

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 (91 FR 20784, April 17, 2026). For more information, please see NMFS' discussion of small numbers in the 2026 final rule (91 FR 20784, April 17, 2026).

The take numbers for authorization are determined as described above in the Summary of Request and Analysis section. Subsequently, the total incidents of harassment for each species are multiplied by scalar ratios (except in

the cases where the take estimate has been rounded up to reflect a group size) 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 (91 FR 20784, April 17, 2026). 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 91 FR 20784, 20812, April 17, 2026). 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/SEFSC/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	707	299	2,451	12.2
<i>Kogia</i> spp	³ 335	101	1,385	8.8
Beaked whales	298	30	1,038	2.9
Rough-toothed dolphin	1,887	542	4,853	11.2
Bottlenose dolphin	2,141	614	166,538	0.4
Clymene dolphin	3,487	1,001	6,136	16.3
Atlantic spotted dolphin	3,587	1,029	21,506	4.8
Pantropical spotted dolphin	16,405	4,708	50,209	9.4
Spinner dolphin ⁴	152	n/a	2,991	5.1
Striped dolphin	3,944	1,132	16,102	7.0
Fraser's dolphin	776	223	1,665	13.4
Risso's dolphin	460	136	1,974	6.9
Blackfish ⁵	5,562	1,641	9,535	17.2
Short-finned pilot whale	2,158	637	3,277	19.4

¹ Scalar ratios were applied to "Authorized Take" values as described at 91 FR 20784, 20818 (April 17, 2026) 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, spinner dolphin, and Risso's dolphin, the estimated SAR abundance estimate is used.

³ Includes 20 takes by Level A harassment and 315 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 Modeled take of 81 increased to account for potential encounter with a group of average size (Maze-Foley and Mullin, 2006).

⁵ The "blackfish" guild includes melon-headed whales, false killer whales, pygmy killer whales, and killer whales.

Based on the analysis contained herein of TGS's proposed survey activity described in its LOA request 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 LOA to TGS, authorizing the take of marine

mammals incidental to its geophysical survey activity, as described above.

Dated: September 9, 2026.

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-XG052]

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management 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 federally permitted fishing vessels to fish outside fishery regulations in support of exempted fishing activities proposed by the Maine Department of Marine Resources. Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative 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 September 29, 2026.

ADDRESSES: You may submit written comments by email: nmfs.gar.efp@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line “ME DMR 2027 On-demand EFP.” 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: Christine Ford, Fishery Management Specialist, christine.ford@noaa.gov, (978) 281–9185.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Maine Department of Marine Resources (ME DMR) submitted a complete application for an EFP to conduct commercial fishing activities that the regulations would otherwise restrict to test alternative gear retrieval systems that only use one traditional surface buoy. This EFP would exempt the participating vessels from the following Federal regulations:

TABLE 1—REQUESTED EXEMPTIONS

CFR citation	Regulation	Need for exemption
50 CFR 697.21(b)(2)	Gear marking requirements	For trial of trap/pot gear with no more than one surface marking on trawls of more than three traps.
50 CFR 648.84(b)	Gear marking requirements	For trial of gillnet gear with no more than one surface marking.

TABLE 2—PROJECT SUMMARY

Project title	Testing various acoustic on-demand, timed and spring-release fishing technologies that help minimize the risk of large whale entanglements in trap/pot and gillnet fishing gear in the Gulf of Maine.
Project start	01/01/2027.
Project end	12/31/2027.
Project objectives	Provide access, training, and support to fishers in the Gulf of Maine to test acoustic on-demand, spring, and timed-release fishing systems and acoustic gear geolocation technology. Data collected would help provide feedback to manufacturers to adapt to the specific needs of Maine fishers involved in fixed gear fleets. This work is important to reduce the risk associated with vertical lines to the endangered North Atlantic right whale in the Gulf of Maine.
Project location	<i>Trap/pot:</i> Lobster Management Area 1 and all Maine Lobster Conservation Zones (A–G). <i>Gillnet:</i> Statistical Areas 513, 514, 515.
Number of vessels	<i>Up to 65 total:</i> up to 7 gillnet vessels, with the rest being trap/pot vessels.
Number of trips, trip duration (days), total number of days, number and duration of sets.	See Project Narrative.
Gear type(s)	Trap/pot and anchored gillnet.

Project Narrative

This EFP would allow federally permitted vessels to test alternative gears to reduce entanglement risk to protected species, mainly the North Atlantic right whale, in trap/pot and sink gillnet fisheries. There would be two components to this EFP, a gear library component, which is an assortment of devices and technologies to retrieve gear, and a gear geolocation component.

This EFP would build on the research conducted by ME DMR under previous EFPs, with DA25–005 being the most recent. Since the start of this project and under previously issued EFPs, ME DMR has conducted 6,715 trap/pot hauls as part of the gear library component. Of these, 2,170 hauls were conducted under the most recent EFP (DA25–005), which became effective December 1,

2025. No hauls have been conducted with gillnet gear, and 55 hauls, which did not use active fishing traps, have been completed as part of the gear geolocation component.

The EFP objectives are to: (1) collect data on deployments and retrievals of various acoustic on-demand fishing gear within the trap/pot and gillnet fisheries in the Gulf of Maine; (2) provide support and training to fishers on various on-demand technologies; (3) assess fishing areas that may be best suited for adopting the tested retrieval systems; (4) increase familiarity of on-demand gear within the trap/pot and gillnet fisheries; (5) provide feedback to on-demand fishing gear manufacturers to increase performance under commercial fishery conditions; (6) trial gear geolocation and marking systems that promote interoperability for fishers

and management; and (7) compare the relative precision of various gear geolocation technologies to improve understanding of how transitioning to acoustic technologies may impact fishing behavior.

