

was originally established by a Decision Memorandum dated September 25, 1997. In 2017, the SAB became a non-discretionary committee when Congress mandated that the SAB shall continue to maintain two specific subcommittees [Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2017 (Pub. L. 115–25) §§ 401, 508]. The SAB is the only Federal Advisory Committee with responsibility to advise the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere on long- and short-range strategies for research, education and the application of science to resource management and environmental assessment and prediction. SAB activities and advice provide necessary input to ensure that National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) science programs are of the highest quality and provide optimal support to resource management.

Status: The March 10–11, 2026, meeting will be open to public participation with a 20-minute public comment period at time allocated on the published agenda. Public statements presented at the meeting should not be repetitive of previously submitted verbal or written statements. In general, each individual or group making a verbal presentation will be limited to a total time of three minutes. Written comments for the March 10–11, 2026 meeting should be received by the SAB Executive Director's Office (noaa.scienceadvisoryboard@noaa.gov) by February 22, 2026 to provide sufficient time for SAB review. Written comments received by the SAB Executive Director after this date will be distributed to the SAB, but may not be reviewed prior to the meeting date.

Special Accommodations: This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for special accommodations may be directed to the SAB Executive Director no later than 12:00 p.m. EDT on February 22, 2026.

Matters To Be Considered: The meeting on March 10–11, 2026, will include the following topic(s): (1) A consent calendar for approval of Working Groups Membership and Terms of References, (2) Working groups reports on several different topics for approval and submission to NOAA, (3) NOAA Science Update and NOAA responses to previous SAB reports, and (4) Working Groups Updates.

Meeting materials, including work products, will also be available on the

SAB website: <https://sab.noaa.gov/current-meetings/>.

David Holst,

Chief Financial Officer/Administrative Officer, Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

[FR Doc. 2025–24255 Filed 1–2–26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-KD-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XF410]

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) is holding a public meeting of its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) via webinar to consider actions affecting New England fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Recommendations from this group will be brought to the full Council for formal consideration and action, if appropriate.

DATES: This meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 21, 2026, beginning at 11 a.m. Webinar Registration information: https://nefmc-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/gm0XQtkiQF-eiM_zbTqBSg.

ADDRESSES: *Council address:* New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA 01950.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council; telephone: (978) 465–0492.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Agenda

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will meet to consider the Council's request to reconsider the SSC recommendations for the white hake overfishing limits and acceptable biological catches for fishing years 2026–2030 based on setting the fishing mortality rate at 75 percent of the rate at maximum sustainable yield (F_{MSY} ; 75 percent F_{MSY}). They also plan to review and discuss initial plans for an SSC workshop in 2026 on integrating dynamic reference points into fisheries management. Also, on the agenda is to review and discuss other aspects of the

2026 SSC work plan. Other business will be discussed as necessary.

Although non-emergency issues not contained on the agenda may come before this Council for discussion, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during this meeting. Council action will be restricted to those issues specifically listed in this notice and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under section 305(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency. The public also should be aware that the meeting will be recorded. Consistent with 16 U.S.C. 1852, a copy of the recording is available upon request.

Special Accommodations

This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director, at 978–465–0492, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

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

Dated: December 31, 2025.

Becky Curtis,

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

[FR Doc. 2025–24247 Filed 1–2–26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XF369]

Taking and Importing Marine Mammals; Taking Marine Mammals Incidental to Geophysical Surveys Related to Oil and Gas Activities in the Gulf of America (Formerly Gulf of Mexico)

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

ACTION: Notice of issuance of letter of authorization.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), as amended, its implementing regulations, and NMFS' MMPA regulations for taking marine mammals incidental to geophysical surveys related to oil and gas activities in the Gulf of America (GOA), originally published as "Taking Marine Mammals Incidental to Geophysical Surveys Related to Oil and Gas Activities in the

Gulf of Mexico,” notification is hereby given that NMFS has modified the Letter of Authorization (LOA) issued to WesternGeco LLC (WesternGeco) for the take of marine mammals incidental to geophysical survey activity in the GOA.

DATES: The LOA is effective through April 19, 2026.

ADDRESSES: The LOA, LOA request, and supporting documentation are available online at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/marine-mammal-protection/issued-letters-authorization-oil-and-gas-industry-geophysical-survey>.

In case of problems accessing these documents, please call the contact listed below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Carter Esch, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, (301) 427–8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Sections 101(a)(5)(A) and (D) of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) direct the Secretary of Commerce to allow, upon request, the incidental, but not intentional, taking of small numbers of marine mammals by U.S. citizens who engage in a specified activity (other than commercial fishing) within a specified geographical region if certain findings are made and either regulations are issued or, if the taking is limited to harassment, a notice of a proposed authorization is provided to the public for review.

