

November 9, 2011, 9 a.m.–6 p.m.  
November 10, 2011, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.

### Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to the Council office (see **ADDRESSES**) at least 3 business days prior to the meeting.

Dated: September 14, 2011.

**Tracey L. Thompson,**

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

[FR Doc. 2011–23928 Filed 9–16–11; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 3510–22–P**

## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

**RIN 0648–XA584**

#### **Takes of Marine Mammals Incidental to Specified Activities; Marine Geophysical Survey in the Central Pacific Ocean, November, 2011 Through January, 2012**

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

**ACTION:** Notice; proposed incidental harassment authorization; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS has received an application from Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory (L–DEO), a part of Columbia University, for an Incidental Harassment Authorization (IHA) to take marine mammals, by harassment, incidental to conducting a marine geophysical survey in the central Pacific Ocean, November through December, 2011. Pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), NMFS is requesting comments on its proposal to issue an IHA to L–DEO to incidentally harass, by Level B harassment only, 20 species of marine mammals during the specified activity.

**DATES:** Comments and information must be received no later than October 19, 2011.

**ADDRESSES:** Comments on the application should be addressed to P. Michael Payne, Chief, Permits, Conservation and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East–West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910–3225. The mailbox address for providing e-mail comments is [ITP.Cody@noaa.gov](mailto:ITP.Cody@noaa.gov). NMFS is not

responsible for e-mail comments sent to addresses other than the one provided here. Comments sent via e-mail, including all attachments, must not exceed a 10-megabyte file size.

All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted to <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/incidental.htm#applications> without change. All Personal Identifying Information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information.

An electronic copy of the application containing a list of the references used in this document may be obtained by writing to the above address, telephoning the contact listed here (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**) or visiting the Internet at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/incidental.htm#applications>.

The following associated documents are also available at the same Internet address: The National Science Foundation's (NSF) draft Environmental Analysis (Analysis) Pursuant to Executive Order 12114. The Analysis incorporates an "Environmental Assessment of a Marine Geophysical Survey by the R/V *Marcus G. Langseth* in the Central Pacific Ocean, November–December 2011," prepared by LGL Limited, on behalf of NSF. Documents cited in this notice may be viewed, by appointment, during regular business hours, at the aforementioned address.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Jeannine Cody, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, (301) 427–8401.

#### **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

##### **Background**

Section 101(a)(5)(D) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (MMPA; 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.*) directs the Secretary of Commerce to authorize, upon request, the incidental, but not intentional, taking of small numbers of marine mammals of a species or population stock, by United States citizens who engage in a specified activity (other than commercial fishing) within a specified geographical region if certain findings are made and, if the taking is limited to harassment, a notice of a proposed authorization is provided to the public for review.

Authorization for the incidental taking of small numbers of marine mammals shall be granted if NMFS finds that the taking will have a negligible impact on the species or stock(s), and will not have an unmitigable adverse impact on the

availability of the species or stock(s) for subsistence uses (where relevant). The authorization must set forth the permissible methods of taking, other means of effecting the least practicable adverse impact on the species or stock and its habitat, and requirements pertaining to the mitigation, monitoring and reporting of such takings. 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."

Section 101(a)(5)(D) of the MMPA established an expedited process by which citizens of the United States can apply for an authorization to incidentally take small numbers of marine mammals by harassment. Section 101(a)(5)(D) of the MMPA establishes a 45-day time limit for NMFS' review of an application followed by a 30-day public notice and comment period on any proposed authorizations for the incidental harassment of small numbers of marine mammals. Within 45 days of the close of the public comment period, NMFS must either issue or deny the authorization. NMFS must publish a notice in the **Federal Register** within 30 days of its determination to issue or deny the authorization.

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].

##### **Summary of Request**

NMFS received an application on June 17, 2011, from L–DEO for the taking by harassment, of marine mammals, incidental to conducting a marine geophysical survey in the central tropical Pacific Ocean in international waters. L–DEO, with research funding from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), plans to conduct the proposed survey from November 26, 2011, through December 29, 2011. Upon receipt of additional information, NMFS determined the application complete and adequate on August 26, 2011.

L–DEO plans to use one source vessel, the R/V *Marcus G. Langseth* (*Langseth*) and a seismic airgun array to image the structure of the oceanic lithosphere (*i.e.*,

the Earth's crust and the uppermost mantle) in the Central Pacific using three-dimensional (3-D) seismic reflection techniques. The *Langseth* will deploy a single hydrophone streamer and approximately 34 short-period Ocean Bottom Seismometers (OBS) to collect geophysical data. After completion of the seismic survey, the *Langseth* will recover the 34 seismometers and deploy 27 broad-band OBSs and five magneto-telluric instruments on the seafloor. These instruments will remain on the seafloor for 12 months and the scientists will recover these instruments on a subsequent cruise in 2012.

In addition to the proposed operations of the seismic airgun array, L-DEO intends to operate a multibeam echosounder (MBES) and a sub-bottom profiler (SBP) continuously throughout the survey.

Acoustic stimuli (*i.e.*, increased underwater sound) generated during the operation of the seismic airgun array, may have the potential to cause a short-term behavioral disturbance for marine mammals in the survey area. This is the principal means of marine mammal taking associated with these activities and L-DEO has requested an authorization to take 20 species of marine mammals by Level B harassment. Take is not expected to result from the use of the MBES, the SBP, the OBSs, or the magneto-telluric instruments for reasons discussed in this notice. Also, NMFS does not expect take to result from collision with the *Langseth* because it is a single vessel moving at a relatively slow speeds during seismic acquisition within the survey, for a relatively short period of time. It is likely that any marine mammal would be able to avoid the vessel.

