

estimated taking occurred to a new individual, which is an unlikely scenario.

Based on the analysis contained herein of the proposed activity (including the proposed mitigation and monitoring measures) and the anticipated take of marine mammals, NMFS preliminarily finds that small numbers of marine mammals will be taken relative to the population size of the affected species or stocks.

Unmitigable Adverse Impact Analysis and Determination

In order to issue an IHA, NMFS must find that the specified activity will not have an “unmitigable adverse impact” on the subsistence uses of the affected marine mammal species or stocks by Alaskan Natives. NMFS has defined “unmitigable adverse impact” in 50 CFR 216.103 as an impact resulting from the specified activity: (1) That is likely to reduce the availability of the species to a level insufficient for a harvest to meet subsistence needs by: (i) Causing the marine mammals to abandon or avoid hunting areas; (ii) Directly displacing subsistence users; or (iii) Placing physical barriers between the marine mammals and the subsistence hunters; and (2) That cannot be sufficiently mitigated by other measures to increase the availability of marine mammals to allow subsistence needs to be met.

The proposed Project is in an area where subsistence hunting for harbor seals or sea lions could occur (Wolfe *et al.* 2013). Peak hunting season in southeast Alaska occurs during the month of November and again during March and April. During this time, seals are aggregated in shoal areas as they prey on forage species such as herring, making them easier to find and hunt (Wolfe *et al.* 2013). However, the project location is not preferred for hunting. There is little-to-no hunting documented in the vicinity and there are no harvest quotas for non-listed marine mammals. As such, the Old Sitka Dock North Dolphins Expansion Project is not expected to have impacts on the ability of hunters from southeast Alaska subsistence communities to harvest marine mammals. Additionally, HPMS contacted the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, but they did not raise any concerns regarding subsistence impacts. Therefore, NMFS has preliminarily determined that there will not be an unmitigable adverse impact on subsistence uses from HPMS's proposed activities.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA: 16 U.S.C.

1531 *et seq.*) requires that each Federal agency insure that any action it authorizes, funds, or carries out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. To ensure ESA compliance for the issuance of IHAs, NMFS consults internally, in this case with the Alaska Region, Protected Resources Division Office, whenever we propose to authorize take for endangered or threatened species.

NMFS is proposing to authorize take of Mexico DPS humpback whales and Western DPS Steller sea lions, which are listed under the ESA. The Permit and Conservation Division has requested initiation of Section 7 consultation with the Alaska Region for the issuance of this IHA. NMFS will conclude the ESA consultation prior to reaching a determination regarding the proposed issuance of the authorization.

Proposed Authorization

As a result of these preliminary determinations, NMFS proposes to issue an IHA to Halibut Point Marine Services LLC for conducting pile driving and removal and down-the-hole drilling activities in Sitka, AK in fall 2020 to winter 2021, provided the previously mentioned mitigation, monitoring, and reporting requirements are incorporated. A draft of the proposed IHA can be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/permit/incidental-take-authorizations-under-marine-mammal-protection-act>.

Request for Public Comments

We request comment on our analyses, the proposed authorization, and any other aspect of this Notice of Proposed IHA for the proposed project. We also request at this time comment on the potential Renewal of this proposed IHA as described in the paragraph below. Please include with your comments any supporting data or literature citations to help inform decisions on the request for this IHA or a subsequent Renewal IHA.

On a case-by-case basis, NMFS may issue a one-year Renewal IHA following notice to the public providing an additional 15 days for public comments when (1) up to another year of identical or nearly identical, or nearly identical, activities as described in the Specified Activities section of this notice is planned or (2) the activities as described in the Specified Activities section of this notice would not be completed by the time the IHA expires and a Renewal would allow for completion of the activities beyond that described in the Dates and Duration section of this

notice, provided all of the following conditions are met:

- A request for renewal is received no later than 60 days prior to the needed Renewal IHA effective date (recognizing that the Renewal IHA expiration date cannot extend beyond one year from expiration of the initial IHA);

- The request for renewal must include the following:

(1) An explanation that the activities to be conducted under the requested Renewal IHA are identical to the activities analyzed under the initial IHA, are a subset of the activities, or include changes so minor (e.g., reduction in pile size) that the changes do not affect the previous analyses, mitigation and monitoring requirements, or take estimates (with the exception of reducing the type or amount of take); and

(2) A preliminary monitoring report showing the results of the required monitoring to date and an explanation showing that the monitoring results do not indicate impacts of a scale or nature not previously analyzed or authorized; and

- Upon review of the request for Renewal, the status of the affected species or stocks, and any other pertinent information, NMFS determines that there are no more than minor changes in the activities, the mitigation and monitoring measures will remain the same and appropriate, and the findings in the initial IHA remain valid.

Dated: January 16, 2020.

Donna S. Wieting,

Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XA015]

Western Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of a public meeting and hearing.

SUMMARY: The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold public meetings and scoping sessions to discuss management of small-boat pelagic fisheries in Hawaii.