An authorization for incidental takings shall be granted if NMFS finds that the taking will have a negligible impact on the species or stock(s), will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of the species or stock(s) for subsistence uses (where relevant), and if the permissible methods of taking and requirements pertaining to the mitigation, monitoring and reporting of such takings are set forth. NMFS has defined “negligible impact” in 50 CFR 216.103 as an impact resulting from the specified activity that cannot be reasonably expected to, and is not reasonably likely to, adversely affect the species or stock through effects on annual rates of recruitment or survival.

Except with respect to certain activities not pertinent here, the MMPA defines “harassment” as: any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which (i) has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild (Level A harassment); or (ii) has the potential to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering (Level B harassment).

On January 19, 2021, we issued a final rule with regulations to govern the unintentional taking of marine mammals incidental to geophysical survey activities conducted by oil and gas industry operators, and those persons authorized to conduct activities on their behalf (collectively “industry operators”), in U.S. waters of the GOA¹ over the course of 5 years (86 FR 5322, January 19, 2021). The rule was based on our findings that the total taking from the specified activities over the 5-year period will have a negligible impact on the affected species or stock(s) of marine mammals and will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of those species or stocks for subsistence uses, and became effective on April 19, 2021.

The regulations at 50 CFR 217.180 *et seq.* allow for the issuance of LOAs to industry operators for the incidental take of marine mammals during geophysical survey activities and prescribe the permissible methods of taking and other means of effecting the least practicable adverse impact on marine mammal species or stocks and their habitat (often referred to as mitigation), as well as requirements pertaining to the monitoring and reporting of such taking. Under 50 CFR 217.186(e), issuance of an LOA shall be based on a determination that the level of taking will be consistent with the findings made for the total taking allowable under these regulations and a determination that the amount of take authorized under the LOA is of no more than small numbers.

NMFS subsequently discovered that the 2021 rule was based on erroneous take estimates. We conducted another rulemaking using correct take estimates and other newly available and pertinent information relevant to the analyses supporting some of the findings in the 2021 final rule and the taking allowable under the regulations. We issued a final rule in April 2024 (89 FR 31488, April 24, 2024), effective May 24, 2024, through April 19, 2026.

The 2024 final rule made no changes to the specified activities or the specified geographical region in which those activities would be conducted, nor to the original 5-year period of effectiveness. In consideration of the new information, the 2024 rule presented new analyses supporting affirmance of the negligible impact

¹ Pursuant to Executive Order 14172, “Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness,” and Department of the Interior Secretarial Order 3423, “The Gulf of America,” the body of water formerly known as the Gulf of Mexico is now called the Gulf of America. Accordingly, this **Federal Register** notice hereafter refers to the Gulf of America.

determinations for all species, and affirmed that the existing regulations, which contain mitigation, monitoring, and reporting requirements, are consistent with the “least practicable adverse impact” standard of the MMPA.

NMFS issued a LOA to WesternGeco on March 7, 2025, for the taking of marine mammals incidental to a three-dimensional ocean bottom node survey over 240 lease blocks in the Green Canyon and Walker Ridge areas, effective March 7, 2025, through December 31, 2025. Please see the **Federal Register** notice of issuance (90 FR 11947, March 13, 2025) for additional detail regarding the LOA and the survey activity.

On March 20, 2025, WesternGeco informed NMFS that they shifted the planned survey area westward and, accordingly, they requested a modification to the LOA to reflect this adjustment. The updated survey plan maintained a total of 100 days of sound source operation, with the distribution shifted to include 57 days in zone 7, 31 days in zone 5, and 12 days in zone 6. Since the number of survey days per zone changed, we updated the take numbers accordingly based on this new information. There were no other changes to the planned survey. On March 31, 2025, NMFS issued a modified LOA to WesternGeco (90 FR 14789, April 4, 2025).

On November 18, 2025, WesternGeco notified NMFS that the survey commenced later than was originally planned (*i.e.*, May/June instead of March), mainly due to vessel scheduling and availability constraints.

