

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: 2015 Mid-Atlantic Research Set-Aside (RSA)

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-NEFSC-2015-2004064

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 Tuesday, September 30, 2014.** 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: Mid-Atlantic 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. January 1, 2015, should be used as the proposed start date on proposals, unless otherwise directed by the Program Officer.

Funding Opportunity Description: NMFS, with assistance from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council), is soliciting proposals that address Mid-Atlantic RSA research priorities concerning summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, longfin squid, Illex squid, Atlantic mackerel, butterfish, bluefish, and spiny dogfish. Proceeds from the sale of research quota are used to pay for research costs and to compensate fishing vessel owners that harvest RSA quota. No Federal funds are provided for research under this notification. Projects funded under the Mid-Atlantic RSA Program must enhance the knowledge of subject Mid-Atlantic fishery resources or contribute to the body of information on which Council management decisions are made. Proposals must

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 Mid-Atlantic RSA Program was created by the Council as a vehicle to fund research projects through the sale of RSA quota. Framework Adjustment 1 to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP), Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish FMP, Bluefish FMP, and Tilefish FMP established a procedure through which RSA quotas are set-aside as part of the Council's quota-setting process. As part of Amendment 3 to the Spiny Dogfish FMP, which is under development, the Council has proposed to add spiny dogfish to the species included under the RSA program. The final rulemaking for Amendment 3 is scheduled for early summer, 2014. The set-asides may range between 0 and 3 percent of each species' Total Allowable Landings (TAL). The set-aside for a given species is designated primarily for research involving that species. However, applicants may request up to 25 percent of the set-aside quota for other species listed in this notice that are not the subject of the proposed research.

B. Program Priorities

Projects must enhance understanding of the fishery resource and contribute to the body of information on which management decisions are made. The Council and NMFS will give priority to funding research proposals in the following areas identified as research priorities by the Council for the 2015 fishing year.

The Council passed a motion at their August 2013 meeting to maintain the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) as their top research priority, and that other projects may be funded depending on available resources. This motion was passed in response to concerns that NEAMAP, which has been funded through the Mid-Atlantic RSA program since 2007, has been granted the majority of the set-aside quota, thereby resulting in decreased funding opportunities for other RSA proposals. For further information on previously funded Mid-Atlantic RSA proposals and the award amounts, visit the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Cooperative Research Program website at: www.nefsc.noaa.gov/coopresearch/. With the exception of the top priority, the sequence of "additional priorities" is not intended to indicate preference of one priority over another. Applicants should be aware that proposals focused on a spiny dogfish priority will only be considered if Amendment 3 establishes spiny dogfish as one of the species included in the Mid-Atlantic RSA program.

2015 Mid-Atlantic RSA Program Priorities

TOP PRIORITY

Spanning Multiple Species

- Conduct fishery independent surveys for all Mid-Atlantic species, especially in the near shore zone (as provided by the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program-NEAMAP).

ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES:

Interactions Between Longfin Squid, Butterfish, Atlantic Mackerel and River Herring

- Test gear modifications (in addition to mesh size), videography and/or alternative gear types (e.g., jigging) in the longfin squid fishery to reduce bycatch of butterfish and other species.

- Study mortality rates of longfin squid that pass through trawl mesh to evaluate effects of mesh regulations on fishing mortality of longfin squid by size and age.

- During the spring, conduct exploratory sampling for squid, Atlantic mackerel, and butterfish in deep water beyond the range of the current NEFSC spring bottom trawl survey.

- Investigate potential for industry surveys to support butterfish or squid assessments.

- Investigate mesh size and/or gear technologies (e.g., grates or separators) to reduce retention of small Atlantic mackerel and river herring in the Atlantic mackerel fishery.

- Explore spatial distribution of stocks relative to the mixing of the northern and southern "contingents" of Atlantic mackerel (i.e., tagging, genetics, chemical assay, and/or microchemistry of otoliths).

- Exploration of bottom trawl catchability characteristics for Atlantic mackerel.

- Participate with industry in investigating the contemporary overlap between the surveyed Atlantic mackerel stock area, Atlantic mackerel commercial fishery, and Atlantic mackerel distribution, and explore historical databases for the same purpose to better understand the interpretation of Atlantic mackerel abundance indices (survey, catch per unit effort).

Summer Flounder

- Evaluate the length, weight, and age compositions of landed and discarded fish in the summer flounder fisheries (recreational and commercial) by sex. Focus should be placed on age sampling of summer flounder 24 inches or larger in total length, using paired hard part samples (i.e., scales, and when possible, otoliths).

- Evaluate gear modifications to reduce discard mortality in the recreational fishery.

