

TABLE 2—PROJECT SUMMARY—Continued

Total number of days	Up to 105.
Gear type(s)	Dredge.
Number of tows or sets	35 per trip.
Duration of tows or sets	15–30 minutes.

Project Narrative

This project builds on initial work completed approximately a decade ago from 2014 through 2015, as well as work from a partial season in 2025, and reflects renewed interest in surfclams and ocean quahogs by the Cape Cod small boat fleet and by a new, local dealer/processor that normally buys from state waters surfclam boats and accepts smaller increments. The previous test from 10 years ago using alternative containers and tags showed promise, but buyers at the time would not accept non-standard cages, limiting the market viability of the alternative cages. Between July 11, 2025, and September 30, 2025, 11 trips were taken under the 2025 EFP. Over 2,500 bushels of surfclams were landed, with no safety incidents. Participants were able to sell almost half the catch to live and specialty markets, at a higher price point, as the percentage of broken clams dropped from 30 to 9 percent. This EFP would collect data to support a future regulatory request to permanently allow small boats to land surfclams and ocean quahogs in smaller increments.

This EFP would authorize three vessels to continue to develop the viability of a day-boat Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog fishery for small vessels based out of Cape Cod by testing alternatives to the large industry-standard cages and 32-bushel (1.7 m³) cage tags. The traditional cages do not fit on smaller day boats and, as a result, vessels not capable of carrying a cage onboard must offload directly into cages. This can be burdensome and dangerous and the extra handling and compression of clams in the cages can lead to damaged product and lower market value. Many ports do not have the infrastructure to safely offload into cages and the local dealer dedicated to buying the catch is not capable of handling 32-bushel cages. All participating vessels would have open access permits and receive tags from one of the participants with allocation.

The participating vessels would use two alternative landing containers: a standard-size fish vat (internal measurements: 44 inch x 39 inch x 27 inch; 1.12 meter (m) x 0.99 m x 0.69 m) capable of holding 16 bushels (0.85 m³); and a standard-size stackable fish tote (internal measurements: 25 inch x 15.8

inch x 10.2 inch; 0.64 m x 0.40 m x 0.26 m) capable of holding 1.5 bushels (0.08 m³). One alternative denomination of a 16-bushel tag would be used, either on a fish vat or on a pallet of 10 1.5-bushel totes wrapped in plastic wrap. The participants acknowledge the loss of 1 bushel (0.05 m³) worth of catch for each pallet tagged. The vats would be constrained to weigh no more than 1,424 pounds (0.65 metric tons (mt)). The totes on a pallet would also be constrained to weigh no more than 1,424 pounds (but likely to only weigh 1,335 pounds (0.61 mt)). Weight samples would be taken by the dealer to verify weights to further develop the experimental containers. The applicant would work with NMFS and the National Band and Tag Company to convert standard cage tags into the alternative tag denomination. Up to 500 32-bushel ocean quahog tags and up to 270 32-bushel surf clam tags would be converted to 16-bushel tags.

Participating fishermen would complete a data sheet for each EFP trip to provide information on price per bushel and weight for each landing increment. Landings data would be verified with collection of dealer reports for each EFP trip. The proportion of breakages vs. live would be tested through collection of processor data detailing surfclam quality and condition. Annual surveys to measure impact and determine progress against the measures of success will be completed and the effects of using modified landing containers and alternative tags will be analyzed to determine what, if any, benefits the EFP protocol provides to economic viability and safety of small boat surfclam/ocean quahog fishing businesses.

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope or impact of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

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

Dated: December 19, 2025.

Kelly Denit,

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[Docket Nos.: NOAA-NOS-2025-0702;
NOAA-NOS-2025-1330]

RIN 0648-XA003

Deep Seabed Mining: Notice of Receipt of Applications for Deep Seabed Mining Exploration Licenses and Announcement of Public Comment Period and Virtual Public Hearings

AGENCY: Office for Coastal Management, National Ocean Service, National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of receipt of applications for deep seabed mining exploration licenses; request for comments; notice of virtual public hearing.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resources Act (DSHMRA or the Act), notice is hereby given that NOAA received, on July 27, 2025, an amended application from The Metals Company USA, LLC (TMC USA) for a license to conduct seabed mining exploration activities within the seabed area beyond national jurisdiction generally known as the Clarion-Clipperton Zone (TMC USA Application A). NOAA received a second amended application from TMC USA on July 28, 2025 (TMC USA Application B). NOAA has determined that these applications are fully compliant with the applicable information requirements of DSHMRA and the Act's implementing regulations. Subject to applicable public disclosure limitations, interested persons are afforded the opportunity to examine the materials relevant to these applications and may submit written comments to NOAA electronically via the instructions below. These applications are electronically available at the locations listed below under **ADDRESSES**. Please note that the statements made in the TMC USA applications do not necessarily reflect the views of NOAA.

or the views of the U.S. Government. As part of the application review process, NOAA will also hold two virtual public hearings to receive oral public comments on these applications.

