

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

Funding Opportunity Title: Marine Fisheries Initiative (MARFIN)

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NMFS-SE-2009-2001423

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.433, Marine Fisheries Initiative.

Dates: Applications must be received by 5 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time on August 11, 2008 to be considered for funding. Applications received after the deadline will be rejected/returned to the sender without further consideration.

Funding Opportunity Description: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Southeast Region, is seeking proposals under the Marine Fisheries Initiative Program (MARFIN), for research and development projects that optimize the use of fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and off the South Atlantic states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida involving the U.S. fishing industry (recreational and commercial), including fishery biology, resource assessment, socioeconomic assessment, management and conservation, selected harvesting methods, and fish handling and processing. This program addresses NOAA's mission goal to "Protect, Restore, and Manage the Use of Coastal and Ocean Resources Through an Ecosystem Approach to Management."

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

MARFIN is a competitive Federal assistance program that funds projects seeking to optimize research and development benefits from U.S. marine fishery resources through cooperative efforts involving the best research and management talents to accomplish priority activities. Projects funded under MARFIN provide answers for fishery needs covered by the NMFS Strategic Plan, available from the Southeast Regional Office (see Contact), particularly those goals relating to: rebuilding over-fished marine fisheries, maintaining currently productive fisheries, and integrating conservation of protected species and fisheries management. Funding priorities for MARFIN are formulated from recommendations received from non-Federal scientific and technical experts and from NMFS research and operations officials.

With the long term planning capabilities available through the Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process, the priorities are selected to coordinate assessment needs with this solicitation. Priority is given to funding projects in the subject areas listed in this section, but proposals in other areas are considered on a funds-available basis. There is no preference between short-term and long-term projects.

B. Program Priorities

You are encouraged to address one of the priority areas listed below as they pertain to Federally managed species or species relevant to Federal fisheries management. If you select more than one priority, you should list first on your application the priority that most closely reflects the objectives of your proposal. Projects should focus on the greatest probability of recovering, maintaining, improving, or developing fisheries; improving the understanding of factors affecting recruitment success; and/or generating increased values and recreational opportunities for fisheries.

1. Bycatch

The bycatch of biological organisms (including interactions with sea turtles and marine mammals) by various fishing gears can have wide-reaching impacts from a fishery's management and an ecological standpoint, with the following major concerns:

a. Shrimp trawl fisheries. Studies are needed to contribute to the regional shrimp trawl bycatch program being conducted by NMFS in cooperation with state fisheries

management agencies, commercial and recreational fishing organizations and interests, environmental organizations, universities, Councils, and Commissions. Specific guidance and research requirements are contained in the Cooperative Bycatch Plan for the Southeast, available from NMFS (see Contact). In particular, the studies should address:

(1) Data collection and analyses to expand and update current bycatch estimates, temporally and spatially emphasizing areas of greatest impact by shrimping. Sampling effort should include estimates of numbers, weight, and random samples of size (age) structure of associated bycatch complex. The statistical design and extent of the shrimp-trawl observation program should ensure that the bycatch data collected are appropriate and sufficient for stock assessment of the bycatch species, specifically red snapper.

(2) Identification, development, and evaluation of gear, non-gear, and tactical fishing options to reduce bycatch.

(3) Obtaining better estimates of fishing effort in the shrimp fishery, which might be done through vessel monitoring systems, electronic logbooks, or otherwise.

b. Reef fish fisheries. The reef fish complex is exploited by a variety of fishing gear and tactics. The following research on bycatch of reef fish species is needed:

(1) Characterize and assess the impact of bycatch of regulatory discards in the commercial and recreational fisheries including depth-related release mortality for species caught with hook and line, bottom longline, bandit gear, and traps/fish pots.

(2) Characterize the species composition, age, size, sex, and disposition (e.g., discard mortality rates) of all fishes caught by commercial and recreational fishermen with respect to depth and latitude as well as estimate effort. Species of interest include: South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, and vermilion snapper; south Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, tilefish, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico red grouper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper.

(3) Identify gear and tactics that can be used to return regulatory discards to depth in the recreational and commercial fisheries to minimize or reverse pressure-related fishing trauma.

(4) Develop on-board recording systems that will capture information on discarded fishes in the commercial and recreational fisheries including species, length, depth, location, and disposition (float, swim, etc.).