#### Description of the Specified Activity

L-DEO's proposed seismic survey is scheduled to commence on November 26, 2011, and continue for approximately 35 days ending on December 29, 2011. Some minor deviation from these dates is possible, depending on logistics, weather conditions, and the need to repeat some lines if data quality is substandard. Therefore, NMFS proposes to issue an authorization that extends to January 19, 2012.

Within this time period, the *Langseth* will conduct seismic operations deploying a 36-airgun array, a 6-kilometer (km) hydrophone streamer, and 34 OBSs. The *Langseth* will depart from Honolulu, Hawai'i on November 26, 2011 and transit to the survey area in the central Pacific Ocean,

approximately 1,300 kilometers (km) south of Hawai'i.

Geophysical survey activities will involve 3-D seismic methodologies to define the detailed structure of the oceanic lithosphere and to develop a comprehensive theory on its formation and evolution. To obtain 3-D images of the lithosphere in the survey area, the *Langseth* will deploy a 36-airgun array as an energy source. The receiving system consists of one 6-km-long hydrophone streamer and approximately 34 OBSs. As the airgun array is towed along the survey lines, the hydrophone streamers will receive the returning acoustic signals and transfer the data to the on-board processing system. The OBSs will receive the returning acoustic signals and record them for internally for later analysis after retrieval from the seafloor.

The proposed study (*e.g.*, equipment testing, startup, line changes, repeat coverage of any areas, and equipment recovery) will take place in water depths of approximately 5,000 meters (m) (3.1 miles (mi)). The survey will require approximately 11 days (d) to complete approximately 2,120 km (1,317.3 mi) of transect lines. The *Langseth* will shoot a 600-km long transect line twice; once using the hydrophone streamer as the receiver and once again using the OBSs. Subsequent seismic operations will occur along two semi-circular arcs (180 degrees) centered at the mid-point of the 600-km long transect line with radii of 50 and 150 km, respectively. The *Langseth* will conduct additional seismic operations in the survey area associated with turns, airgun testing, and repeat coverage of any areas where the initial data quality is sub-standard. Data acquisition will include approximately 264 hours (hr) of airgun operation (11d × 24 hr).

The scientific team for this survey consists of Drs. J.B. Gaherty (L-DEO); D. Lizarralde, J.A. Collins, and R. Evans (Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution); and G. Hirth (Brown University).

#### Vessel Specifications

The *Langseth*, owned by NSF, is a seismic research vessel with a propulsion system designed to be as quiet as possible to avoid interference with the seismic signals emanating from the airgun array. The vessel, which has a length of 71.5 m (235 feet (ft)); a beam of 17.0 m (56 ft); a maximum draft of 5.9 m (19 ft); and a gross tonnage of 3,834 pounds, is powered by two 3,550 horsepower (hp) Bergen BRG-6 diesel engines which drive two propellers. Each propeller has four blades and the

shaft typically rotates at 750 revolutions per minute. The vessel also has an 800-hp bowthruster, which is not used during seismic acquisition. The *Langseth's* operation speed during seismic acquisition will be approximately 8.5 km per hr (km/h) (5.3 miles (mi) per hr (mph) or 4.6 knots (kts)) and the cruising speed of the vessel outside of seismic operations is 18.5 km/h (11.5 mph or 10 kts).

When the *Langseth* is towing the airgun array and the hydrophone streamer, the turning rate of the vessel is limited to five degrees per minute. Thus, the maneuverability of the vessel is limited during operations with the streamer.

The vessel also has an observation tower from which protected species visual observers (PSVO) will watch for marine mammals before and during the proposed airgun operations. When stationed on the observation platform, the PSVO's eye level will be approximately 21.5 m (71 ft) above sea level providing the PSVO an unobstructed view around the entire vessel.

#### Acoustic Source Specifications

##### Seismic Airguns

The *Langseth* will deploy a 36-airgun array, with a total volume of approximately 6,600 cubic inches (in<sup>3</sup>) at a tow depth of 9 m (29.5 ft). The airguns are a mixture of Bolt 1500LL and Bolt 1900LLX airguns ranging in size from 40 to 360 in<sup>3</sup>, with a firing pressure of 1,900 pounds per square inch. The dominant frequency components range from zero to 188 Hertz (Hz). The array configuration consists of four identical linear or strings, with 10 airguns on each string; the first and last airguns will be spaced 16 m (52 ft) apart. Of the 10 airguns, nine will fire simultaneously while the tenth airgun will serve as a spare and will be turned on in case of failure of one of the other airguns. During the multichannel seismic (MCS) survey, each airgun array will emit a pulse at approximately 22-second (s) intervals which corresponds to a shot interval of approximately 50 m (164 ft). During OBS data acquisition, each airgun array will emit a longer pulse at approximately 300-s intervals which corresponds to a shot interval of approximately 650 m (2,132.5 ft). During firing, the airguns will emit a brief (approximately 0.1 s) pulse of sound; during the intervening periods of operations, the airguns will be silent.

L-DEO will tow each array approximately 100 m (328 ft) behind the vessel and will distribute the array

across an area of approximately 24 by 16 m (78.7 by 52.5 ft) behind the *Langseth*.

