational activity authorization (EEAA), and documentation of catches landed as a result of granting the permit/authorization. A NMFS Regional Administrator or Director may authorize, for limited testing, public display, data collection, exploratory fishing, compensation fishing, conservation engineering, health and safety surveys, environmental cleanup, and/or hazard removal purposes, the target or incidental harvest of species managed under an FMP or fishery regulations that would otherwise be prohibited. These regulations at [50 CFR 600.745\(b\)](#) supplement existing information collections required by the various fishery management plans establishing minimum standards for these activities. The regulations dealing with specific fisheries may impose additional requirements.

**c. Temporary possession.** Eligible researchers on board federally permitted fishing vessels that plan to temporarily possess fish in a manner not compliant with applicable fishing regulations for the purpose of collecting scientific data on catch may submit a request for a temporary possession letter of authorization. The researchers are requested to submit reports of their scientific research activity after its completion. The regulations at [50 CFR 648.12\(d\)](#) have similar information collection requirements to scientific research LOAs.

**2. Explain how, by whom, how frequently, and for what purpose the information will be used. If the information collected will be disseminated to the public or used to support information that will be disseminated to the public, then explain how the collection complies with all applicable Information Quality Guidelines.**

**a. Scientific Research Plan.** NMFS Regions, Fishery Science Centers, and NMFS and Coast Guard enforcement use information obtained from voluntarily submitted research plans and subsequent reports in monitoring such activities to ensure they are bona fide scientific research activities. NMFS reviews each scientific research plan submitted to establish that the sponsoring organization and personnel involved are recognized scientific investigators, that the specific project contemplated appears to be scientific research and not fishing, and that the vessel or vessels to be used are or will be used exclusively for research for the duration of the scientific research cruise. The information collected, which is likely to include confidential research catch statistics and proprietary research information, will not be disseminated to the public except in aggregate as part of the total mortality in the fishery. Total mortality is part of a routine NMFS

determination of the status of the affected stocks and is subject to quality control measures and a pre-dissemination review pursuant to [Section 515 of Public Law 106-554](#) whenever conducted. NMFS also uses any reports or articles, voluntarily submitted, to confirm that the activities conducted were scientific research, and to consider the appropriateness of acknowledging future requests.

**b. Exempted fishing and exempted educational activities.** Regulations at [50 CFR 600.745\(b\)\(2\) and \(d\)\(2\)](#) identify the information that an applicant must submit to receive an EFP or EEAA. This information includes:

(i). The date of the application.

(ii). The applicant's name, mailing address, and telephone number.

(iii). A statement of the purposes and goals of the exempted fishery for which an EFP/EEAA is needed, including justification for issuance of the EFP/EEAA. For EEAA, evidence the sponsoring institution is a valid educational institution.

(iv). For each vessel to be covered by the EFP/EEAA, as soon as the information is available and before operations begin under the EFP:

(a) A copy of the United States Coast Guard (USCG) documentation, state license, or registration of each vessel, or the information contained on the appropriate document.

(b) The current name, address, and telephone number of the owner and master, if not included on the document provided for the vessel.

(v). The species (target and incidental) expected to be harvested under the EFP, the amount(s) of such harvest necessary to conduct the exempted fishing, the arrangements for disposition of all regulated species harvested under the EFP, and a detailed explanation of any anticipated impacts on marine mammals or endangered species. See (viii) for authorization.

(vi). For each vessel covered by the EFP, the approximate time(s) and place(s) fishing will take place, and the type, size, and amount of gear to be used.

(vii). The signature of the applicant.

(viii). The Regional Administrator or Director, as appropriate, may request from an applicant additional information necessary to make the determinations required under this section. NMFS Regions, and NMFS and USCG enforcement use EFP and EEAA applications to identify the entities and vessels involved and ensure the applicant carries out activities within the restraints of the permit.

NMFS Regions, Regional Fishery Management Councils, Fishery Science Centers, and NMFS and USCG enforcement use the EFP application statement of purpose and goals in evaluating proposals to determine their usefulness to the overall goals of the applicable fishery management

plan and for issuance of permits, and evaluate them comparatively with other applicants for the same fishery.

NMFS evaluates EEAA applications to confirm their educational value and determine their usefulness to the overall goals of the applicable fishery management plan and for issuance of permits.

NMFS Regions use the species (including marine mammals and endangered species) and amounts to be caught, the time and location of the projected catch, and any additional information requested to be provided to analyze the impact of the activity on the fishery stocks, endangered species, marine mammals and cumulative effects on the environment for the purposes of compliance with NEPA. NMFS has required more detailed information as EFPs have become more numerous and complex, with greater associated impacts on the fisheries and other parts of the environment.

NMFS Regions, Centers, and enforcement use exempted fishing and exempted educational activity reports to ensure activities are carried out as described in the permit, document the catch for inclusion in the total catch, and consider the permittee for future permits.

NMFS anticipates that the information collected, which is likely to include confidential fish catch statistics and proprietary fishing practice and strategy information, will not be disseminated to the public unless specifically authorized as part of the EFP or EEAA. If NMFS makes public non-confidential information, then prior to dissemination, the information will be subjected to quality control measures and a pre-dissemination review pursuant to [Section 515 of Public Law 106-554](#).