2. Reef Fish and other Fishery Resources Associated with Reef Environments

Some species within the reef fish complex are overfished and/or experiencing overfishing, either because of directed efforts or because they are the bycatch of other fisheries. Reef fish are vulnerable to overfishing because they tend to concentrate over specific types of habitat, are often long-lived, may aggregate to spawn, and sometimes change sex. These behaviors can make traditional fishery statistics misleading. Priority research areas include:

a. Collection of basic biological data for species in commercially and recreationally important fisheries. Life history studies are needed that cover the complete geographic range of species scheduled for assessments. In addition, data are also needed on less dominant stocks not scheduled for assessments, and on Caribbean species.

(1) Age and growth of reef fish:

(a) Description of the age and growth patterns, especially for South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, tilefish, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico red grouper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper that are scheduled for stock assessments. Black grouper, scamp, red hind, speckled hind, coney, graysby, Warsaw grouper, silk snapper, queen snapper, other less dominant stocks, and management units for which data are lacking in the Caribbean require more age information. Better methods and standardized techniques are needed for aging yellowedge grouper, tilefish, snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, and other deep water species.

(b) Collect otoliths from groupers, snappers, and other reef fish species according to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) otolith manual. If proposal is selected for funding, coordinate studies and design sampling systems to provide production-style aging programs for the reef fish fishery with Steve VanderKooy at GSMFC (228) 875-5912. Analyze age information (by gear and sector) considering temporal and geographic effects for red grouper.

(c) Age sampling from commercial, headboat, and Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistic Survey (MRFSS) that is representative of the fisheries for South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, tilefish, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico red grouper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper.

(2) Reproduction studies of reef fish:

Update maturity schedules, fecundity, and sex ratios throughout geographic range for species scheduled for stock assessments including: South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, tilefish, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico red grouper,

red snapper, and gray triggerfish; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper. Maturity schedules, fecundity, and sex ratios are needed for commercially and recreationally important reef fish including black grouper, scamp, red hind, speckled hind, coney, graysby, Warsaw grouper, silk snapper, queen snapper, other less dominant stocks, and management units for which data are lacking in the Caribbean.

(3) Recruitment of reef fish and other fishery resources associated with reef environments.

(a) Source of recruitment in Gulf and South Atlantic waters, especially for snappers, groupers, amberjacks, and other reef fish.

(b) Annual estimation of the absolute of relative recruitment of juvenile snapper, or grouper to estuarine and nearshore habitats. Development of recruitment indices for South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, tilefish, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico red grouper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper.

(c) The contribution of live-bottom habitat, proposed Marine Protected Areas in the South Atlantic, habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC) off Fort Pierce, Florida (Oculina bank), and off west central Florida (i.e., Florida Middle Grounds) to reef fish recruitment.

(4) Stock structure of reef fish and other fishery resources associated with reef fish environments.

(a) Movement and migration patterns of commercially and recreationally valuable reef fishes, especially gag in the Gulf and South Atlantic and greater amberjack between the Gulf and South Atlantic.

(b) Examine retention and residency of reef fish species. Examine temporal and spatial differences in the size at age, size at maturity, etc.

(c) Genetic research on stock structure of red grouper in the Gulf of Mexico. Genetic research on gag from the Gulf and South Atlantic.

(d) Otolith microchemistry of dominant reef fish from Gulf, South Atlantic and Caribbean to determine estuarine nursery habitat.

(e) Compare estimates of growth, maturity, and sex-transition for reef fish (i.e., gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, vermilion snapper, etc.) caught in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.

(f) Provide long-term continuous age structure information (especially in the South Atlantic) for species subject to frequent assessments including: South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, tilefish, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico red grouper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper.

(g) Develop models that integrate information from cohort strength, larval transport, and environmental information from an Integrated Coastal Ocean Observing System (IOOS) to explain variability recruitment of gag and other species.

(h) Coordinated tagging studies need to be conducted between researchers in the Gulf and South Atlantic to determine the magnitude of exchange of gag and greater amberjack between the Gulf and South Atlantic.

b. Population assessment of reef fish and other fishery resources associated with reef environments:

(1) Determine age specific mortality and mortality rates especially for: South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, tilefish, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico red grouper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper.

(2) Description of habitat and fish populations in the deep reef community and the prey distributions supporting the community.

(3) Development of better indices of abundance that cover a broader spatial/seasonal scale for South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, tilefish, and snowy grouper; and Gulf of Mexico red grouper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish.

(4) Innovative methods are needed for stock assessments of aggregate stocks, including the potential effect of fishing on genetic structure and the incorporation of sex change for protogynous species into stock assessment models.

c. Management of reef fish:

(1) Research in direct support of management, including catch and release estimate of mortalities by gear and depth. Species of interest include South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, tilefish, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico red grouper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper.