#### Metrics Used in This Document

This section includes a brief explanation of the sound measurements frequently used in the discussions of acoustic effects in this document. Sound pressure is the sound force per unit area, and is usually measured in micropascals ( $\mu\text{Pa}$ ), where 1 pascal (Pa) is the pressure resulting from a force of one newton exerted over an area of one square meter. Sound pressure level (SPL) is expressed as the ratio of a measured sound pressure and a reference level. The commonly used reference pressure level in underwater acoustics is 1  $\mu\text{Pa}$ , and the units for SPLs are dB re: 1  $\mu\text{Pa}$ .

$$\text{SPL (in decibels (dB))} = 20 \log \left( \frac{\text{pressure}}{\text{reference pressure}} \right)$$

SPL is an instantaneous measurement and can be expressed as the peak, the peak-peak (p-p), or the root mean square (rms). Root mean square, which is the square root of the arithmetic average of the squared instantaneous pressure values, is typically used in discussions of the effects of sounds on vertebrates and all references to SPL in this document refer to the root mean square unless otherwise noted. SPL does not take the duration of a sound into account.

#### Characteristics of the Airgun Pulses

Airguns function by venting high-pressure air into the water which creates an air bubble. The pressure signature of an individual airgun consists of a sharp rise and then fall in pressure, followed by several positive and negative pressure excursions caused by the oscillation of the resulting air bubble. The oscillation of the air bubble transmits sounds downward through the

seafloor and the amount of sound transmitted in the near horizontal directions is reduced. However, the airgun array also emits sounds that travel horizontally toward non-target areas.

The nominal source levels of the airgun array used by L-DEO on the *Langseth* is 236 to 265 dB re: 1  $\mu\text{Pa}_{(\text{p-p})}$  and the rms value for a given airgun pulse is typically 16 dB re: 1  $\mu\text{Pa}$  lower than the peak-to-peak value. However, the difference between rms and peak or peak-to-peak values for a given pulse depends on the frequency content and duration of the pulse, among other factors.

Accordingly, L-DEO has predicted the received sound levels in relation to distance and direction from the 36-airgun array and the single Bolt 1900LL 40-in<sup>3</sup> airgun, which will be used during power downs. A detailed description of L-DEO's modeling for marine seismic source arrays for species mitigation is provided in Appendix A of L-DEO's application. These are the nominal source levels applicable to downward propagation. The effective source levels for horizontal propagation are lower than those for downward propagation because of the directional nature of the sound from the airgun array.

Appendix B of L-DEO's environmental analysis discusses the characteristics of the airgun pulses. NMFS refers the reviewers to the application and environmental analysis documents for additional information.

#### Predicted Sound Levels for the Airguns

Tolstoy *et al.*, (2009) reported results for propagation measurements of pulses from the *Langseth's* 36-airgun, 6,600 in<sup>3</sup> array in shallow-water (approximately 50 m (164 ft)) and deep-water depths (approximately 1,600 m (5,249 ft)) in the

Gulf of Mexico in 2007 and 2008. Results of the Gulf of Mexico calibration study (Tolstoy *et al.*, 2009) showed that radii around the airguns for various received levels varied with water depth and with array tow depth.

L-DEO used the results from the Gulf of Mexico study to determine the algorithm for its model that calculates the exclusion zones (EZ) for the 36-airgun array and the single airgun. L-DEO uses these values to designate mitigation zones and to estimate take (described in greater detail in Section VII of L-DEO's application and Section IV of the environmental analysis) for marine mammals.

Comparison of the Tolstoy *et al.* calibration study with L-DEO's model for the *Langseth's* 36-airgun array indicated that the model represents the actual received levels, within the first few kilometers, where the predicted exclusion zones are located. However, the model for deep water (greater than 1,000 m; 3,280 ft) overestimated the received sound levels at a given distance but is still valid for defining exclusion zones at various tow depths. Because the tow depth of the array in the calibration study is less shallow (3 m; 9.8 ft) than the tow depth array in the proposed survey (9 m; 29.5 ft), L-DEO used correction factors for estimating the received levels in deep water during the proposed survey. The correction factors used were the ratios of the 160- and 180-dB distances from the modeled results for the 6,600 in<sup>3</sup> airgun array towed at 6 m (19.7 ft) versus 9 m (29.5 ft) from LGL (2008); 1.285 and 1.3381 respectively.

Table 1 summarizes the predicted distances at which sound levels (160- and 180-dB) are expected to be received from the 36-airgun array and a single airgun operating in deep water.

TABLE 1—MEASURED (ARRAY) OR PREDICTED (SINGLE AIRGUN) DISTANCES TO WHICH SOUND LEVELS GREATER THAN OR EQUAL TO 160 AND 180 dB RE: 1  $\mu\text{Pa}_{\text{rms}}$  THAT COULD BE RECEIVED IN DEEP WATER USING A 36-AIRGUN ARRAY, AS WELL AS A SINGLE AIRGUN TOWED AT A DEPTH OF 9 M (29.5 FT) DURING THE PROPOSED SURVEY IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC OCEAN, DURING NOVEMBER, 2011–JANUARY, 2012

[Distances are based on model results provided by L-DEO.]

Source and volume	Water depth	Predicted RMS distances (m)	
		160 dB	180 dB
Single Bolt airgun (40 in <sup>3</sup> ) .....	Deep	385	40
36-Airgun Array .....	(> 1,000 m)	3,850	940

Appendix A of the environmental analysis discusses L-DEO's calculations for the model. NMFS refers the reviewers to the application and

environmental analysis documents for additional information.