Bluefish

- Evaluate the amount and length, weight, and age compositions of discards from the commercial and recreational fisheries.

- Initiate fishery-dependent and independent sampling of offshore populations of bluefish during the winter months (consider migration, seasonal fisheries, and unique selectivity patterns resulting in a bimodal partial recruitment pattern; consider if the migratory pattern results in several recruitment events).

Black Sea Bass

- Perform studies focused on life history and reproductive behaviors, such as changes in sex ratio as a function of age and size, or the evaluation of the sizes of territories in relation to mating or reproduction.

- Increase sea sampling to verify information from commercial logbooks toward providing better estimates of discards (with emphasis on pot trap and hook and line gear).

- Evaluate and, if appropriate, continue a fixed gear survey of black sea bass similar to the one used for scup.

Scup

- Estimate the fishery components used to calculate scup mortality for commercial and recreational landings and discards (with emphasis on discards).

- Expand age sampling of scup from commercial and recreational catches. Focus age sampling on scup 10 inches or larger in total length.

- Review and evaluate existing fishery independent indices for scup.

Illex Squid

- Determine size, age-at-maturity, and growth parameters for Illex squid.

Spiny Dogfish

- Investigate the effects of stock structure or distribution, sex ratio, and size of pups on birth rate and first year survival of pups.

- Continue large scale (international) tagging programs, including conventional external tags, data storage tags, and satellite pop-up tags, to help clarify movement patterns and migration rates.

- Investigate the distribution of spiny dogfish beyond the depth range of current NEFSC bottom trawl surveys, possibly by using experimental research or supplemental surveys.

- Continue aging studies for spiny dogfish age structures (e.g., fins, spines) obtained from all sampling programs (include additional age validation and age structure exchanges), and conduct an aging workshop for spiny dogfish, encouraging

participation by NEFSC, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, other interested state agencies, academia, and other international investigators with an interest in dogfish aging (US and Canada Pacific Coast, International Council for the Exploration of the Seas).

- Evaluate ecosystem effects on spiny dogfish acting through changes in spiny dogfish vital rates (e.g., natural mortality, fecundity, size/age at maturity, 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. Statutory authority for entering into cooperative agreements and other financial agreements with non-profit organizations is found at 15 U.S.C. 1540.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

No Federal funds are provided for research under this notification. Funds generated from RSA landings shall be used to cover the cost of the research activities, including vessel costs, and to compensate vessel owners for expenses incurred during the harvest of the set-aside species. For example, the funds may be used to pay for gear modifications, monitoring equipment, additional provisions (e.g., fuel, ice, food for scientists), or the salaries of research personnel. The Federal Government is not liable for any costs incurred by the researcher or vessel owner should the sale of RSA quota not fully reimburse the researcher, research organization, and/ or research and compensation harvesting vessels' owners for his/her expenses. Any additional funds generated through the sale of RSA quota, above the cost of the research activities, shall be retained by the vessel owners as compensation for use of his/her vessel.

The harvest of RSA quota is largely driven by increased fishing opportunities, such as the ability to fish during quota closures or exceed trip possession limits. Such privileged fishing opportunities, which must be authorized by state and Federal authorities (See Section IV.F.3 Permits and Approvals), are expected to arise for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, longfin squid, butterfish, bluefish, and spiny dogfish. Consequently, it is anticipated that these will be the only species awarded under the 2015 RSA program, although Atlantic Mackerel and Illex squid may also be available. The 2015 RSA quotas have been proposed for summer flounder (553,350 lb), scup (842,165 lb), black sea bass (136,907 lb), and spiny dogfish (1,518,000 lb). The 2015 RSA quotas for longfin squid, butterfish, and bluefish have not yet been proposed, but for reference purposes, the 2014 longfin squid, butterfish, and bluefish RSA quotas for were 1,453,711 lb, 700,000 lb, and 300,000 lb respectively. Proposed RSA quotas are contingent on final rulemaking. The value of RSA quota will be dictated by market conditions prevailing at the time the compensation fishing trips are conducted. For information regarding the general

market value of these species, applicants may refer to the most recent Fisheries of the United States publication posted at: www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/publications.html.

Butterfish RSA quota will be reserved in conjunction with any longfin squid RSA quota award to ensure that butterfish bycatch does not constrain the harvest of longfin squid RSA quota. Butterfish RSA quota in excess of what is needed to facilitate the harvest of longfin RSA quota may be awarded for the targeted butterfish fishery.