(2) Research on management measures that will reduce release mortality. Identify

gear and tactics that can be used to return regulatory discards to depth in the recreational fishery to minimize or reverse pressure-related fishing trauma.

(3) Collect data on the magnitude and size/age composition of South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red pogy, tilefish, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico red grouper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper that are discarded by fishery and gear. Develop on-board recording systems that will record information on discarded fishes in the commercial and recreational fishery including species, length, depth, location, and disposition (float, swim, etc.).

(4) Identify ways to design, manage, and implement a U.S. Caribbean fishing permit specific to gear or fishery.

(5) Collect, assemble, and computerize information on the commercial and recreational catches of yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, mutton snapper, yellowtail snapper, and other important species from the Caribbean. Topics should include a description of the fisheries including gear used, length and frequency of trips, area and habitat sampled, number of fishers, and depth fished.

(6) Obtain data from the Gulf of Mexico catches of red grouper to improve the accuracy of stock assessments.

(7) Develop pilot programs supporting management of reef fish including:

(a) Develop a pilot program for fisheries independent sampling of reef fish species, particularly grouper, tilefish, and red snapper.

(b) Develop a pilot program to quantify, by reef fish fishery, bycatch, catch composition, size frequency, etc.

(c) Develop appropriate statistical approaches for collecting recreational data usable for regional monitoring of recreational quotas.

3. Red Snapper Research

Red snapper are overfished and undergoing overfishing in the Gulf of Mexico and their status in the South Atlantic Bight is unknown. Assessments of these stocks are highly uncertain due to inadequate knowledge about some aspects to this species life history. Additionally, some aspects of the fishery such as shrimp trawl bycatch and regulatory discard mortality impede the ability of the stock to rebuild.

a. Red snapper bycatch: The bycatch of red snapper can have significant impacts from a fisheries management and ecological standpoint. The following research on regulatory discards is needed to better evaluate the effectiveness of management

measures such as minimum size limits and closed seasons:

- (1) Development and evaluation of gear, fishing tactics, and management measures to minimize the bycatch of or increase the survival of discarded red snapper and other reef fish species.
- (2) Evaluate the effect on fishing mortality/harvest of allowing recreational anglers to keep 1-4 fish under no minimum size limit or size limits less than 16 inches total length.
- (3) Characterization and assessment of the impact of bycatch of undersized reef fish species, including release mortality, during recreational and commercial fishing. Research on the catch-and-release mortality of red snapper and other reef fish species, by gear (e.g., capture by commercial bandit rigs that are electrically or hydraulically powered), fishery (e.g., headboat, private boat, charter boat, commercial), and depth. Studies are needed to specifically relate sink or swim data, which can be obtained through observer programs, with long-term survival rates. More information is needed on release mortality and discard rate by depth, fish size, season and fishery.
- (4) Research to document predation rates on discarded red snapper and other reef fish species.

b. Red snapper population assessment:

- (1) Life history studies that cover the complete range of the species, including fecundity estimates by length and age. Fecundity samples are particularly needed from older red snapper.
- (2) Estimates of red snapper abundance indices covering a broad seasonal/spatial scale, age structure, age specific mortality rates, and recruitment indices.
- (3) Estimates of red snapper mortality rates through traditional methods or utilization of genetic tag methods.
- (4) Research (e.g., otolith analysis, tagging, etc.) to better describe stock structure and mixing rates between the eastern and western Gulf of Mexico. Research should include oceanographic data to determine whether transport from the Campeche Banks could be supplying important numbers of larvae to the western stock.
- (5) Review the value of the larval index given that many factors can mask the relationship of larvae to spawners.
- (6) Provide information on the effects on shrimp trawling on red snapper through community effects including nutrient cycling and changes in predation pressure.
- (7) Continue and expand the fishery-independent survey for adult red snapper.

(8) Examine the age structure of red snapper taken from longlines (survey and fishery) and other gear, to clarify geographic distribution of fish as they age.

(9) Conduct representative sampling of age- and length-composition consistently across area, time, and gear.

(10) Research to clarify the magnitude and timing of density dependent compensation in juveniles by estimating survival at different densities of juvenile abundance.

c. Management of red snapper.

(1) Research to evaluate the use of minimum size limits as a management tool in the red snapper fishery.

(2) Research to estimate, independently of any stock assessment, changes in catchability by gear over time.