#### Ocean Bottom Seismometer

L-DEO proposes to use the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI)

“D2” OBS during the cruise. This type of OBS is approximately one meter in height and has a maximum diameter of 50 centimeters (cm). The anchor ( $2.5 \times 30.5 \times 38.1$  cm) is made of hot-rolled steel and weighs 23 kilograms (kg). The acoustic release transponder used to communicate with the OBS uses frequencies of 9 to 13 kHz. The source level of the release signal is 190 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa.

#### *Multibeam Echosounder*

The *Langseth* will operate a Kongsberg EM 122 MBES concurrently during airgun operations to map characteristics of the ocean floor. The hull-mounted MBES emits brief pulses of sound (also called a ping) (10.5 to 13 kilohertz (kHz)) in a fan-shaped beam that extends downward and to the sides of the ship. The transmitting beamwidth is one or two degrees ( $^{\circ}$ ) fore-aft and  $150^{\circ}$  athwartship and the maximum source level is 242 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa.

For deep-water operations, each ping consists of eight (in water greater than 1,000 m; 3,280 ft) or four (less than 1,000 m; 3,280 ft) successive, fan-shaped transmissions, from two to 15 milliseconds (ms) in duration and each ensonifying a sector that extends  $1^{\circ}$  fore-aft. Continuous wave pulses increase from two to 15 milliseconds (ms) long in water depths up to 2,600 m (8,530 ft). The MBES uses frequency-modulated chirp pulses up to 100-ms long in water greater than 2,600 m (8,530 ft). The eight successive transmissions span an overall cross-track angular extent of about  $150^{\circ}$ , with 2-ms gaps between the pulses for successive sectors.

#### *Sub-Bottom Profiler*

The *Langseth* will also operate a Knudsen Chirp 3260 SBP concurrently

during airgun and MBES operations to provide information about the sedimentary features and bottom topography. The SBP is capable of reaching depths of 10,000 m (6.2 mi). The dominant frequency component of the SBP is 3.5 kHz which is directed downward in a  $27^{\circ}$  cone by a hull-mounted transducer on the vessel. The nominal power output is 10 kilowatts (kW), but the actual maximum radiated power is three kW or 222 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa. The ping duration is up to 64 ms with a pulse interval of one second, but a common mode of operation is to broadcast five pulses at 1-s intervals followed by a 5-s pause.

NMFS expects that acoustic stimuli resulting from the proposed operation of the single airgun or the 36-airgun array has the potential to harass marine mammals, incidental to the conduct of the proposed seismic survey. NMFS expects these disturbances to be temporary and result in a temporary modification in behavior and/or low-level physiological effects (Level B harassment only) of small numbers of certain species of marine mammals. NMFS does not expect that the movement of the *Langseth*, during the conduct of the seismic survey, has the potential to harass marine mammals because of the relatively slow operation speed of the vessel (4.6 kts; 8.5 km/hr; 5.3 mph) during seismic acquisition.

#### **Description of the Specified Geographic Region**

The survey will encompass the area bounded by  $5-10^{\circ}$  N,  $150-156^{\circ}$  W in international waters in the central Pacific Ocean (see Figure 1 in L-DEO's application). Water depth in the survey area is approximately 5,000 m (3.1 mi).

#### **Description of the Marine Mammals in the Area of the Proposed Specified Activity**

Twenty-six marine mammal species may occur in the proposed survey area, including 19 odontocetes (toothed cetaceans), 6 mysticetes (baleen whales) and one species of pinniped during November through December. Six of these species are listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), including the humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), sei (*Balaenoptera borealis*), fin (*Balaenoptera physalus*), blue (*Balaenoptera musculus*), and sperm (*Physeter macrocephalus*) whale and the Hawaiian monk seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*).

Hawaiian monk seals have the potential to transit in the vicinity of the proposed seismic survey, although any occurrence would be rare as they are vagrants to the area. Based on available data, L-DEO does not expect to encounter Hawaiian monk seals within the proposed survey area and does not present analysis for these species. Accordingly, NMFS will not consider this pinniped species in greater detail and the proposed IHA will only address requested take authorizations for mysticetes and odontocetes.

The species of marine mammals expected to be most common in the survey area (all delphinids) include the pantropical spotted dolphin (*Stenella attenuata*) and spinner dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*).

Table 2 presents information on the abundance, distribution, and conservation status of the marine mammals that may occur in the proposed survey area November, 2011 through January, 2012.

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**Table 2.** Habitat, abundance, and conservation status of marine mammals that may occur in or near the proposed seismic survey area in the central Pacific Ocean.

[See text and Tables 2 and 3 in L-DEO's application and environmental analysis for further details.]

