

TABLE 1—TAKE ANALYSIS—Continued

Species	Authorized take	Scaled take ¹	Abundance ²	Percent abundance
Short-finned pilot whale	768	226.5	2,741	8.3

¹ Scalar ratios were applied to “Authorized Take” values as described at 86 FR 5322, 5404 (January 19, 2021) to derive scaled take numbers shown here.

² Best abundance estimate. For most taxa, the best abundance estimate for purposes of comparison with take estimates is considered here to be the model-predicted abundance (Garrison *et al.*, 2023). For Rice’s whale, Atlantic spotted dolphin, and Risso’s dolphin, the larger estimated SAR abundance estimate is used.

³ Includes 26 takes by Level A harassment and 368 takes by Level B harassment. Scalar ratio is applied to takes by Level B harassment only; small numbers determination made on basis of scaled Level B harassment take plus authorized Level A harassment take.

⁴ The “blackfish” guild includes melon-headed whales, false killer whales, pygmy killer whales, and killer whales.

Based on the analysis contained herein of WesternGeco’s proposed survey activity described in its LOA application, as subsequently modified by WesternGeco, and the anticipated take of marine mammals, NMFS finds that small numbers of marine mammals will be taken relative to the affected species or stock sizes (*i.e.*, less than one-third of the best available abundance estimate) and therefore the taking is of no more than small numbers.

Authorization

NMFS has determined that the level of taking for this LOA request is consistent with the findings made for the total taking allowable under the incidental take regulations and that the amount of take authorized under the LOA is of no more than small numbers. Accordingly, we have issued a modification to the LOA to WesternGeco authorizing the take of marine mammals incidental to its geophysical survey activity, as described above.

Dated: March 31, 2025.

Kimberly Damon-Randall,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XE800]

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 Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) application contains all of the required information and warrants further consideration. The EFP would allow a federally permitted fishing vessel to fish outside fishery regulations in support of exempted fishing activities proposed by the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI). Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require publication of this notification to provide interested parties the

opportunity to comment on applications for proposed EFPs.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before April 21, 2025.

ADDRESSES: You may submit written comments by email at nmfs.gar.efp@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line “Electronic jigging machines in the Gulf of Maine Groundfish Closure Areas.” All comments received are a part of the public record and may be posted for public viewing without change. All personal identifying information (*e.g.*, name, address), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter “anonymous” as the signature if you wish to remain anonymous).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Elise Scholl, Fishery Management Specialist, elise.scholl@noaa.gov, (978) 281–9189.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The applicant submitted a complete application for an EFP to conduct commercial fishing activities that the regulations would otherwise restrict. This EFP would exempt the participating vessels from the following Federal regulations:

TABLE 1—REQUESTED EXEMPTIONS

CFR citation	Regulation	Need for exemption
50 CFR 648.83(a)(1)	Restriction on retention of pollock under the minimum fish size (TL) of 19 inches (48.3 cm).	To retain sublegal size pollock for research sampling.
50 CFR 648.81(a)(1)	No fishing vessel may enter, fish, or be in, and no fishing gear capable of catching NE multispecies maybe on board a vessel in the Cashes Ledge or Western Gulf of Maine Closure Areas.	To allow commercial fishing activity in the Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area and the Cashes Ledge Closure Area (except the Ammen Rock Habitat Management Area), to collect samples for research.

TABLE 2—PROJECT SUMMARY

Project title	Using electronic jigging machines as a novel, ultra-low impact, gear type to collect catch data and biological samples in the Gulf of Maine (GOM) Groundfish Closure Areas.
Project start	05/01/2025.
Project end	04/30/2026.
Project objectives	Provide critical data on the distribution, size and sex composition, feeding habits, and physical characteristics of pollock in data-limited areas in the GOM.
Project location	Statistical areas 513, 514, and 515.

TABLE 2—PROJECT SUMMARY—Continued

Number of vessels	1.
Number of trips	Up to 30.
Trip duration (days)	2.
Total number of days	Up to 60.
Gear type(s)	Hook, Rod and Reel.
Number of tows or sets	4 per trip.
Duration of tows or sets	3 hours.