(3) Utilize simulation studies to identify and evaluate appropriate management strategies (including use of various reference points) and corresponding assessment modeling approaches for the fishery complex (shrimp, red snapper, vermilion snapper, etc.). Research could also test the hypothesis that red snapper production is enhanced in some way by increased shrimp trawling.

4. Coastal Migratory Pelagic Fisheries

The commercial and recreational demand for migratory coastal pelagics has led to overfishing for certain species. Additionally, some are transboundary with Mexico and other countries and may ultimately demand international management attention. The MARFIN program will no longer accept applications for highly migratory species, including sharks, billfish and tunas. Priorities include:

a. Recruitment indices for king and Spanish mackerel, cobia, dolphin, and wahoo, primarily from fishery-independent data sources.

b. Fishery-independent methods of assessing stock abundance of king and Spanish mackerel, dolphin, and wahoo.

c. Release mortality data for all coastal pelagic species. Age composition of commercial and recreational discards of king mackerel.

d. Improved catch statistics for all species in Mexican waters, with special emphasis on king mackerel, dolphin, and wahoo. This includes length-frequency and life history information.

e. Information on populations of coastal pelagics overwintering off the Gulf of

Mexico and the South Atlantic states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, especially concerning population size, age, and movement patterns; and for dolphin and wahoo during the entire year throughout their migratory patterns. Calculate the mixing rates for Atlantic/Gulf king mackerel on an annual basis and increase sampling intensity within the mixing zones with sample allocation that is representative of the fine scale distribution of the catch within the mixing zones. Continue evaluation of tag data, ongoing otolith microchemistry, otolith shape analysis studies, and microsatellite genetic marker data to improve estimation of stock structure and mixing proportions.

f. Development of a practical method for aging dolphin.

g. Basic biostatistics for Spanish mackerel, cobia, dolphin, and wahoo to develop age-length keys and maturation schedules for stock assessments and to evaluate stock structures.

h. Impact of bag limits on total catch and landings of king and Spanish mackerel, dolphin, wahoo, and cobia.

i. Improved estimates of batch fecundity, spawning frequency, and age specific fecundity, including age and size at maturity, for king mackerel.

j. Evaluate spatial variability in size at maturity and fecundity at age among regions and migratory groups for king mackerel.

k. Determine age estimates for eastern Gulf king mackerel.

l. Evaluate the available sex ratio at size data to determine how sex ratios vary with size.

m. Obtain data from Mexican Gulf king mackerel catches.

n. Determine if king mackerel in the eastern and western Gulf of Mexico are separate stocks.

5. Gulf of Mexico Red Drum

Gulf of Mexico red drum are not experiencing overfishing but it is unknown if they are overfished. Most of the data for assessments comes from studies conducted by NMFS and state fishery management agencies. Specific research needs for red drum include:

a. Estimates of the absolute abundance of red drum from the Gulf of Mexico.

b. Age composition of adults in offshore waters.

c. Standardized stock assessment methodology that can accept state specific data

within the context of a Gulf-wide stock assessment.

6. Essential Fish Habitat

Over the years, human activities have affected the quality and quantity of available habitat that is necessary to support populations of recreationally and commercially important fish. Data and information are needed to refine the identification and description of essential fish habitat (EFH). Current priorities for research in this are included:

- a. Determine the effects of fishing gears (e.g., trawls and traps) and practices (e.g., gear retrieval and anchoring) on EFH, with emphasis on benthic habitats within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Caribbean, southern U.S. Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico regions.
- b. Develop scientific data to allow geographical EFH designations based on clearly defined habitat requirements for the various life stages of Federally managed species, especially species which commonly occur in estuarine habitats. Emphasis should be on habitat-related densities; growth, reproduction, or survival rates within discrete habitats; or production rates by habitat.
- c. Develop scientific data to allow the identification or refinement, as appropriate, of Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) designation for the various life stages of federally managed species.
- d. Develop geographic information system (GIS) mapping protocols and tools to allow the presentation of EFH, HAPC, fishery distribution information, and other relevant data for the southeastern United States, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- e. Characterize, using GIS, the spatial and temporal abundance and distribution of egg, larval, and juvenile life stages of managed species from the SEAMAP data files.
- f. Collect baseline data for proposed MPAs in the South Atlantic. Projects should address information needs described in the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan, Amendment 14. Examples of relevant information include use of MPA by various life stages of long-lived deepwater snapper grouper species; comparison of distribution and abundance of such species within and adjacent to MPAs; profiles of the population sex ratio, age, and size structure of deepwater snapper grouper species within the MPAs; and the effectiveness of these MPAs in modifying fishing behavior in and adjacent to the MPAs.