Species	Occurrence in Survey Area during Nov – Jan	Habitat	Abundance in Hawaii <sup>1</sup>	Abundance in the N. Pacific or ETP	ESA <sup>2</sup>	Density <sup>3</sup>
<i>Mysticetes</i>						
Humpback whale	Rare	Mainly nearshore waters and banks	7,120 – 10,425 <sup>4</sup>	20,800 <sup>5</sup>	EN	0
Bryde's whale	Common	Pelagic, coastal	469	13,000 <sup>6</sup>	NL	0.58
Sei whale	Rare	Mostly pelagic	N.A.	7,260 – 12,620 <sup>7</sup>	EN	0
Fin whale	Rare	Slope, pelagic	N.A.	13,260 – 18,680 <sup>8</sup>	EN	0
Blue whale	Rare	Pelagic, coastal	N.A.	1,400 <sup>9</sup> – 2,842 <sup>10</sup>	EN	0.01
Minke whale	Rare	Coastal	N.A.	9,000 <sup>11</sup>	NL	0
<i>Odontocetes</i>						
Sperm whale	Common	Pelagic, steep topography	6,919	26,053 <sup>12</sup> – 24,000 <sup>13</sup>	EN	2.97
Pygmy sperm whale	Uncommon	Deep waters off shelf	7,138	N.A.	NL	0.03
Dwarf sperm whale	Common	Deep, shelf, slope	17,519	11,200 <sup>14</sup>	NL	7.65
Blainville's beaked whale	Uncommon	Pelagic	2,872	25,300 <sup>15</sup>	NL	0.35
Cuvier's beaked whale	Common	Slope, pelagic	15,242	20,000 <sup>9</sup>	NL	6.66
Ginkgo-toothed beaked whale	Rare	Pelagic	N.A.	25,300 <sup>15</sup>	NL	0.35
Longman's beaked whale	Uncommon	Pelagic	1,007	294 <sup>16</sup>	NL	0.44
Rough-toothed dolphin	Common	Mainly pelagic	8,709	107,633 <sup>17</sup>	NL	1.24
Bottlenose dolphin	Common	Coastal, shelf, deep	3,215	335,834 <sup>17</sup>	NL	4.94
Pantropical spotted dolphin	Common	Coastal and pelagic	8,978	1,297,092 <sup>18</sup>	NL	120.4
Spinner dolphin	Common	Coastal and pelagic	3,351	1,797,716 <sup>18</sup>	NL	183.5
Striped dolphin	Common	Off continental shelf	13,143	964,362 <sup>17</sup>	NL	16.45
Fraser's dolphin	Common	Pelagic	10,226	289,300 <sup>9</sup>	NL	4.47
Risso's dolphin	Common	Shelf, slope, seamounts	2,372	110,457 <sup>17</sup>	NL	0.81
Melon-headed whale	Common	Pelagic	2,950	45,400 <sup>9</sup>	NL	1.29
Pygmy killer whale	Uncommon	Pelagic, coastal	956	38,900 <sup>9</sup>	NL	0
False killer whale	Common	Pelagic	484 <sup>19</sup>	39,800 <sup>9</sup>	NL	0.10
Killer whale	Rare	Widely distributed	349	8,500 <sup>20</sup>	NL	0.15
Short-finned pilot whale	Common	Pelagic, high-relief	8,870	589,315 <sup>21</sup>	NL	5.07

N.A. Not available or not assessed.

<sup>1</sup> Abundance from Barlow (2006) unless otherwise stated.<sup>2</sup> U.S. Endangered Species Act: EN = Endangered, T = Threatened, NL = Not listed.

<sup>3</sup> Density (#/1000 km<sup>2</sup>) estimates as listed in Table 3 of the application. Cetacean densities are based on NMFS SWFSC ETP ship transect surveys conducted in 1986–2006 from predictive modeling (Barlow *et al.*, 2009; Read *et al.*, 2009) or in 2002 from Barlow (2006). Densities are corrected for  $f(0)$  and  $g(0)$ . Where no source is given, the species was not included in Read *et al.* (2009) or Barlow (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Calambokidis *et al.* (2008)

<sup>5</sup> North Pacific (Barlow *et al.*, 2009a)

<sup>6</sup> Wade and Gerrodette (1993); estimate is for *Balaenoptera edeni* but may include some *B. borealis*.

<sup>7</sup> Tillman (1977)

<sup>8</sup> Ohsumi and Wada (1974)

<sup>9</sup> ETP (Wade and Gerrodette, 1993)

<sup>10</sup> U.S. west coast (Carretta *et al.*, 2010)

<sup>11</sup> Wada (1976)

<sup>12</sup> ETP (Whitehead, 2002a)

<sup>13</sup> Eastern Temperate North Pacific (Whitehead, 2002a)

<sup>14</sup> Wade and Gerrodette (1993); estimate for ETP mostly for *K. sima* but may also include *K. breviceps*

<sup>15</sup> This estimate includes all species of the genus *Mesoplodon* in the ETP (Wade and Gerrodette, 1993)

<sup>16</sup> ETP (Ferguson and Barlow, 2003)

<sup>17</sup> ETP for 2006 (Gerrodette *et al.*, 2008)

<sup>18</sup> ETP for 2006 for the two offshore spotted dolphin, and the eastern and whitebelly spinner dolphin, stocks (Gerrodette *et al.*, 2008)

<sup>19</sup> Hawaii pelagic stock (Barlow and Rankin, 2007)

<sup>20</sup> ETP (Ford 2002)

<sup>21</sup> This estimate is for *G. macrorhynchus* and *G. melas* in the ETP (Gerrodette and Forcada, 2002)

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Refer to Sections III and IV of L-DEO's application for detailed information regarding the abundance and distribution, population status, and life history and behavior of these species and their occurrence in the proposed project area. The application also presents how L-DEO calculated the estimated densities for the marine mammals in the proposed survey area. NMFS has reviewed these data and determined them to be the best available scientific information for the purposes of the proposed IHA.

#### Potential Effects on Marine Mammals

Acoustic stimuli generated by the operation of the airguns, which introduce sound into the marine environment, may have the potential to cause Level B harassment of marine mammals in the proposed survey area. The effects of sounds from airgun operations might include one or more of the following: Tolerance, masking of natural sounds, behavioral disturbance, temporary or permanent impairment, or non-auditory physical or physiological effects (Richardson *et al.*, 1995; Gordon *et al.*, 2004; Nowacek *et al.*, 2007; Southall *et al.*, 2007).