For the gear library component, participating vessels would replace one traditional surface marking with their choice of alternative gear available in the Maine Innovative Gear Library. Currently, there are several options, including, but not limited to: (1) buoy and stowed rope systems (e.g., Sub Sea Sonics, Ashored, Edgetech); (2) lift bag systems (e.g., SMELTS (Sea Mammal Education Learning Technology Society), Ropeless Systems, Liftlabs); (3) buoy and spooled rope systems (e.g., Devocean); and (4) stowed rope/timed release (e.g., Sub Sea Sonics). Vessels would be required to use one traditional

surface marking on one end of trap trawls of more than three traps and on all gillnet gear. For trap trawls of fewer than three traps, vessels would still use one traditional surface marking, in addition to the on-demand retrieval system; therefore, there would be no fully ropeless trawls. Other than gear markings, all trap trawls and gillnet strings would be consistent with the regulations of the management area where the vessel is fishing and would be fished in accordance with the participating vessels' standard operations (*i.e.*, number and length of trips, soak times, trap limits, *etc.*). Because the on-demand systems would replace buoyed systems that the fishermen would otherwise be fishing, the gear library component would not increase fishing effort.

For the geolocation component, vessels would use acoustic positioning systems from Teledyne Benthos, Ropeless Systems, Ashored, Sub Sea Sonics, Edgetech, or Advanced Navigation. Each of these systems uses a surface unit to communicate with a unit on the seafloor to determine the gear's geolocation, associated with whichever gear is attached. This may differ significantly from the geolocation provided by the surface buoy or surface GPS marking upon deployment, the extent of which ME DMR is proposing to investigate, alongside the performance of these systems in an acoustic environment where multiple signals are being transmitted simultaneously. Vessels would set up to three trawls at different distances apart, within a one-kilometer radius. Trawls would be allowed to soak no longer than 1 hour each. Up to 10 discrete, single-day gear geolocation trials would be conducted within the fishing year, resulting in a maximum of 150 gear retrievals. In instances where traps are used, they would not have fresh bait. These trials would increase trap/pot effort via short soaks and a high rate of retrieval. However, catch per unit effort would be reduced.

ME DMR researchers anticipate, for the gear library component, up to 6,240 trap/pot trawl retrievals and up to 500 gillnet string retrievals, and up to an additional 150 retrievals of trap/pot trawls for the geolocation component. Trap trawls would be consistent with Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) regulations. Trawls would not exceed 50 traps per trawl. The gear library component trawls would soak for no shorter than 3 days and no longer than 30 days. Gillnets would be consistent with ALWTRP and Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan regulations. Gillnets would use 15–30.5

centimeter mesh, would not exceed 3,200 meters, and are estimated to soak for no more than 24 hours. Any legal catch would be sold to a dealer.

To maximize data collection and participation, ME DMR requests flexibility to modify the participant vessel list with the ability to list up to 65 total vessels, consisting of up to 7 gillnet vessels, with the rest consisting of trap/pot vessels.

ME DMR or partnering organizations and a representative from gear manufacturers would distribute gear and train all participants on its use. Scientific observers may accompany the participants on up to two trips per vessel, within budget and safety limitations. ME DMR would provide standardized data collection sheets to all participants. Individually identifiable data would only be made available via consent of the participants.

ME DMR has proposed the following best practices and risk management:

- Buoy lines associated with this project would contain unique white and blue markings above the required regional markings;
- Weekly mandatory gear loss reporting;
- After release, the on demand vertical line would be retrieved as quickly as possible to minimize time in the water column;
- Visual right whale sightings would be recorded on data sheets and fishermen would notify NMFS via email (ne.rw.survey@noaa.gov) or via phone (866–755–6622), or the U.S. Coast Guard via radio (Channel 16);
- Typical soak time is anticipated to be less than 14 days and no longer than 30 days (weather permitting and without unforeseen circumstances);
- Project vessels would adhere to a 10-knot (5.1 meters per second) speed limit when transiting dynamic management areas, transiting areas closed to vertical lines, and/or whales are observed;
- Law enforcement agencies, including Maine Marine Patrol and NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, would be notified of project participants and activities in advance of the project start date. Materials related to the redeployment of alternative retrieval gear systems would be provided along with this notice. Law enforcement would be able to inspect gear at any time as usual, because at least one traditional endline would be present at all times. Law enforcement would be provided with the information necessary to continue relevant enforcement operations with participant gear;

- Trap Tracker or an equivalent application would be utilized for acoustic on-demand retrieval and set positioning details and would be available to Federal, State, and corresponding enforcement personnel;

- Gear locations would be available to those who have downloaded gear marking applications, but otherwise locations would be treated with sensitivity to mitigate the possibility of gear molestation from members of the public who oppose project activities;

- Project updates would be updated through the ME DMR website for public awareness of general activities related to this EFP; and

- Premature deployments of on-demand gear would be documented and would be retrieved as soon as circumstances (*e.g.*, weather) allow.

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: September 9, 2026.

Shannon Bettridge,

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

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CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget for Review and Approval; Comment Request; AmeriCorps State and National Application Instructions

AGENCY: Corporation for National and Community Service.

ACTION: Notice of information collection; request for comment.

SUMMARY: The Corporation for National and Community Service, operating as AmeriCorps, has submitted an information collection request (ICR) for the AmeriCorps State and National Application Instructions.

DATES: Written comments must be submitted to the individual and office listed in the **ADDRESSES** section by October 14, 2026.