

constraint may be allowed to participate in the Consortium pursuant to a separate non-CRADA agreement.

DATES: The Consortium's activities will commence on May 1, 2025 ("Commencement Date"). NIST will accept letters of interest to participate in this Consortium on an ongoing basis.

ADDRESSES: Completed letters of interest must be submitted via the letter of interest webform at <https://forms.gle/bCMV9tmc9uRyZxmRA>, by email to melissa.phillips@nist.gov, or via hardcopy to the Consortium Manager, Dr. Melissa Phillips, Chemical Sciences Division of NIST's Material Measurement Laboratory, 100 Bureau Drive, Mail Stop 8390, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20899. Organizations whose letters of interest are accepted in accordance with the process set forth in the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** section of this notice will be asked to sign a consortium CRADA with NIST. A consortium CRADA template will be made available to qualifying applicants.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: J'aime Maynard, Consortia Agreements Officer, National Institute of Standards and Technology's Technology Partnerships Office, by mail to 100 Bureau Drive, Mail Stop 2200, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20899, by electronic mail agreements@nist.gov, or by phone (301) 975-8408.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The objective of the DSQAP is to develop and evaluate measurement methods and standards to support quality and safety for the dietary supplement testing community. Approximately 75% of the U.S. population takes dietary supplements, including vitamins and mineral supplements, representing an annual expenditure of more than \$20 billion USD. Regulations, driven by reported cases of inaccurate labeling, adulteration, contamination (with pesticides, heavy metals, or toxic botanicals), and drug interactions, are now in place that require manufacturers to evaluate the identity, purity, and composition of their ingredients and finished products. The plethora of unique products on the market has led to an uptick in published methods but limited outlets for external method evaluation and validation.

The focus of this Consortium is to evaluate and standardize methods to characterize and quantify nutrients, marker compounds, and/or contaminants in dietary supplement ingredients and finished products, improving overall comparability within the community and enabling organizations that join the Consortium ("Consortium Members") to improve the

accuracy and precision of their own, internal measurements. The Consortium will organize at least two interlaboratory exercises annually based on candidate reference materials and/or commercial products with the following goals:

- Evaluate the suitability of current published methods, including standard methods, to measure nutrients, marker compounds, and/or contaminants in dietary supplement ingredients and finished products.
- Utilize common materials to collect reproducibility data in support of measurement assurance and standards development.
- Propose tests(s) that can be standardized through the AOAC International or similar consensus process, using outcomes from Consortium efforts as a foundation.
- Evaluate the applicability of current reference materials for dietary supplement ingredient and finished product testing. If needed, develop new reference materials to support advancement of the dietary supplement testing industry.

No proprietary information will be shared as part of the Consortium. Contributions of materials to be used as interlaboratory study samples, such as dietary supplement ingredients or products, are highly encouraged.

Participation Process

Eligibility to participate in the Consortium will be determined by NIST based on the information provided by prospective participants in response to this notice. Prospective participants can submit a letter of interest by completing the letter of interest webform at <https://forms.gle/bCMV9tmc9uRyZxmRA>; alternatively, parties can answer the questions detailed in LETTER OF INTEREST, below, and send via email or hardcopy (for reference, see **ADDRESSES** section above). NIST will contact interested parties if there are questions regarding the responsiveness of the letters of interest to the project objective or requirements identified below.

Each responding organization's letter of interest should include the address, point of contact, and following information:

(1) The contribution(s) the organization will make to the Consortium efforts. All Consortium members must contribute one or more of the following:

- a. Analytical Testing: Narrative of interest and experience in analytical testing of dietary supplement ingredients and products and description of the services and/or technical capabilities (e.g., available

instrumentation, relevant accreditations, published methods) they will contribute to Consortium activities.

b. Materials: Narrative of interest and description of the dietary supplement ingredients and products they will contribute to Consortium activities.

c. Unique Industry or Community Perspective: Narrative of interest and description of other relevant expertise (e.g., trade associations, regulatory oversight, standards development) they will contribute to Consortium activities.

(2) List of anticipated participating individuals.

Letters of interest must not include proprietary information, including proprietary business information. NIST will not treat any information provided in response to this notice as proprietary information. NIST will notify each organization of its eligibility to join the Consortium. In order to participate in this Consortium, each eligible organization must sign a CRADA. Entities that are not permitted to enter into CRADAs pursuant to law or other governmental constraint may be allowed to participate in the Consortium, at NIST's discretion, pursuant to separate non-CRADA agreements with terms that may differ, as necessary from the Consortium CRADA terms. NIST does not guarantee participation in the Consortium to any organization submitting a letter of interest.

Authority: 15 U.S.C. 3710a.