Permanent hearing impairment, in the unlikely event that it occurred, would constitute injury, but temporary threshold shift (TTS) is not an injury (Southall *et al.*, 2007). Although the possibility cannot be entirely excluded, it is unlikely that the proposed project would result in any cases of temporary or permanent hearing impairment, or any significant non-auditory physical or physiological effects. Based on the

available data and studies described here, some behavioral disturbance is expected, but NMFS expects the disturbance to be localized and short-term.

#### Tolerance to Sound

Studies on marine mammals' tolerance to sound in the natural environment are relatively rare. Richardson *et al.* (1995) defines tolerance as the occurrence of marine mammals in areas where they are exposed to human activities or man-made noise. In many cases, tolerance develops by the animal habituating to the stimulus (*i.e.*, the gradual waning of responses to a repeated or ongoing stimulus) (Richardson *et al.*, 1995; Thorpe, 1963), but because of ecological or physiological requirements, many marine animals may need to remain in areas where they are exposed to chronic stimuli (Richardson *et al.*, 1995).

Numerous studies have shown that pulsed sounds from airguns are often readily detectable in the water at distances of many kilometers. Malme *et al.*, (1985) studied the responses of humpback whales on their summer feeding grounds in southeast Alaska to seismic pulses from an airgun with a total volume of 100-in<sup>3</sup>. They noted that the whales did not exhibit persistent avoidance when exposed to the airgun and concluded that there was no clear evidence of avoidance, despite the possibility of subtle effects, at received levels up to 172 dB: re 1  $\mu$ Pa.

Weir (2008) observed marine mammal responses to seismic pulses from a 24-airgun array firing a total volume of either 5,085 in<sup>3</sup> or 3,147 in<sup>3</sup> in Angolan

waters between August 2004 and May 2005. She recorded a total of 207 sightings of humpback whales ( $n = 66$ ), sperm whales ( $n = 124$ ), and Atlantic spotted dolphins ( $n = 17$ ) and reported that there were no significant differences in encounter rates (sightings/hr) for humpback and sperm whales according to the airgun array's operational status (*i.e.*, active versus silent).

#### Masking of Natural Sounds

The term masking refers to the inability of a subject to recognize the occurrence of an acoustic stimulus as a result of the interference of another acoustic stimulus (Clark *et al.*, 2009). Introduced underwater sound may, through masking, reduce the effective communication distance of a marine mammal species if the frequency of the source is close to that used as a signal by the marine mammal, and if the anthropogenic sound is present for a significant fraction of the time (Richardson *et al.*, 1995).

Masking effects of pulsed sounds (even from large arrays of airguns) on marine mammal calls and other natural sounds are expected to be limited. Because of the intermittent nature and low duty cycle of seismic airgun pulses, animals can emit and receive sounds in the relatively quiet intervals between pulses. However, in some situations, reverberation occurs for much or the entire interval between pulses (*e.g.*, Simard *et al.*, 2005; Clark and Gagnon, 2006) which could mask calls. Some baleen and toothed whales are known to continue calling in the presence of seismic pulses, and their calls can

usually be heard between the seismic pulses (e.g., Richardson *et al.*, 1986; McDonald *et al.*, 1995; Greene *et al.*, 1999; Nieukirk *et al.*, 2004; Smultea *et al.*, 2004; Holst *et al.*, 2005a,b, 2006; and Dunn and Hernandez, 2009). However, Clark and Gagnon (2006) reported that fin whales in the northeast Pacific Ocean went silent for an extended period starting soon after the onset of a seismic survey in the area. Similarly, there has been one report that sperm whales ceased calling when exposed to pulses from a very distant seismic ship (Bowles *et al.*, 1994). However, more recent studies found that they continued calling in the presence of seismic pulses (Madsen *et al.*, 2002; Tyack *et al.*, 2003; Smultea *et al.*, 2004; Holst *et al.*, 2006; and Jochens *et al.*, 2008). Dolphins and porpoises commonly are heard calling while airguns are operating (e.g., Gordon *et al.*, 2004; Smultea *et al.*, 2004; Holst *et al.*, 2005a, b; and Potter *et al.*, 2007). The sounds important to small odontocetes are predominantly at much higher frequencies than are the dominant components of airgun sounds, thus limiting the potential for masking.

In general, NMFS expects the masking effects of seismic pulses to be minor, given the normally intermittent nature of seismic pulses. Refer to Appendix B (4) of L-DEO's environmental analysis for a more detailed discussion of masking effects on marine mammals.

#### Behavioral Disturbance

Disturbance includes a variety of effects, including subtle to conspicuous changes in behavior, movement, and displacement. Reactions to sound, if any, depend on species, state of maturity, experience, current activity, reproductive state, time of day, and many other factors (Richardson *et al.*, 1995; Wartzok *et al.*, 2004; Southall *et al.*, 2007; Weilgart, 2007). If a marine mammal does react briefly to an underwater sound by changing its behavior or moving a small distance, the impacts of the change are unlikely to be significant to the individual, let alone the stock or population. However, if a sound source displaces marine mammals from an important feeding or breeding area for a prolonged period, impacts on individuals and populations could be significant (e.g., Lusseau and Bejder, 2007; Weilgart, 2007). Given the many uncertainties in predicting the quantity and types of impacts of noise on marine mammals, it is common practice to estimate how many mammals would be present within a particular distance of industrial activities and/or exposed to a particular level of industrial sound. In most cases, this approach likely overestimates the

numbers of marine mammals that would be affected in some biologically-important manner.