7. Economic and Sociocultural Studies

Social and economic assessments are required components of all fishery management plans and actions. These assessments support the accomplishment of management

objectives while minimizing adverse social and economic impacts. Current priority research needs are:

a. Development of economic incentives and other innovative alternatives, including bycatch quotas, to gear and season/area restrictions as ways to reduce bycatch. The project should contrast the relative costs, potential gains, and level of bycatch reduction associated with traditional methods and any innovative alternatives addressed by the project.

b. Estimation of demand and supply relationships in the market for for-hire services. Fishing quality (stock size, catch per unit effort, average fish size) as a determinant of demand and supply should be emphasized. Key species are red drum, king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, red grouper, gag, black grouper, dolphin, wahoo, vermilion snapper, yellowtail snapper, red snapper, greater amberjack, and Atlantic black sea bass. The models should be applicable to the evaluation of the economic effects of common management tools, including, but not limited to, minimum and maximum size limits, bag limits, and seasonal closures. Important supply and demand factors such as cost, trip duration, time of departure, capacity, services offered, target species, fishing location, etc., should be investigated. Specific attention should also be given to species target behavior, time and space decisions, and whether profit maximization is an appropriate motivational assumption for the supply of for-hire services.

c. Design and evaluation of limited access options for all sectors of a specific fishery, including both the commercial and recreational sectors. Emphasis should be included, where appropriate, on different gears, modes of fishing, enforcement, and jurisdictional issues. Key species of emphasis are red snapper and grouper.

d. Estimation of fishing behavioral and effort supply models in response to common fishery management tools such as quotas, fixed seasonal closures, trip and bag limits, and size limits for the commercial sector. Specific attention should be given to species target behavior, time and space decisions. The intent of this research is to determine the basis upon which fishermen make their fishing related decisions (e.g., when to fish, where to fish, how much to fish, what species to target, what gear to use, etc.) in response to regulation.

e. In-depth ethnographic profiles of communities in the Gulf of Mexico (all states) and South Atlantic (Ft. Pierce, Florida through North Carolina only). These include communities already identified as fishing communities and communities for which insufficient information exists to make status determination. Applicants should contact NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service for appropriate prospective communities, based on the results of on-going investigations. Profiles should include descriptions of the community, commercial and recreational fishing-related activities and businesses, historical information on fishing related activities, community structure and social ties based on fishing, and changes in the community due to federal regulations on the fisheries. The profiles should test the hypothesis that the

community is substantially engaged in or substantially dependent on fishing, as defined by the MSFCMA.

f. Estimation of the non-market value of marine turtles, bottlenose dolphins, and right whales.

g. Examination of the costs and benefits of vessel and/or license buy-back programs. The analysis must include costs of the program and examination of alternative funding mechanisms. Key fisheries are red snapper, vermilion snapper, king mackerel, and shrimp (Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic).

h. Evaluation of alternative effort control management measures in federally managed commercial fisheries. The evaluation should apply to a specific fishery. Key candidate species/fisheries are shrimp, Atlantic snapper-grouper, and reef fish. Analyses should include a comparison of potential economic, social, and cultural impacts at the vessel, individual, and community level, and examine the desirability of single species versus multiple species approaches.

i. Evaluation of the transference of fishing opportunity between commercial, recreational, and conservation sectors under a transferable rights program. Key fisheries are the red snapper, grouper (collectively), Atlantic snapper-grouper, and reef fish (collectively).

j. Evaluation of the allocation of harvests (TAC/quotas) among competing user groups. Key fisheries include individual species (red snapper, vermilion snapper, king mackerel, red grouper, and gag), Atlantic snapper-grouper, and species groups (grouper). The analysis should quantify the economic value to each sector and identify the allocation that maximizes the economic benefit to the nation, subject to the biological constraints specified by the respective rebuilding plans, where appropriate. Evaluation of the commercial sector should include analysis by gear type and fishing location (western and northern Gulf, eastern Gulf, Keys), while that of the recreational sector should distinguish between charter, party boat, and private angler by fishing location.

k. Development of methodologies to accurately assess the cumulative economic and social impacts of fishery management regulations on fishermen and fishing communities.

l. Develop a framework to define and estimate OY for any fishery, incorporating, as per SFA definition, social and economic components into the current biological definition of OY.

m. Estimate the economic rent for one of the following fisheries: the Gulf of Mexico commercial reef fish fishery, the South Atlantic commercial snapper-grouper fishery, the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic commercial coastal migratory pelagic fishery, and the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic commercial shrimp fishery.

n. Continuation of the longitudinal study on social and economic characteristics of the charter and head boat fleets in the Southeast. An interview-based survey collecting higher resolution socio-demographic, economic, and attitude data complements ongoing data collections in this industry (permitting process; MRFSS for-hire and intercept surveys). Data of this nature has not been collected since 1998. By repeating studies conducted both in 1988 and 1998 we will be able to compare the industry through time and discover broad trends.