In addition to requesting set-aside quota to generate funds, applicants should consider requesting set-aside quota for research purposes where applicable. For example, if a research plan entails landing fish for research purposes; such fish should be included in the overall set-aside request. If an applicant chooses to request set-aside quota strictly for research purposes it should be clearly stated in the application and further explanation of compensation landings must be identified.

B. Project/Award Period

The research project period should be January 1, through December 31, 2015. All RSA quota must be caught within the fishing year from which it was derived. With the exception of spiny dogfish, 2015 Mid-Atlantic RSA quota must be harvested between January 1, 2015, and December 31, 2015. For spiny dogfish, 2015 RSA quota must be harvested between May 1, 2015, and April 30, 2016. The harvest of RSA quota cannot begin until the award has been granted and the appropriate authorizations to harvest RSA quota have been retained.

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 conduct of the research project. Examples of substantial involvement may include but are not limited to involvement and/or collaboration between NOAA scientists and a recipient scientist in the conduct of the research project. 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 institutions of higher education, hospitals, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, and 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 Council are ineligible to submit an application under this program. However, 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 for work using an RSA allocation for the 2015 fishing year 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/ago/acquisition/standard.cfm>. Applicants without Internet access can contact Cheryl A. Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, or by phone at 508-495-2070, or fax at 508-495-2004, or via e-mail at cheryl.corbett@noaa.gov. To apply for this NOAA federal funding opportunity, please go to <http://www.grants.gov>, and use the following funding opportunity number: NOAA-NMFS-NEFSC-2015-2004064.

B. Content and Form of Application

Should an applicant wish to include a coversheet with his/her proposal, the coversheet should summarize key information already contained with the proposal which includes the program name, date, applicant name, project title, project duration, principal investigator(s), program priorities addressed, pounds requested, and funds requested broken down by research, compensation, and total value.

Applicants must adhere to provision under "Applications" and the nine

requirements under "Required Elements" by the application deadline. Failure to follow these provisions will result in proposals being returned to the applicant without review.

1. Applications

a. Applications submitted under the 2015 Mid-Atlantic 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 Activities). These forms are available at <http://www.ago.noaa.gov/ago/acquisition/standard.cfm>. They should be submitted through the www.grants.gov website. Applicants submitting hard copies 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 the cost 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. In the event that a spiny dogfish RSA is not established, proposals focused on a spiny dogfish priority will not be considered. 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 10 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, addressing the locations and sample procedures as well as quantitative methods with justifications, and attainable within the time, funding, and resources available.

Proposals should be accomplishment-oriented and identify specific performance measures and how investigators anticipate research results being used in the science and/or management arenas to enhance the understanding of the fishery resource being studied 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 for business and financial management, field work, analysis of data, and reporting, expected products, and participants other than applicant; (2) project 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; and (6) names and affiliations of graduate students supported under the project

b. A detailed budget, including a description of the amount of RSA quota being requested (including revenues derived from the sale of RSA quota) and funding needs. The budget must include a breakdown of research costs including labor, vessel contracts, permits, 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 the applicant. Proposals must provide a description of the safeguards that will be used to ensure that the set-aside quota award 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 vessels 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 by name with contact information in the proposal, if possible;

e. Supporting documents, including resumes, letters of intent for vessels to participate in research activities, coordination with state fisheries agencies, and any relevant contracts;

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, F1-3, F10-F13, H1-H24, H26, and H27-31. This form is located at <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/grants.html>. Failure to complete all of the indicated questions 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 Tuesday, September 30, 2014. 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: Mid-Atlantic 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: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>. 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. DOC Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreement are set forth in the Federal Register notice of December 17, 2012 (77 FR 74634) and are applicable to this solicitation. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-12-17/pdf/2012-30228.pdf>

2. The RSA harvest time frame must fall within January 1 through December 31, 2015, for all species other than spiny dogfish. Spiny dogfish RSA quota harvest would need to occur between May 1, 2015, and April 30, 2016. There may be times when compensation fishing is not concurrent with the timing of the research. In these instances, to help ensure minimum interruption with the proposed research, no more than 50 percent of the requested RSA quota should be harvested prior to the onset of the study. Proposals requesting RSA harvest prior to or after these time frames will not be considered.

3. The Federal Government shall not be liable for any costs incurred in the conduct of the project. Any additional funds, generated through the sale of RSA 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. 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, regulation waivers and compensation fishing activities, application procedures, and completion of application forms. Since 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, through the public mailing list maintained by the Council office, and through NOAA cooperative research website: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/coopresearch/>.