The sound criteria used to estimate how many marine mammals might be disturbed to some biologically-important degree by a seismic program are based primarily on behavioral observations of a few species. Scientists have conducted detailed studies on humpback, gray, bowhead (*Balaena mysticetus*), and sperm whales. Less detailed data are available for some other species of baleen whales, small toothed whales, and sea otters (*Enhydra lutris*), but for many species there are no data on responses to marine seismic surveys.

**Baleen Whales**—Baleen whales generally tend to avoid operating airguns, but avoidance radii are quite variable (reviewed in Richardson, *et al.*, 1995). Whales are often reported to show no overt reactions to pulses from large arrays of airguns at distances beyond a few kilometers, even though the airgun pulses remain well above ambient noise levels out to much longer distances. However, as reviewed in Appendix B (5.1) of L-DEO's environmental analysis, baleen whales exposed to strong noise pulses from airguns often react by deviating from their normal migration route and/or interrupting their feeding and moving away. In the cases of migrating gray and bowhead whales, the observed changes in behavior appeared to be of little or no biological consequence to the animals (Richardson *et al.*, 1995). They simply avoided the sound source by displacing their migration route to varying degrees, but within the natural boundaries of the migration corridors.

Studies of gray, bowhead, and humpback whales have shown that seismic pulses with received levels of 160 to 170 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa seem to cause obvious avoidance behavior in a substantial fraction of the animals exposed (Malme *et al.*, 1986, 1988; Richardson *et al.*, 1995). In many areas, seismic pulses from large arrays of airguns diminish to those levels at distances ranging from four to 15 km from the source. A substantial proportion of the baleen whales within those distances may show avoidance or other strong behavioral reactions to the airgun array. Subtle behavioral changes sometimes become evident at somewhat lower received levels, and studies summarized in Appendix B (5.1) of L-DEO's environmental analysis have shown that some species of baleen whales, notably bowhead and humpback whales, at times, show strong avoidance at received levels lower than 160–170 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa.

McCauley *et al.* (1998, 2000) studied the responses of humpback whales off western Australia to a full-scale seismic survey with a 16-airgun array (2,678-in<sup>3</sup>) and to a single airgun (20-in<sup>3</sup>) with source level of 227 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa<sub>(p-p)</sub>. In the 1998 study, they documented that avoidance reactions began at five to eight km from the array, and that those reactions kept most pods approximately three to four km from the operating seismic boat. In the 2000 study, they noted localized displacement during migration of four to five km by traveling pods and seven to 12 km by more sensitive resting pods of cow-calf pairs. Avoidance distances with respect to the single airgun were smaller but consistent with the results from the full array in terms of the received sound levels. The mean received level for initial avoidance of an approaching airgun was 140 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa for humpback pods containing females, and at the mean closest point of approach distance the received level was 143 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa. The initial avoidance response generally occurred at distances of five to eight km from the airgun array and two km from the single airgun. However, some individual humpback whales, especially males, approached within distances of 100 to 400 m (328 to 1,312 ft), where the maximum received level was 179 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa.

Humpback whales on their summer feeding grounds in southeast Alaska did not exhibit persistent avoidance when exposed to seismic pulses from a 1.64-L (100-in<sup>3</sup>) airgun (Malme *et al.*, 1985). Some humpbacks seemed "startled" at received levels of 150 to 169 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa. Malme *et al.* (1985) concluded that there was no clear evidence of avoidance, despite the possibility of subtle effects, at received levels up to 172 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa.

Studies have suggested that south Atlantic humpback whales wintering off Brazil may be displaced or even strand upon exposure to seismic surveys (Engel *et al.*, 2004). The evidence for this was circumstantial and subject to alternative explanations (IAGC, 2004). Also, the evidence was not consistent with subsequent results from the same area of Brazil (Parente *et al.*, 2006), or with direct studies of humpbacks exposed to seismic surveys in other areas and seasons. After allowance for data from subsequent years, there was no observable direct correlation between strandings and seismic surveys (IWC, 2007:236).

There are no data on reactions of right whales to seismic surveys, but results from the closely-related bowhead whale show that their responsiveness can be quite variable depending on their

activity (migrating versus feeding). Bowhead whales migrating west across the Alaskan Beaufort Sea in autumn, in particular, are unusually responsive, with substantial avoidance occurring out to distances of 20 to 30 km from a medium-sized airgun source at received sound levels of around 120 to 130 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa (Miller *et al.*, 1999; Richardson *et al.*, 1999; see Appendix B (5) of L-DEO's environmental analysis). However, more recent research on bowhead whales (Miller *et al.*, 2005; Harris *et al.*, 2007) corroborates earlier evidence that, during the summer feeding season, bowheads are not as sensitive to seismic sources. Nonetheless, subtle but statistically significant changes in surfacing-respiration-dive cycles were evident upon statistical analysis (Richardson *et al.*, 1986). In the summer, bowheads typically begin to show avoidance reactions at received levels of about 152 to 178 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa (Richardson *et al.*, 1986, 1995; Ljungblad *et al.*, 1988; Miller *et al.*, 2005).