C. Program Authority

Authority for the Marine Fisheries Initiative Program is provided by the following: 15 U.S.C 713c-3(d).

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Approximately \$2.0 million may be available in fiscal year (FY) 2009 for projects. This amount includes possible in-house projects. Actual funding availability for this program is contingent upon Fiscal Year 2009 Congressional appropriations. The NMFS Southeast Regional Office anticipates awarding projects that will range from \$25,000 to \$300,000. The average award is \$150,000. Publication of this notice does not obligate NMFS to award any specific grant or cooperative agreement or any of the available funds. Project proposals accepted for funding with a project period over one year do not have to compete for the additional years of funding. However, funding for the additional years is contingent upon the availability of funds and satisfactory performance and is at the sole discretion of the agency.

B. Project/Award Period

The period of awards may be from one to three 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 of NOAA in the management of the project. An example of substantial involvement

is: an exchange between the recipient and a NMFS laboratory of sample materials for analysis.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants may be institutions of higher education, nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, state, local and Indian tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible. Foreign governments, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, and international organizations are excluded for purposes of this solicitation since the objective of the MARFIN program is to optimize research and development benefits from U.S. marine fishery resources.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Cost-sharing is not required for this program.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Not applicable.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application packages are available through www.grants.gov. If applicants do not have internet access, applications may be requested from: National Marine Fisheries Service, State/Federal Liaison Branch, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

B. Content and Form of Application

1. Format Requirements:

All pages should be single-spaced and should be composed in at least a 12-point font

with one-inch margins on 8 1/2 x 11 paper. The project description may not exceed 25 pages, exclusive of title page, project synopsis, literature cited, budget information, resumes of investigator, and letters of support (if any). Failure to follow the requirements will result in the rejection of the application and subsequent return.

Any PDF or other attachments that are included in an electronic application must meet the above format requirement when printed out.

2. Content Requirements:

The following information must be included. Failure to submit it will result in an application not being reviewed.

a. Signed Title Page: The title page (SF-424) must be signed by the authorized representative. Electronic signatures submitted through www.grants.gov satisfy this requirement.

b. Project Synopsis (1-page limit): It is critical that the project synopsis accurately describes the project being proposed and conveys all essential elements of the activities. It is imperative that potential applicants tie their proposals to one of the program priorities described in Section I.B.

c. Project Description (25-page limit): The applicant should describe and justify the project being proposed and address each of the evaluation criteria as described below in Section V. Project descriptions should include clear objectives and specific approaches to achieving those objectives, including methods, timelines, and expected outcomes.

d. Literature Cited: If applicable.

e. Budget and Budget Justification: There should be a detailed budget justification accompanying the SF424A Budget Information form. Indicate matching funds if provided in a separate column. Provide justifications for all budget items in sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested.

f. Resumes (2 pages maximum for each major participant).

g. Standard Application Forms: Please refer to the appropriate application package available through www.grants.gov.

h. NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, applicants are required to answer the following questions:

1. Has any National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or other environmental

compliance documentation (e.g., Endangered Species Act Biological Opinion; Letter of Concurrence or Biological Assessment/Evaluation; Clean Water Act permit; State Historic Preservation Officer consultation; state environmental compliance documentation (mini-NEPA); etc.) been completed? If yes, list the environmental compliance documentation that has been completed and provide copies of the documentation as appropriate.

2. Would the proposed activity or environmental impacts of the activity be subject to public controversy? If yes, describe the potential controversy.

3. Would the proposed activity have potential environmental impacts that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks? If yes, describe the impacts that are uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

4. Is the proposed activity related to other activities (both NOAA and non-NOAA that together may cumulatively adversely impact the environment? For example, the proposed activity is one of a series of projects that together may cause a change in the pattern of pollutant discharge, traffic generation, economic change, flood plain change, or land use. If yes, briefly describe the other activities and discuss how the related projects would have cumulative impacts on the environment.

5. Would the proposed activity involve a non-native species? If yes, describe how the non-native species is involved.

6. Would the proposed activity occur within a unique geographic area of notable recreational, ecological, scientific, cultural, historical, scenic or aesthetic importance? If yes, describe the area, including the name or designation if known.