2. The Council staff will bear the primary responsibility for the evaluation of impacts associated with any requested compensation fishing regulatory exemptions. However, applications that propose research and/or compensation fishing activities that exceed the scope of analysis provided by the Council staff in the Council's quota specification packages may require the applicant to submit additional information as necessary to ensure compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

3. Permits and Approvals

a. Vessels participating in the Mid-Atlantic RSA Program must obtain the appropriate vessel documentation consistent with experimental fishing regulations at 50 CFR 600.745 and 50 CFR 648.12. Vessels conducting certain types of research activities that require relief from fishery regulations may be required to obtain an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) or other permit. EFP application guidance is available from the Sustainable Fisheries Division, Greater Atlantic Fisheries Office.

b. If an exemption from Federal regulations is proposed, a list of the specific regulations to be exempted and a brief justification for each regulation to be exempted must be included. Should an applicant submit a request for an EFP to NMFS, the completed application should be received by NMFS at least 60 days before the requested start date of the proposed research.

c. Successful applicants must obtain compensation fishing permits from NMFS prior to initiating compensation fishing. NMFS will issue EFPs to federally permitted fishing vessels identified by the project coordinator, which authorize such vessels to take compensation fishing trips.

d. Projects may not have more than 50 vessels authorized to conduct compensation fishing at any given time, unless sufficient justification can demonstrate that more than 50 vessels are needed. All research set-aside quota that is landed for sale or research must be reported per the Interactive Voice Response system or Vessel Monitoring System instructions provided by NMFS. 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.

e. Proposals must include written acknowledgements of coordination with all cooperators or partners identified in the proposal. This includes a detailed description about how vessel activities will be coordinated, and measures that will be taken to ensure an RSA quota award will not be exceeded. Cooperators include fisheries agencies of those states where RSA quota may be landed, or in whose waters the project is expected to conduct operations. It is the responsibility of applicants to obtain any required state authorizations prior. NOAA cannot guarantee that state agencies will accede to any particular request. Contact information for state fishery management agencies is available from NMFS.

f. NMFS must have a signed confidentiality waiver from vessel owners prior to releasing RSA quota harvest data to grant recipients. NMFS staff will provide copies of a confidentiality waiver form to successful applicants.

g. Successful Projects that are designed to generate data that will ultimately be merged with other governmental databases will be required to submit the data in electronic form in accordance with protocols of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) and/or other database formats as may be required by NMFS.

To apply for this NOAA Federal Funding Opportunity, please submit applications to <http://www.grants.gov> and use the following funding opportunity number NOAA-NMFS-NEFSC-2015-2004064. Applicants who do not have Internet access may submit their application to Cheryl A. Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

The technical reviewers identified by NMFS to evaluate proposals submitted in response to this Federal Funding Opportunity (see Section V.B.) will evaluate proposals by assigning scores up to the maximum indicated for each of the following criteria:

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 Council, NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities. For the 2015 RSA program, 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 is important. The application must include a description of how all collected data will be provided to the NEFSC for future access and archiving purposes. The applicant should consult with ACCSP or NEFSC Division of Data Management Services for formatting guidance. (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, qualifications/experience of project participants. Where appropriate, unified versus separate stand-alone proposals on related projects involving multiple principal investigators are preferred. For proposals involving multiple vessels harvesting RSA, special attention will be given to specification of safeguards to ensure that the authorized RSA allocation 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. The anticipated revenue from the RSA should be commensurate with estimated project costs, and generally should not exceed 2.5 times the cost of the associated research. Economic and budget projections should be quantified, to the extent possible. Where appropriate, use of existing equipment (fishing gear) is preferred versus acquisition of new equipment. (25 points)

5. Outreach and education: This criterion assesses whether the project involves a focused and effective education and outreach strategy. To enhance the educational benefits of the RSA program, it is encouraged to include support of, as appropriate, undergraduate or graduate students as part of the research program. All students supported by RSA grants should be listed and curriculum vitae provided. Outreach activities should include an outreach plan, identification of anticipated benefits, potential users, likelihood of success, and methods of broadly disseminating research results. (10 points)

B. Review and Selection Process

NMFS will solicit written technical evaluations from three or more appropriate private and public sector experts (e.g., industry, academia, or governmental experts) to determine the technical merit of the proposal and to provide a rank score of the project based on the criteria described in the Evaluation Criteria section of this document. Following completion of the technical evaluation, NMFS will convene a

management review panel, including the Council's RSA Committee, and management and/or other technical experts, to review and individually critique the scored proposals to enhance NOAA's understanding of the proposals. Initial successful applicants may be required, in consultation with NMFS, to further refine/modify the research, including the proposed location, as a condition of project approval. No consensus recommendations will be made by the management review panel members or technical reviewers.

