

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
SOUTHEAST REGION**

NEWS RELEASE

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**NOAA FISHERIES' MARINE MAMMAL AUTHORIZATION PROGRAM
INTEGRATES WITH STATES' FISHERY LICENSE SYSTEMS**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is integrating the commercial fishing license programs of the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida into its national Marine Mammal Authorization Program (MMAP). The integration will reduce registration burdens on marine fishers while protecting and conserving marine mammals in the southeastern United States. This action will no longer require permit holders from the above states to submit an MMAP registration, renewal form, or processing fee to receive or validate the 2002 MMAP Authorization Certificate. NOAA Fisheries will automatically process registrations for the 2002 MMAP Authorizations from information obtained from all these states. Fishers currently holding commercial licenses from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida who must have MMAP Authorizations can expect to receive their Authorizations by the end of March 2002. This will be done automatically and will not require any action by fishers. The announcement of this integrated process will soon be published in the Federal Register.

“NOAA Fisheries has integrated its MMAP with several other licensing systems elsewhere in the country,” said Joseph Powers, acting administrator for NOAA Fisheries southeast region. “We’re now moving forward with the states in the southeast.”

Section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act requires that every U.S. commercial fishery be placed in one of three categories, depending on how often the fishery causes serious injury or death to marine mammals. Fisheries that frequently or occasionally cause serious injury or death to marine mammals are designated as Category I or II fisheries and must be registered under the MMAP. Category III fishers are not required to register. Some of the Category I and II fisheries include but are not limited to: North Carolina Long Haul Seine, Atlantic Blue Crab Trap/Pot, North Carolina Roe Mullet Stop Net, North Carolina Inshore Gillnet, Mid-Atlantic Coastal Gillnet, and Southeast Atlantic Gillnet. For a full description of the eighteen Category I and II fisheries in the Atlantic Ocean, contact NOAA Fisheries at the address or telephone number given below. All vessel owners or operators, regardless of the category of fishery they participate in, must continue to report all incidental injuries and mortalities of marine mammals that have occurred as a result of commercial fishing operations.

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“We’re delighted that North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida have joined this partnership to reduce the registration fees and burdens placed on their fishers,” said Powers. “This streamlined process will help NOAA Fisheries better gauge marine mammal and commercial fishery interactions. Better information about such interactions will promote better management and benefit marine mammal populations.”

Written inquiries should be sent to: NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office, Protected Resources Division, Attn: Teletha Griffin, 9721 Executive Center Drive North, St. Petersburg, FL 33702. Comments or questions can also be directed to (727) 570-5312.

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