Project Narrative

GMRI is requesting an EFP in support of a pilot study aimed at collecting data on the distribution, size and sex composition, feeding habits, and physical characteristics of pollock in data limited areas within the GOM. The project aims to collect data through haul-level catch and effort data collection, biological sampling, and discard monitoring via electronic monitoring (EM). The participating vessel is authorized to use EM through their Sector Operations Plans.

The project aims to fulfill specific research needs of GMRI’s pollock study and address research priorities identified in the 2022 pollock stock assessment, including research on the geographic distribution by size. The exemptions would allow sampling inside the Western GOM Closure Area and the Cashes Ledge Closure Area in order to evaluate pollock size distributions and reproductive dynamics inside and outside the closure areas. The exemption to the minimum pollock size would allow the vessel to retain sub-legal sized pollock to collect catch data and biological samples.

Sampling would be conducted with hook jigging gear, including auto-jigs and rod and reel. The applicant claims that the auto-jigging machines are low-impact due to this method being associated with minimal bycatch and discards exhibiting relatively high survivability. There would be up to 4 auto-jigs, and 2 rod and reels deployed at a time, with a maximum of 32 hooks total fishing at one time. The hook sizes would vary from size 8/0 to 14/0.

The applicant estimates there would be 28 trips inside the closure areas and 20 trips outside the closure areas. GMRI researchers are seeking at least 50 tagged pollock per area per season, so that samples of pollock on any given trip do not all come from the same school. Fishing effort may occur both inside and outside the closure areas on the same trip. GMRI would not compensate the vessel for collecting data and samples. Rather, the sampling design would allow the vessel to harvest groundfish from an area that it is not otherwise authorized to fish in, offering an incentive to participate in the study.

This incentive would be used to offset costs associated with the sampling regime requested by GMRI researchers.

To help expand the temporal and spatial scope of the samples, every 10th pollock would be separated from the commercial catch, and tagged with a color-coded zip tie differentiating its harvest location. Sub-legal sized pollock selected for biological sampling would be measured according to the Vessel Electronic Monitoring Plan (VMP) prior to storing in slush ice, while sub-legal sized pollock not selected for biological sampling would be live discarded according to the VMP. Sub-legal sized fish of all other species would also be live discarded according to the VMP. GMRI scientists would conduct dockside sampling of all tagged fish including length, weight, sex, and stomach contents, as well as taking photo documentation of the physical characteristics of each tagged pollock. Haul level catch, discard, and fishing effort data collection would be completed using the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Fisheries Logbook Data Recording Software.

The project would also provide 50–100 cod fin clips from inside the GOM Closure Areas to expand the geographic range of an ongoing cod DNA study being conducted by the University of New Hampshire. Samples would consist of fingernail-size fin clips from the top of the tail, presumably posing no threat to the survivability of the released cod. The project seeks to sample cod catch, including undersized cod.

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: April 1, 2025.

Karen H. Abrams,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XE763]

Takes of Marine Mammals Incidental to Specified Activities; Taking Marine Mammals Incidental to Alaska Railroad Corporation Seward Freight Dock Construction in Seward, Alaska

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

ACTION: Notice; proposed incidental harassment authorization; request for comments on proposed authorization and possible renewal.

SUMMARY: NMFS has received a request from the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) for authorization to take marine mammals incidental to the Seward Freight Dock construction project in Seward, Alaska. Pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), NMFS is requesting comments on its proposal to issue an incidental harassment authorization (IHA) to incidentally take marine mammals during the specified activities. NMFS is also requesting comments on a possible one-time, 1-year renewal that could be issued under certain circumstances and if all requirements are met, as described in the Request for Public Comments section at the end of this notice. NMFS will consider public comments prior to making any final decision on the issuance of the requested MMPA authorization and agency responses will be summarized in the final notice of our decision.

DATES: Comments and information must be received no later than May 5, 2025.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be addressed to Jolie Harrison, Chief, Permits and Conservation Division,