WesternGeco requested that NMFS extend the end of the LOA effective period from December 31, 2025, to February 28, 2026, to provide sufficient time to complete the survey. To account for any potential additional delays, NMFS recommended extending the LOA effective period through April 19, 2026 (*i.e.*, the expiration date for the rule). The overall survey plan remains the same (*i.e.*, 100 total days of sound source operation). However, given the survey timing now involves months for which take was not previously assessed, we have updated WesternGeco’s take estimates based on the revised schedule (table 1). The monthly distribution of survey days is not known in advance, though we assume that the planned 100 days of source operation would occur contiguously. Take estimates for each species are based on the period that produces the greatest value.

For the Rice’s whale, take estimates based on the modeling yielded results that are not realistically likely to occur when considered in light of other

relevant information concerning Rice’s whale habitat preferences considered during the rulemaking process. NMFS’ 2024 final rule provided detailed discussion regarding Rice’s whale habitat (e.g., 89 FR 31508, 31519, April 24, 2024). In summary, recent survey data, sightings, and acoustic data support Rice’s whale occurrence in waters throughout the GOA between approximately 100 and 400 meters (m) depth along the continental shelf break, and associated habitat-based density modeling has identified similar habitat (i.e., approximately 100 to 400 m water depths along the continental shelf break) as being Rice’s whale habitat (Garrison *et al.*, 2023; Soldevilla *et al.*, 2022, 2024).

Although Rice’s whales may occur outside of the general depth range expected to provide suitable habitat, we expect that any such occurrence would be rare. WesternGeco’s planned activities will occur in water depths of approximately 700 to 3,400 m in the central GOA. Thus, NMFS does not expect there to be the reasonable potential for take of Rice’s whale in association with this survey and, accordingly, does not authorize take of Rice’s whale through the LOA.

Based on the results of our analysis, NMFS has determined that the level of taking expected for this survey and authorized through the LOA is consistent with the findings made for the total taking allowable under the regulations. See table 1 in this notice and table 6 of the rule (89 FR 31488, April 24, 2024).

Small Numbers Determination

Under the rule, NMFS may not authorize incidental take of marine mammals in an LOA if it will exceed “small numbers.” In short, when an acceptable estimate of the individual marine mammals taken is available, if the estimated number of individual animals taken is up to, but not greater than, one-third of the best available abundance estimate, NMFS will determine that the numbers of marine mammals taken of a species or stock are small (89 FR 31535, May 24, 2024). For more information please see NMFS’ discussion of small numbers in the 2021 final rule (86 FR 5438, January 19, 2021).

The take numbers for authorization are determined as described in the **Federal Register** notice of issuance (90 FR 11947, March 13, 2025). Subsequently, the total incidents of

harassment for each species are multiplied by scalar ratios to produce a derived product that better reflects the number of individuals likely to be taken within a survey (as compared to the total number of instances of take), accounting for the likelihood that some individual marine mammals may be taken on more than 1 day (86 FR 5404, January 19, 2021). The output of this scaling, where appropriate, is incorporated into adjusted total take estimates that are the basis for NMFS’ small numbers determinations, as depicted in table 1.

This product is used by NMFS in making the necessary small numbers determinations through comparison with the best available abundance estimates (see discussion at 86 FR 5391, January 19, 2021). For this comparison, NMFS’ approach is to use the maximum theoretical population, determined through review of current stock assessment reports (SAR; <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-stock-assessments>) and model-predicted abundance information (<https://seamap.env.duke.edu/models/Duke/GOM>). Information supporting the small numbers determinations is provided in table 1.

TABLE 1—TAKE ANALYSIS

Species	Authorized take	Scaled take ¹	Abundance ²	Percent abundance
Rice’s whale	0	n/a	51	n/a
Sperm whale	698	295.4	3,007	9.8
<i>Kogia</i> spp	³ 396	118.8	980	14.8
Beaked whales	1,205	121.7	803	15.2
Rough-toothed dolphin	1,760	505.1	4,853	10.4
Bottlenose dolphin	1,323	379.8	165,125	0.2
Clymene dolphin	2,535	727.6	4,619	15.8
Atlantic spotted dolphin	928	266.4	21,506	1.2
Pantropical spotted dolphin	19,948	5,724.9	67,225	8.5
Spinner dolphin	284	81.6	5,548	1.5
Striped dolphin	6,140	1,762.2	5,634	31.3
Fraser’s dolphin	727	208.8	1,665	12.5
Risso’s dolphin	450	132.8	1,974	6.7
Blackfish ⁴	5,214	1,538.2	6,113	25.2
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 370 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 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); 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 modified LOA to WesternGeco authorizing the take of marine mammals incidental to its geophysical survey activity, as described above.

Dated: December 30, 2025.