**c. Temporary possession.** The regulations at [50 CFR 648.12\(d\)\(3\)](#) have similar information collection requirements to scientific research plans (as outlined above).

**3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological techniques or other forms of information technology.**

This collection involves no use of forms, but copies of the relevant regulations with the application requirements can be found on the Internet at the links listed above. Documents may be submitted via e-mail.

**4. Describe efforts to identify duplication.**

To the extent that scientific research organizations are required to submit scientific research plans to the sponsor(s) of their research, those same plans would be acceptable for the purposes of this information collection. Copies of any scientific cruise report or research documentation required to be submitted by a scientific research organization would be acceptable as a voluntary report for the purposes of this collection. The requirements for an EFP or EEAA and associated reports are the minimum requirements. The EFP or EEAA may have additional requirements as specified by the regulations of the fishery in which the activity is authorized. The Regional Administrator will specify all applicable reporting requirements as part of issuing the EFP or

EEAA.

**5. If the collection of information involves small businesses or other small entities, describe the methods used to minimize burden.**

Respondents to this information collection vary from large research organizations to individual fishermen or educators. Many respondents are categorized as small businesses or entities. These regulations were drafted with the consideration that the typical respondent would be a small entity, with the requirement made flexible enough that the Regional Administrator can tailor them to the scope of the project.

**6. Describe the consequences to the Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently.**

If the information requested in the scientific research plan is not obtained, enforcement of violations of the MSA where the violator asserts he/she was conducting scientific research and not fishing will continue to be difficult to prove. Legitimate researchers will continue to be inconvenienced and enforcement units will continue to conduct needless and inappropriate boardings of scientific research vessels whose activities are confused with fishing. If the information requested by exempted fishing and exempted educational activity permits is not obtained, there will be no standard way of dealing with these activities from Region to Region, there will be more incidents of persons who believe they are conducting scientific research being found in violation of the MSA, and the catches of some activities taking large amounts of fish currently considered scientific research may go unrecorded, possibly contributing to overfishing.

**7. Explain any special circumstances that require the collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with OMB guidelines.**

There are no special circumstances involved with this action.

**8. Provide information on the PRA Federal Register Notice that solicited public comments on the information collection prior to this submission. Summarize the public comments received in response to that notice and describe the actions taken by the agency in response to those comments. Describe the efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.**

A Federal Register Notice published on March 9, 2018 (83 FR 10434) solicited public comment.

No comments were received responding directly to the Federal Register Notice.

Comments were solicited from several members of the public, including scientists and affected fishermen. One consolidated comment was received.

As collected by West Coast Highly Migratory Species (HMS) staff, applicants on the West Coast

have commented: With the current iteration of the simplified Pacific Council-developed HMS EFP template application, it takes no more than 15-30 minutes to fill out and send the application. The pre-trip notification takes less than 5 minutes, the post-trip sending of a copy of landings receipts takes 5-10 minutes, and the annual report can take 1-2 hours, depending upon activity and how many vessels are included.

Response: This comment indicates that the West Coast Region and Pacific Fishery Management Council have streamlined the EFP application process in such a way that there is a minimum of burden on the applicant.

**9. Explain any decisions to provide payments or gifts to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.**

There are no payments or gifts.

**10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.**

As stated in the applicable regulations, it is NMFS policy not to release confidential data, other than in aggregate form, as the MSA, Section 402b, protects (in perpetuity) the confidentiality of those submitting data. Whenever data are requested, NMFS ensures that information identifying the pecuniary business activity of a particular vessel operator is not identified.

**11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private.**

No sensitive questions are asked.

**12. Provide an estimate in hours of the burden of the collection of information.**

NMFS recently re-surveyed all Regions and Science Centers for the annual and projected annual number of scientific research letters of acknowledgment, exempted fishing, and exempted educational activity authorization requests they processed. This estimate only includes those regions and science centers that do not report their burden hours through their own PRA submissions. With the removal of this duplication, the estimated burden hours have decreased. The number of respondents is now estimated to be 121 (previously 143) with correspondingly lower responses, 242 (previously 286). The estimated number of respondents and number of responses decreased. The estimated burden hours also decreased from 7,753 to 2,141. See the table below, with previous response numbers and response times in parentheses. Once this revision/extension is approved, there will no longer be duplicative burden.