7. Would the proposed activity affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources? If yes, describe the impact.

8. Would the proposed activity affect public health or safety? The effects may be adverse or beneficial and temporary, long-term, or permanent. If yes, describe the effects and the circumstances that would cause these impacts.

9. Would the proposed activity affect directly or indirectly, in an adverse or beneficial manner, any listed endangered, threatened, or otherwise protected species or their critical habitat under federal and state laws including the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act? If yes, name the species and/or habitat that will be impacted and describe the circumstances that would impact the species and/or habitat.

Applications must identify the principal participants, and include copies of any agreements describing the specific tasks to be performed by participants. Project

applications should give a clear presentation of the proposed work, the methods for carrying out the project, its relevance to managing and enhancing the use of Gulf of Mexico and/or South Atlantic fishery resources, and cost estimates as they relate to specific aspects of the project. All applications must include funding for the principal investigator to participate in an annual MARFIN Conference in the southeast regional area at the completion of the project. Budgets must include a detailed breakdown, by category of expenditures, with appropriate justification for both the Federal and non-Federal shares.

Applications should exhibit familiarity with related work that is completed or ongoing. Proposals should state whether the research applies to the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic or North Atlantic for highly migratory species or multiple areas. Successful applicants are required to collect and manage data in accordance with standardized procedures and format approved or specified by NMFS and to participate with NMFS in specific cooperative activities that are determined by consultations between NMFS and successful applicants before project grants are awarded. All data collected as part of an awarded grant must be provided to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on August 11, 2008 to be considered for funding. Applications received after the deadline will be rejected/returned to the sender without further consideration. Applications submitted through www.grants.gov will be accompanied by an automated receipt of the date and time of submission. Hard copy applications will be hand stamped with time and date when received.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications submitted by state and local governments are subject to the provisions of executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs. Any applicant submitting an application for funding is required to complete item 16 on SF-424 regarding clearance by the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) established as a result of EO 12372. To find out about and comply with a State's process under EO 12372, the names, addresses and phone numbers of participating SPOCs are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's home page at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>

E. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Costs - If the applicant does not have a negotiated indirect cost rate

agreement with a Federal agency, then they may direct cost all charges, or submit a request to establish a rate. The Federal share of indirect costs proposed must not exceed 25 percent of the total direct costs identified on Standard Form 424A Budget Information. The indirect rate is fixed at 25 percent in order to maximize the funds available for actual research and to allow applicants to recover a reasonable indirect cost.

Construction is not an allowable activity under this program. Therefore, applications will not be accepted for construction projects.

Funding beyond the first year will be dependent upon satisfactory performance and the continued availability of funds.

F. Other Submission Requirements

Applications must be submitted through www.grants.gov, unless an applicant does not have internet access. In that case, hard copies with original signatures may be sent to: National Marine Fisheries Service, State/Federal Liaison Branch, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated by three or more appropriate private and/or public sector experts to determine their technical merit. These reviewers will provide individual evaluations of the proposals. No consensus advice will be given. These reviewers provide comments and assign scores to the applications based on the following criteria, with the points shown in parentheses:

1. Importance/relevance and applicability of proposed projects to the program goals (35 points):

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities. For this program, this includes: Does the proposal have a clearly stated goal(s) with associated objectives that meet the needs outlined in the project narrative.

2. Technical/scientific merit (40 points):

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. For this program, this includes: Does the proposal clearly identify and describe, in the project outline and statement of work, scientific methodologies and analytical procedures that will adequately address project goals and objectives?

3. Overall qualifications of applicants (15 points):

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For this program, this includes: Does the applicant possess the necessary education and identify the appropriate resources to complete the project?

4. Project costs (10 points):

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. For this program, this includes: Does the budget appropriately allocate and justify costs?

5. Outreach and education (no points):

This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. This criterion is not used by the MARFIN program.

B. Review and Selection Process

When we receive applications we will screen them to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see Submission Dates and Times); include SF 424 authenticated by an authorized representative; were submitted by an eligible applicant; address one of the funding priorities for federally managed species; and include a budget, statement of work, and milestones, and identify the principal investigator. We do not have to screen applications before the submission deadline in order to identify deficiencies that would cause your application to be rejected so that you would have an opportunity to correct them. However, should we do so and provide you information about deficiencies, or should you independently decide it is desirable to do so, you may correct any deficiencies in your application before the deadline. After the deadline, the application must remain as submitted; no changes can be made to it. If your application does not conform to these requirements and the deadline for submission has passed, the application will be returned without further consideration.