Kimberly Damon-Randall,

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

[FR Doc. 2025–24236 Filed 1–2–26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Notice To Solicit Nominations for Membership on the National Sea Grant Advisory Board (NSGAB)

AGENCY: Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce (DOC).

ACTION: Notice to solicit nominations for membership on the National Sea Grant Advisory Board (NSGAB). <https://seagrant.noaa.gov/About/Advisory-Board>.

SUMMARY: The National Sea Grant Advisory Board (NSGAB) advises the National Sea Grant College Program (Sea Grant) in the areas of program evaluation, strategic planning, education and extension and science and technology programs. For more information on this Federal Advisory Committee please visit the Federal Advisory Committee database: <https://www.facadatabase.gov/FACA/FACAPublicPage>. This notice also responds to the Sea Grant Program Improvement Act of 1976, which requires the Secretary of Commerce to solicit nominations at least once a year for membership on the NSGAB. To apply for membership to the Board, applicants should submit a current resume. A cover letter highlighting specific areas of expertise relevant to the purpose of the Board is helpful, but not required. Nominations will be accepted by Email at oar.sg-feedback@noaa.gov. NOAA is an equal opportunity employer.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Board, which consists of a balanced representation from academia, industry, state government and citizens groups, was established in 1976 by Section 209 of the Sea Grant Improvement Act (Pub. L. 94–461, 33 U.S.C. 1128). The Board advises the Secretary of Commerce and the Director of the National Sea Grant

College Program with respect to operations under the Act, and such other matters as the Secretary refers to them for review and advice. Race or sex shall not be considered in the selection of the committee's membership.

Privacy Act Statement: Authority. The collection of information concerning nominations to the NSGAB FAC is authorized under the FACA, as amended, 5 U.S.C. App. and its implementing regulations, 41 CFR part 102–3, and in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended, (Privacy Act) 5 U.S.C. 552a. **Purpose.** The collection of names, contact information, resumes, professional information, and qualifications is required in order for the Under Secretary to appoint members to the NSGAB FAC. **Routine Uses.** NOAA will use the nomination information for the purpose set forth above. The Privacy Act of 1974 authorizes disclosure of the information collected to NOAA staff for work-related purposes and for other purposes only as set forth in the Privacy Act and for routine uses published in the Privacy Act System of Records Notice COMMERCE/DEPT–11, Candidates for Membership, Members, and Former Members of Department of Commerce Advisory Committees, available at <https://www.osec.doc.gov/opog/PrivacyAct/SORNs/dept-11.html>, and the System of Records Notice COMMERCE/DEPT–18, Employees Personnel Files Not Covered by Notices of Other Agencies, available at <https://www.osec.doc.gov/opog/PrivacyAct/SORNs/DEPT-18.html>.

Disclosure. Furnishing the nomination information is voluntary; however, if the information is not provided, the individual would not be considered for appointment as a member of the NSGAB FAC.

David Holst,

Chief Financial Officer/Administrative Officer, Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

[FR Doc. 2025–24254 Filed 1–2–26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510–KA–P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XF409]

Marine Mammals; File No. 29101

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

ACTION: Notice; receipt of application.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Amanda Lauer, Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University, 720 Rutland Avenue, Traylor Building, Room 515, Baltimore, MD 21205, has applied in due form for a permit to import marine mammal parts for scientific research.

DATES: Written comments must be received on or before February 4, 2026.

ADDRESSES: The application and related documents are available for review by selecting “Records Open for Public Comment” from the “Features” box on the Applications and Permits for Protected Species home page, <https://apps.nmfs.noaa.gov>, and then selecting File No. 29101 from the list of available applications. These documents are also available upon written request via email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov.

Written comments on this application should be submitted via email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov. Please include File No. 29101 in the subject line of the email comment.

Those individuals requesting a public hearing should submit a written request via email to NMFS.Pr1Comments@noaa.gov. The request should set forth the specific reasons why a hearing on this application would be appropriate.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jennifer Skidmore and Shasta McClenahan, Ph.D., (301) 427–8401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The subject permit is requested under the authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (MMPA; 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) and the regulations governing the taking and importing of marine mammals (50 CFR part 216).

The applicant requests a 5-year research permit to import non-listed and non-MMPA depleted marine mammal parts from Denmark to study anatomy of ear and vocal apparatus. Parts from up to 10 cetaceans and 10 pinnipeds, excluding walrus, would be imported annually.

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), an initial determination has been made that the activity proposed is categorically excluded from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Concurrent with the publication of this notice in the **Federal Register**, NMFS is forwarding copies of the application to the Marine Mammal Commission and its Committee of Scientific Advisors.