DATES: The Council will hold meetings in Honolulu, Oahu on Tuesday, February 4, 2020, between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.; in Kona, HI on Wednesday, February 5, 2020, between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.; in Hilo, HI on Thursday, February 6, 2020, between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.; in Kahului, Maui on Monday, February 10, 2020, between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.; in Lihue, Kauai on Tuesday, February 11, 2020, between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.; and in Kaneohe, Oahu on Thursday, February 13, 2020, between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. All times listed are local island times. For specific times and agendas, see **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**.

ADDRESSES: The Honolulu, Oahu meeting will be held at the Washington Intermediate School Cafeteria, 1633 S King St., Honolulu, HI 96826. The Kona, Hawaii meeting will be held at the West Hawaii Civic Center, Building G, 74-5044 Ane Keohokalole Hwy., Kailua-Kona, HI 96740. The Hilo, Hawaii meeting will be held at Aunt Sally Kaleohano's Luau Hale, 799 Piilani St., Hilo, HI 96720. The Kahului, Maui meeting will be held at the Lihikai Elementary School Cafeteria, 355 S Papa Ave., Kahului, HI 96732. The Kauai meeting will be held at the Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School Cafeteria, 4431 Nuhou St., Lihue, HI 96766. The Kaneohe, Oahu meeting will be held at the Benjamin Parker Elementary School Cafeteria, 45-259 Waikalua Rd., Kaneohe, HI 96744.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kitty M. Simonds, Executive Director, Western Pacific Fishery Management Council; telephone: (808) 522-8220.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Public scoping and comment periods will be provided in the agenda. The order in which agenda items are addressed may change. The meetings will run as late as necessary to complete scheduled business.

Schedule and Agenda for All Meetings

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Public Scoping Session Goals and Objectives
3. Informational Briefing
 - a. Background on the Hawaii Small-boat Pelagic Fishery
 - b. Potential Management Scenarios
 - c. Discussion Questions
4. Public Comment/Scoping Session
5. Report on Next Steps

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Kitty M. Simonds, (808) 522-8220 (voice) or (808) 522-

8226 (fax), at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: January 16, 2020.

Tracey L. Thompson,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XX023]

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; General Provisions for Domestic Fisheries; Application for Exempted Fishing Permits

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Greater Atlantic Region, NMFS, has made a preliminary determination that an application submitted by the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance to revise an existing Exempted Fishing Permit contains all of the required information and warrants further consideration. The revised Exempted Fishing Permit would allow two commercial fishing vessels participating in an electronic monitoring program to fish with benthic longline gear in portions of the Cashes Ledge Closure Area. Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require publication of this notice to provide interested parties the opportunity to comment on applications for proposed Exempted Fishing Permits.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before February 6, 2020.

ADDRESSES: You may submit written comments by any of the following methods:

- *Email:* NMFS.GAR.EFP@NOAA.gov. Include in the subject line "LONGLINE AMENDMENT TO EM EFP."
- *Mail:* Michael Pentony, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope "LONGLINE AMENDMENT TO EM EFP."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Maria Vasta, Fishery Management Specialist, 978-281-9196.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

On May 1, 2019, NMFS granted an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) to the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, and fishermen, to continue developing an audit model electronic monitoring (EM) program for catch accounting in the groundfish fishery. Fifteen vessels using a variety of gear types (*e.g.*, jig, benthic longline, sink gillnet, bottom trawl) are participating in the project.

Vessels participating in this EFP are required to use EM on 100 percent of groundfish trips. Camera systems are used in lieu of human at-sea monitors, and in addition to Northeast Fishery Observer Program observers. Vessels must adhere to a vessel-specific monitoring plan detailing at-sea catch handling protocols. Vessels must also submit haul-level electronic vessel trip reports with count and weight estimates for all groundfish discards. To incentivize participation in this program and because vessels are fully accountable, the audit model EM EFP exempts certain participating vessels from several Federal closed area regulations. One of these exemptions allows vessels fishing with jig gear (jigging machines, handgear) to fish in the Cashes Ledge Closure Area, excluding the Ammen Rock Habitat Management Area (HMA).

The Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance subsequently submitted a request to revise this EFP to allow two additional vessels to fish with benthic longline gear in portions of the Cashes Ledge Closure Area. Both vessels are currently participating in the audit model EM EFP. The revised EFP would exempt the two participating benthic longline vessels from the Cashes Ledge Closure Area excluding the Ammen Rock HMA at 50 CFR 648.81(a)(3). These vessels would continue to be required to use EM systems on 100 percent of groundfish trips and to adhere to their specific vessel-monitoring plans. Existing catch accounting, video review, and other EM protocols would remain in effect during these operations.

The revised EFP would be effective through the end of fishing year 2019 (April 31, 2019). Project partners estimate that the two participating vessels would collectively take 20 benthic longline trips in the Cashes Ledge Closure Area under the amended EFP. Each trip would last for approximately 18 hours in duration. Cumulative catch estimates from these