Following the technical review, we will determine the score for each individual review and average the individual technical review scores to determine the final technical score for each application. Then, we will rank applications in descending order by their average technical scores. The top twenty applications will be forwarded to a

panel for further review. Those applications that are not in the top twenty category will be eliminated from further consideration.

Those applications that meet the top twenty ranking will be presented to a panel of non-NOAA fishery experts known as the MARFIN panel. Each member of the MARFIN Panel individually considers: if needs of the Agency are addressed in each proposal; if the project assists industry; and if the project addresses issues that are important to regional fisheries management. Needs of the Agency follow the information identified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Title III, Sections 301 and 404. The individuals on the Panel provide comments and rate each of these proposals as either "Recommended for Funding" or "Not Recommended for Funding". The Panel will give no consensus advice. The Program Manager ranks the proposals in the order of preferred funding based on the number of Panel members recommending the proposal for funding. In the event that there are two or more projects tied in the panel's percent selected category that are competing for the final available funds, all tied projects will be given equal consideration by the selecting official regardless of their peer review score. . The selecting official will resolve any ties by selecting the projects that best meet immediate research needs.

C. Selection Factors

The MARFIN Panel ratings will be provided in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based on the following factors:

1. Availability of funding;
2. Balance/distribution of funds:
 - a. geographically
 - b. by type of institutions
 - c. by type of partners
 - d. by research areas
 - e. by project types
3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA/federal

agencies;

4. Program priorities and policy factors;

5. Applicant's prior award performance;

6. Partnerships with/Participation of targeted groups;

7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, successful applications generally are recommended within 150 days from the date of publication of this notice. The earliest start date of awards average 90 days after each project is selected and after all NMFS/applicant negotiations of cooperative activities have been completed. The earliest start date of awards is about 180 days after the date of publication of this notice. Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for their applications. Unsuccessful applications will be returned to the applicant.

The exact amount of funds awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NMFS cooperative involvement with the activities of each project are determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office and the NMFS Program Office. Recipients must not initiate projects until an approved award is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been approved for funding by the NOAA Grants Management Division with the issuance of an award signed by a NOAA Grants Officer. This is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin.

The award will be issued to the Authorizing Official and the PI of the project either electronically or in hard copy. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposals were not selected for recommendation by the Program Office.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Department of Commerce Grants and Cooperative Agreements Notice

Administrative and national policy requirements for all Department of Commerce awards are contained in the Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of February 11, 2008 (73 FR 7696). A copy of the notice may be obtained at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/search.html>

Limitation of Liability

Funding for potential projects in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

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 funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA Web site: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216--5--TOC.pdf>, NEPA Questionnaire, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/questionnaire.pdf>, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, <http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc--ceq.htm>. Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that 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). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an

application is selected, funds can be withheld by the Grants Officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment of any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

C. Reporting

Financial reports are to be submitted to the NOAA Grants Officer identified in the award and Performance (technical) reports are to be submitted to the Federal Program Officer. Unless otherwise specified by terms of the award, program and financial reports are to be submitted semi-annually. Program reports should include progress on identified milestones. Electronic submission of performance reports is preferred. All reports will be submitted on a semi-annual schedule and must be submitted no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of the award. In addition to the financial and performance reports, grant recipients will be required to submit a comprehensive evaluation report 90 days after the project end date.

VII. Agency Contacts

For questions regarding the application process, you may contact: Robert Sadler, State/Federal Liaison Branch, (727) 824-5324, or Robert.Sadler@noaa.gov

VIII. Other Information

We will award grants or cooperative agreements for a maximum period of up to three years, consisting of one, two, or three budget periods. The award period depends upon the duration of funding requested in the application, the decision of the NMFS selecting official on the amount of funding, the results of post-selection negotiations between the applicant and NOAA officials, and pre-award review of the application by NOAA and DOC officials. Normally, each project budget period is 12 months in duration. The earliest start date of awards (1st of a month) is about 180 days after the date of publication of this notice. You must also be available to respond to questions during the review and evaluation of the proposal(s).

If you are selected to receive a grant award for a project, you must:

1. Manage the day-to-day operations of the project, be responsible for the performance of all activities for which funds are granted, and be responsible for the satisfaction of all administrative and managerial conditions imposed by the award.
2. Keep records sufficient to document any costs incurred under the award, and

allow access to these records for audit and examination by the Secretary of Commerce, the Comptroller General of the United States, or their authorized representatives; and submit financial status reports (FFR) to NOAA Grants in accordance with the award conditions.