DATES: Comments on the applications must be received by February 23, 2026. The virtual public hearings are scheduled for January 27, 2026, and January 28, 2026, from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Eastern Time each day. Instructions for attending the virtual public hearings are provided below.

ADDRESSES: The TMC USA Application A is electronically available at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NOS-2025-0702>; The TMC USA Application B is electronically available at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NOS-2025-1330>.

You may send comments, identified by docket number, by either of the following means:

Written Comments

Comments must be submitted by the date and electronic method described below to ensure that the comments are received, documented, and considered by NOAA. Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered. Comments that are not related to the applications or that contain profanity, vulgarity, threats, or other inappropriate language will not be considered. To ensure full consideration by NOAA, comments must be submitted in English. Comments that are not submitted in English may not be posted to the public dockets on regulations.gov, or considered by NOAA. All relevant comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address) submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NOAA will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

- For TMC USA Application A, submit all public written comments via the Federal regulations.gov e-Portal at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NOS-2025-0702> or go to www.regulations.gov and enter "NOAA-NOS-2025-0702" in the search bar.

- For TMC USA Application B, submit all public written comments via the Federal regulations.gov e-Portal at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NOS-2025-1330> or go to www.regulations.gov and enter "NOAA-NOS-2025-1330" in the search bar.

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For each docket, locate the document you wish to comment on from the resulting list and click on the "Submit a comment" icon on the right of that line. Please note that comments will only be considered for the docket to which they are submitted. If your comment is in response to both TMC USA Application A and TMC USA Application B, you must submit two comments, one to each docket.

Oral Comments

You may submit oral comments for either or both applications (TMC USA Application A and/or TMC USA Application B) at either virtual public hearing. At the virtual public hearings, you will be asked to specify whether your comment is in reference to TMC USA Application A, TMC USA Application B, or both.

NOAA will conduct the virtual public hearings via Adobe Connect. Each person who wants to attend either virtual public hearing must electronically register by January 21, 2026, 5 p.m. Eastern Time. Attendance at each virtual public hearing will be limited to 1,000 individuals for each of the two dates; therefore, NOAA requests that individuals register and attend only one hearing, on either January 27 or January 28, 2026. To register for either hearing, use the following link: https://noaabroadcast.adobeconnect.com/evxcr87egzq/event/event_info.html. Any person who registers and wants to speak at a virtual public hearing should indicate that they want to speak during registration. Each registered participant will receive an Adobe Connect link for the virtual public hearing.

Once the virtual public hearing starts, NOAA will describe the virtual public hearing logistics. NOAA will then start the public comment part of the virtual public hearing and will call on speakers on a first come/first served basis through the raised hand function of Adobe Connect. NOAA will then unmute the person speaking. Each speaker will have three minutes to speak on either or both applications (TMC USA Application A and/or TMC USA Application B). If a speaker does not respond when they are called on, NOAA will move to the next speaker. At the three-minute mark for each speaker, NOAA will mute that speaker. Speakers cannot allot their time to another speaker. Once all speakers have spoken, or at the scheduled end of the virtual public hearing, whichever is earlier, NOAA will end the virtual public hearing. NOAA retains discretion to

extend the virtual public hearing if appropriate and feasible. NOAA will record each hearing and will include transcripts of the hearings on the public dockets for each of the TMC USA Applications on the regulations.gov website at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NOS-2025-0702> for TMC USA Application A and at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NOS-2025-1330> for TMC USA Application B. The names provided by each speaker will also be published as part of the transcripts.

The virtual public hearings do not replace the process for submission of written comments. NOAA will not respond during the hearings to oral comments or questions. To ensure full consideration by NOAA, oral comments must be in English. Comments that are not in English may not be transcribed or considered by NOAA.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Authority: 30 U.S.C. 1426(a)(1).

Neil A. Jacobs,

*Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XF214]

Endangered and Threatened Species; Take of Anadromous Fish

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

ACTION: Notice; availability of a proposed evaluation and pending determination for public comment.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that NMFS has received a Hatchery and Genetics Management Plan (HGMP) for seven hatchery programs rearing and releasing fall Chinook salmon, spring Chinook salmon, fall chum salmon, sockeye salmon, coho salmon and steelhead in the Skokomish River basin. The plan describes a hatchery program operated by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in collaboration with the Skokomish Indian Tribe and Tacoma Power Utility as co-managers. This document serves to notify the public of the availability