Alicia Chambers,

NIST Executive Secretariat.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XE504]

Taking and Importing Marine Mammals; Taking Marine Mammals Incidental to Geophysical Surveys Related to Oil and Gas Activities in the 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 Mexico, notification is hereby given that NMFS has issued a Letter of Authorization (LOA) to TGS for the take of marine mammals incidental to geophysical survey activity in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM).

DATES: The LOA is effective from December 20, 2024 through December 19, 2025.

ADDRESSES: The LOA, LOA request, and supporting documentation are available online at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/incidental-take-authorization-oil-and-gas-industry-geophysical-survey-activity-gulf-mexico>. In case of problems accessing these documents, please call the contact listed below (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** section).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rachel Wachtendonk, 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 GOM 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, effective May 24, 2024 (89 FR 31488, April 24, 2024).

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 affirmation of the negligible impact 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.

Summary of Request and Analysis

TGS plans to conduct a three-dimensional (3D) ocean bottom node (OBN) survey over 453 lease blocks in the East Breaks area, with water depths ranging from approximately 1,200 to 2,000 m. See section F of the LOA application for a map of the area. TGS anticipates using two source vessels with a low-frequency airgun source known as Gemini (also referred to as a dual barbell source). Please see TGS’s application for additional detail.

The Gemini source was not included in the acoustic exposure modeling developed in support of the rules. However, the Gemini was previously described and evaluated in support of a previous LOA and we rely on that analysis here (88 FR 72739, October 23, 2023). For additional detail regarding the source, see section C of the LOA application. Based on this information we have determined there will be no effects of a magnitude or intensity different from those evaluated in support of the rules. NMFS expects that use of modeling results supporting the final rule relating to use of the 4,130 cubic inch (in³) airgun array are expected to be conservative as a proxy for use in evaluating potential impacts of use of the Gemini.

The survey effort proposed by TGS in its LOA request was used to develop LOA-specific take estimates based on the acoustic exposure modeling results described in our rule preamble (89 FR 31488, April 24, 2024). In order to generate the appropriate take number for authorization, the following information was considered: (1) survey type; (2) location (by modeling zone¹); (3) number of days; (4) source; and (5) month.² In this case, the 4,130 in³ airgun array was selected, as discussed above. The acoustic exposure modeling performed in support of the rule provides 24-hour exposure estimates for each species, specific to each modeled source and survey type in each zone and month.

No 3D OBN surveys were included in the modeled survey types, and use of existing proxies (*i.e.*, two-dimensional (2D), 3D (narrow-azimuth) NAZ, 3D

¹ For purposes of acoustic exposure modeling, the GOM was divided into seven zones. Zone 1 is not included in the geographic scope of the rule.

² Acoustic propagation modeling was performed for two seasons: winter (December-March) and summer (April-November). Marine mammal density data is generally available on a monthly basis, and therefore further refines take estimates temporally.

(wide-azimuth) WAZ, Coil) is generally conservative for use in evaluation of 3D OBN survey effort, largely due to the greater area covered by the modeled proxies. Summary descriptions of these modeled survey geometries are available in the preamble to the proposed rule (83 FR 29212, 29220, June 22, 2018). Coil was selected as the best available proxy survey type in this case because the spatial coverage of the planned survey is most similar to the coil survey pattern. The planned OBN survey will involve two source vessels sailing along closely spaced survey lines, with daily survey area coverage of approximately 172 kilometers squared per day, similar to that assumed for the coil survey proxy. Among the different parameters of the modeled survey patterns (e.g., area covered, line spacing, number of sources, shot interval, total simulated pulses), NMFS considers area covered per day to be most influential on daily modeled exposures exceeding Level B harassment criteria. Although TGS is not proposing to perform a survey using the coil geometry, the coil proxy is most representative of the effort planned by TGS in terms of predicted Level B harassment exposures.

The survey will take place over approximately 150 days with 90 days of sound source operation in zone 6. The monthly distribution of survey days is not known in advance, so take estimates for each species are based on the time period that produces the greatest value.

For some species, take estimates based solely on the modeling yielded results that are not realistically likely to occur when considered in light of other relevant information available during the rulemaking process regarding marine mammal occurrence in the GOM. The approach used in the acoustic exposure modeling, in which seven modeling zones were defined over the U.S. GOM, necessarily averages fine-scale information about marine mammal distribution over the large area of each modeling zone. Thus, although the modeling conducted for the rule is a natural starting point for estimating take, the rule acknowledged that other information could be considered (see, e.g., 86 FR 5442, January 19, 2021), discussing the need to provide flexibility and make efficient use of previous public and agency review of other information and identifying that

additional public review is not necessary unless the model or inputs used differ substantively from those that were previously reviewed by NMFS and the public. For this survey, NMFS has other relevant information reviewed during the rulemaking that indicates use of the acoustic exposure modeling to generate a take estimate for Rice's whale produces results inconsistent with what is known regarding their occurrence in the GOM. Accordingly, we have adjusted the calculated take estimates for Rice's whale as described below.