C. Selection Factors

The merit review ratings shall provide a rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The program officer may first make recommendations to the Selecting Official applying the selection factors below. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank 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 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. Whether this project duplicates other projects funded or considered for funding
by NOAA or other Federal agencies.
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 National Environmental Policy Act 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 experimental fishery requirements discussed under the Permits and Approvals section of this document; (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.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Technical and management review of the proposals will occur during the 3 months following the deadline for this announcement. Initiation of approved RSA project activities should begin early in the 2015 calendar year for most projects. January 1, 2015, 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 an authorization to begin project operations. Official notification of selection, signed by the NOAA Grants Officer, is the authorizing document that allows a project to begin. Notifications will be issued to the authorizing official and the principal investigator of the project. Successful and unsuccessful applicants may be notified either electronically or in writing.

To enable the use of a universal identifier and to enhance the quality of information available to the public as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, to the extent applicable, any proposal awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the Central Contractor Registration and Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System and be subject to reporting requirements, as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 CFR Parts 25, 170 (2010).

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements.

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 published in the Federal Register on December 17, 2012 (77 FR 74634). You may obtain a copy of this notice by contacting the agency contact, or by going to the website at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

If recommended for funding, applicants whose proposed projects may have an environmental impact will be asked to furnish sufficient information to assist NOAA in assessing the potential environmental consequences of supporting the project.

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the NEPA, for applicant projects or proposals which 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_6.pdf, NEPA Questionnaire, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/questionnaire.pdf>, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/ceq_regulations/regulations.html. 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). NEPA analysis for RSA project compensation fishing activities is normally conducted by the Council through the Council's fishery management specifications process for RSA species. If the Council's NEPA analysis is not adequate, applicants may be required to provide additional specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses.

In addition, 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 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 reports are to be submitted electronically unless the recipient does not have internet access, in which case, hard copy submissions will be accepted. A final Federal Financial Report (SF-425) is required to be submitted to the Grants Officer.

a. The SF425 must report \$0.00 on every line item and the comment section should state: This is an RSA grant award which has no federal dollars associated with it. The final accounting information has been 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 progress reports must include, in addition to an update on the status of the research, documentation of all fish caught by vessels participating in the project, including catch by vessels operating under a Letter of Acknowledgment. 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 final accounting of all fish caught and landed during compensation fishing and research (including catch by vessels operating under a Letter of Acknowledgment), fish sold, and if applicable, the disbursement of any additional funds generated through the sale of set-aside landings above the cost of the research activities. If you choose to use an auction service to convert your allocation into dollars, you are still liable to provide landing information to fulfill this requirement;
- g. Data from research projects must be submitted in electronic format with appropriate documentation to NMFS as requested. All raw data collected under grants issued as a result of this solicitation belongs to and shall remain the property of the Federal Government. Grantees will be required to collect, assimilate, maintain and transmit any and all raw data in a format and timeframe that may be specified by NMFS. Partial submissions of the final report will not be accepted. If any of the required elements of the final report are omitted in the original submission, the Federal Program Officer (FPO) shall reject the final report until all requirements have been satisfied;
- h. An electronic version of the final report must be submitted in a format suitable for posting on the web, including all tables, figures and maps. Currently the preferred format is PDF (Portable Document Format), although an alternative format may be specified by NMFS or the MAFMC webmaster; and
- i. Principal Investigators must anticipate being requested to provide an oral presentation to the RSA Committee or the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council on the results of their research.

3. All RSA quota that is landed, including fish landed for research purposes, must be reported to NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) per the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System and Vessel Monitoring System instructions provided by NMFS. Starting in 2014, in addition to the long-standing pre- and post-trip reporting requirement, compensation fishing vessels will be required to notify NMFS via the IVR system at least 1-hour prior to landing to report RSA quota. Non-compliance with this reporting requirement could be cause for revoking compensation fishing privileges and for not awarding future NOAA projects.

VII. Agency Contacts

Information may be obtained from Kathy Collins, Public Affairs Specialist, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, by phone 302-674-2331 ext. 259, or via email at kcollins1@mafmc.org, or Cheryl A. Corbett, Cooperative Programs Specialist, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, or by phone at 508-495-2070, or fax at 508-495-2004, or via e-mail at cheryl.corbett@noaa.gov for grant related questions; or from Ryan Silva, Cooperative Research Liaison, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Fisheries Office, by phone 978-281-9326, or via e-mail at ryan.silva@noaa.gov for compensation fishing/regulatory questions.

VIII. Other Information

A. Limitation of Liability

In no event will NOAA or the DOC be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or to provide special fishing privileges.

B. 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 publically 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 protected to the extent permitted by law.