**Regional PRAs that previously included some of the same permits as 0648-0309**

<u>Region</u>	<u>PRA</u>	<u>Regs</u>	<u>Permits included</u>
AKR	0648-0206	600.745(b) and 679.6	

EFPs are part of their permit family of forms; not LOAs or EEAAs, **which are covered under this collection.**

Separate PRA for all their EFP, SRP, LOA, and Display permits. **No longer covered under this collection.**

HMS 0648-0471 600.745(b) and 635.32(h)

WCR 0648-0203 600.745(b)

EFPs are part of their permit family of forms; not LOAs or EEAAs, **which are covered under this collection.**

WCR 0648-0204 600.745(b)

EFPs are part of their permit family of forms; not LOAs or EEAAs, **which are covered under this collection.**

2018 Annual PRA Burden Hour Estimates					
Requirement	Number of Respondents	Frequency of Response	Total Responses (2015 responses in parentheses)	Avg. Hrs. per Response (2015 response times in parentheses)	Total Annual Burden
Scientific Research Plans	89	1	89 (75)	13 (9)	1157
Scientific Research Reports	89	1	89 (75)	6 (4)	534
EFP Requests	30	1	30 (65)	10 (89)	300
EFP Reports	30	1	30 (65)	4.5 (15)	135
Exempted Educational Requests	2	1	2 (3)	5 (4)	10
Exempted Educational Reports	2	1	2 (3)	2.5 (2)	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>121*</b>		<b>242</b>		<b>2,141</b>
* Unduplicated respondents; the same respondents appear multiple times (applications and reports) NOTE: Average reduced response times for EFP requests and reports are due to a smaller set of each, with some of those regions/respondents previous claiming to need significantly more time, now covered in their own collections.					

Estimate of annualized labor cost to respondents:

\$35.16/hr. (GS-12/1 equivalent – using Rest of U.S. locality pay) x 2,141hrs = \$75,277.56

**13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to the respondents or record-keepers resulting from the collection (excluding the value of the burden hours in Question 12 above).**

The costs for postage, envelopes, and copying are estimated at \$382.36, based on the following: \$1.58 (stamps (2 @ \$.049 = \$0.98) + envelopes (1 at \$0.10) + copying (10 pages at \$.05 = \$0.50)) x 242 applications/reports = \$382.36 (\$382).

**14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government.**

The estimated annual Federal cost of this information collection is \$76,816, based on the following:

Scientific research activities:

(\$17.84/hr (GS-6 equivalent) for letter preparation and report filing x 2.4 hrs/request = \$42.82) + (\$48.78/hr (GS-13/6 equivalent) for final review of LOA x 3.8 hrs/request = \$185.36) = \$228.18 x 89 LOAs = \$20,308.02 (**\$20,308**).

EFPs:

(\$24.24/hr (GS-9 equivalent) for research and analysis, permit preparation, and report filing x 66.5 hrs/application = \$1,611.96) + (\$48.78/hr (GS-13/6 equivalent) for final review of EFP x 4.1 hrs/application = \$200.00) = \$1,811.96 x 30 EFPs = \$54,358.80 (**\$54,359**).

EEAAs:

(\$24.24/hr (GS-9 equivalent) for research and analysis, permit preparation, and report filing x 39.3 hrs/application = \$952.63) + (\$48.78/hr (GS-13/6 equivalent) for final review of EFP x 2.5 hrs/application = \$121.95) = \$1074.58 x 2 EEAAs = \$2,149.16 (**\$2,149**).

**Total government cost: \$20,308 + \$54,359 + \$2,149 = \$76,816.**

**15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments.**

Adjustments:

During our preparation for this PRA renewal submission, we were notified that several of our regional offices have been including EFPs in their regional permit-family-of-forms PRA submissions. Thus, there has been a double-counting of burden hours for EFPs among our submission and submissions from these regional offices. Now that we are aware of this, we have not included the burden hours associated with EFPs for those regional offices in this submission. The result is a decrease in the number of EFPs and the associated burden hours.

The most basic reason for changes to burden hours, from renewal to renewal, is that each time we estimate burden hours is three years since the last time, and we are estimating burden hours based on different applicants (different people or institutions). Each application is unique, there are no cookie-cutter applications. Each scientific research plan is also unique, and is based on the individual proposal. Scientific research plans are "requested" for Letters of Acknowledgement (LOAs). LOAs were not part of the duplication.



Additional points about why burden hours change from renewal to renewal:

The applicants typically do not have "off the shelf" materials as each scientific investigation is often unique as they are attempting to answer new scientific questions - or the applicant is requesting an exemption(s) from the fishing regulations for a specific purpose and they have to provide the agency with their proposal, justification, etc. Therefore, each application and each subsequent report are also unique.

The burden hour estimates are an average determined by surveying each of our regional offices around the country. We trust our RO staff to be the best ones to estimate the burden hours, as they know the projects and applicants that they deal with. Some ROs had higher estimates, while others had lower estimates. The numbers provided are the averages.

We do not have a form, but the applicants have to meet the requirements in the fisheries regulations for these types of permits, plus any additional requirements (such as special reporting requirements) that are included in the permits.

Therefore, in addition to decrease in responses from regions that had duplication, there has been variance in responses that were NOT duplicated. The short answer is that we can't say exactly which decreases are due to variance as opposed to removal of duplication.

**16. For collections whose results will be published, outline the plans for tabulation and publication.**

The results of this collection will not be published.

**17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons why display would be inappropriate.**

There are no forms, therefore display of the OMB approval of the information collection is N/A.

**18. Explain each exception to the certification statement.**

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

**B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS**

This collection does not employ statistical methods.