NMFS' final rule described a "core habitat area" for Rice's whales (formerly known as GOM Bryde's whales)³ located in the northeastern GOM in waters between 100 and 400 m depth along the continental shelf break (Rosel *et al.*, 2016). However, whaling records suggest that Rice's whales historically had a broader distribution within similar habitat parameters throughout the GOM (Reeves *et al.*, 2011; Rosel and Wilcox, 2014). In addition, habitat-based density modeling has identified similar habitat (i.e., approximately 100 to 400 m water depths along the continental shelf break) (Roberts *et al.*, 2016; Garrison *et al.*, 2023), and Rice's whales have been detected within this depth band throughout the GOM (Soldevilla *et al.*, 2022, 2024). See discussion provided at, e.g., 83 FR 29228, June 22, 2018; 83 FR 29280, June 22, 2018; 86 FR 5418, January 19, 2021.

Although Rice's whales may occur outside of the core habitat area, we expect that any such occurrence would be limited to the narrow band of habitat described above (i.e., 100–400 m) and that, based on the few available records, these occurrences would be rare. TGS's planned activities will occur in water depths of approximately 1,200 to 2,000 m in the central GOM. 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

³ The final rule refers to the GOM Bryde's whale (*Balaenoptera edeni*). These whales were subsequently described as a new species, Rice's whale (*Balaenoptera ricei*) (Rosel *et al.*, 2021).

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 GOM 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 above in the Summary of Request and Analysis section. 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; 89 FR 31535, May 24, 2024). 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	674	284.9	3,007	9.5
<i>Kogia</i> spp.	³ 259	79.0	980	9.4
Beaked whales	254	25.7	803	3.2
Rough-toothed dolphin	1,862	534.5	4,853	11.0
Bottlenose dolphin	2,581	740.8	165,125	0.4
Clymene dolphin	3,209	921.1	4,619	19.9
Atlantic spotted dolphin	4,349	1,248.2	21,506	5.8
Pantropical spotted dolphin	11,870	3,406.7	67,225	5.1
Spinner dolphin	⁴ 152	43.6	5,548	0.8
Striped dolphin	1,887	541.6	5,634	9.6
Fraser's dolphin	742	213.0	1,665	12.8
Risso's dolphin	482	142.1	1,974	7.2
Blackfish ⁵	5,034	1,484.9	6,113	24.3
Short-finned pilot whale	2,561	755.5	2,741	27.6

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 13 takes by Level A harassment and 246 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 9 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 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) 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 an LOA to TGS authorizing the take of marine mammals incidental to its geophysical survey activity, as described above.

Dated: December 20, 2024.

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-XE526]

Pacific Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice; public meeting.

SUMMARY: The Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Pacific Council) Groundfish Management Team (GMT) will hold a hybrid in person/webinar work session that is open to the public.

DATES: The GMT meeting will be held Tuesday, February 4, 2025 from 12:30 p.m., Pacific standard time, until business for the day has been completed. The GMT will reconvene Wednesday, February 5 through Friday, February 7, 2025, from 8:30 a.m. until business for each day has been completed.

ADDRESSES:

Meeting address: The meeting will be held at the Pacific Fishery Management Council Office, Large Conference Room, 7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101, Portland, OR 97220-1384. This work session is being conducted in person with a web broadcast that provides the opportunity for remote public comment. Specific meeting information, including directions on how to join the meeting and system requirements will be

provided in the meeting announcement on the Pacific Council's website (see www.pcouncil.org). Please contact Mr. Kris Kleinschmidt (kris.kleinschmidt@noaa.gov) or (503) 820-2412 for technical assistance.

Council address: Pacific Fishery Management Council, 7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101, Portland, OR 97220-1384.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Todd Phillips, Pacific Council; telephone: (503) 820-2426.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The primary purpose of this work session is for the GMT to prepare for 2025 Pacific Council meetings. Specific agenda items will include: Phase 2 stock definitions, new management measure development and prioritization, 2027/2028 harvest specifications and management measure expectations, the expected humpback whale and leatherback sea turtle biological opinion, and GMT chair/vice chair elections. The GMT may also address groundfish management actions the Pacific Council has indicated on their Year-at-a-Glance calendar, such as the 2025 Pacific whiting fishery and limited entry fixed gear follow-on actions. A detailed agenda will be available on the Pacific Council's website prior to the meeting.

Although non-emergency issues not contained in the meeting agenda may be discussed, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during these meetings. Action will be restricted to those issues specifically listed in this document and any issues arising after