Reactions of migrating and feeding (but not wintering) gray whales to seismic surveys have been studied. Malme *et al.* (1986, 1988) studied the responses of feeding eastern Pacific gray whales to pulses from a single 100-in<sup>3</sup> airgun off St. Lawrence Island in the northern Bering Sea. They estimated, based on small sample sizes, that 50 percent of feeding gray whales stopped feeding at an average received pressure level of 173 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa on an (approximate) rms basis, and that 10 percent of feeding whales interrupted feeding at received levels of 163 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa. Those findings were generally consistent with the results of experiments conducted on larger numbers of gray whales that were migrating along the California coast (Malme *et al.*, 1984; Malme and Miles, 1985), and western Pacific gray whales feeding off Sakhalin Island, Russia (Wursig *et al.*, 1999; Gailey *et al.*, 2007; Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Yazvenko *et al.*, 2007a, b), along with data on gray whales off British Columbia (Bain and Williams, 2006).

Various species of *Balaenoptera* (blue, sei, fin, and minke whales) have occasionally been seen in areas ensounded by airgun pulses (Stone, 2003; MacLean and Haley, 2004; Stone and Tasker, 2006), and calls from blue and fin whales have been localized in areas with airgun operations (*e.g.*, McDonald *et al.*, 1995; Dunn and Hernandez, 2009). Sightings by observers on seismic vessels off the United Kingdom from 1997 to 2000 suggest that, during times of good sightability, sighting rates for mysticetes

(mainly fin and sei whales) were similar when large arrays of airguns were shooting vs. silent (Stone, 2003; Stone and Tasker, 2006). However, these whales tended to exhibit localized avoidance, remaining significantly further (on average) from the airgun array during seismic operations compared with non-seismic periods (Stone and Tasker, 2006). In a study off of Nova Scotia, Moulton and Miller (2005) found little difference in sighting rates (after accounting for water depth) and initial sighting distances of balaenopterid whales when airguns were operating vs. silent. However, there were indications that these whales were more likely to be moving away when seen during airgun operations. Similarly, ship-based monitoring studies of blue, fin, sei and minke whales offshore of Newfoundland (Orphan Basin and Laurentian Sub-basin) found no more than small differences in sighting rates and swim directions during seismic versus non-seismic periods (Moulton *et al.*, 2005, 2006a,b). Data on short-term reactions by cetaceans to impulsive noises are not necessarily indicative of long-term or biologically significant effects. It is not known whether impulsive sounds affect reproductive rate or distribution and habitat use in subsequent days or years. However, gray whales have continued to migrate annually along the west coast of North America with substantial increases in the population over recent years, despite intermittent seismic exploration (and much ship traffic) in that area for decades (Appendix A in Malme *et al.*, 1984; Richardson *et al.*, 1995; Allen and Angliss, 2010). The western Pacific gray whale population did not seem affected by a seismic survey in its feeding ground during a previous year (Johnson *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, bowhead whales have continued to travel to the eastern Beaufort Sea each summer, and their numbers have increased notably, despite seismic exploration in their summer and autumn range for many years (Richardson *et al.*, 1987; Angliss and Allen, 2009).

**Toothed Whales**—Little systematic information is available about reactions of toothed whales to noise pulses. Few studies similar to the more extensive baleen whale/seismic pulse work summarized above and (in more detail) in Appendix B of L-DEO's environmental analysis have been reported for toothed whales. However, there are recent systematic studies on sperm whales (*e.g.*, Gordon *et al.*, 2006; Madsen *et al.*, 2006; Winsor and Mate, 2006; Jochens *et al.*, 2008; Miller *et al.*,

2009). There is an increasing amount of information about responses of various odontocetes to seismic surveys based on monitoring studies (*e.g.*, Stone, 2003; Smultea *et al.*, 2004; Moulton and Miller, 2005; Bain and Williams, 2006; Holst *et al.*, 2006; Stone and Tasker, 2006; Potter *et al.*, 2007; Hauser *et al.*, 2008; Holst and Smultea, 2008; Weir, 2008; Barkaszi *et al.*, 2009; Richardson *et al.*, 2009).

Seismic operators and marine mammal observers on seismic vessels regularly see dolphins and other small toothed whales near operating airgun arrays, but in general there is a tendency for most delphinids to show some avoidance of operating seismic vessels (*e.g.*, Goold, 1996a,b,c; Calambokidis and Osmeck, 1998; Stone, 2003; Moulton and Miller, 2005; Holst *et al.*, 2006; Stone and Tasker, 2006; Weir, 2008; Richardson *et al.*, 2009; see also Barkaszi *et al.*, 2009). Some dolphins seem to be attracted to the seismic vessel and floats, and some ride the bow wave of the seismic vessel even when large arrays of airguns are firing (*e.g.*, Moulton and Miller, 2005). Nonetheless, small toothed whales more often tend to head away, or to maintain a somewhat greater distance from the vessel, when a large array of airguns is operating than when it is silent (*e.g.*, Stone and Tasker, 2006; Weir, 2008). In most cases, the avoidance radii for delphinids appear to be small, on the order of one km less, and some individuals show no apparent avoidance. The beluga whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*) is a species that (at least at times) shows long-distance avoidance of seismic vessels. Aerial surveys conducted in the southeastern Beaufort Sea during summer found that sighting rates of beluga whales were significantly lower at distances 10 to 20 km compared with 20 to 30 km from an operating airgun array, and observers on seismic boats in that area rarely see belugas (Miller *et al.*, 2005; Harris *et al.*, 2007).

Captive bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) and beluga whales exhibited changes in behavior when exposed to strong pulsed sounds similar in duration to those typically used in seismic surveys (Finneran *et al.*, 2000, 2002, 2005). However, the animals tolerated high received levels of sound before exhibiting aversive behaviors.

Results for porpoises depend on species. The limited available data suggest that harbor porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) show stronger avoidance of seismic operations than do Dall's porpoises (*Phocoenoides dalli*) (Stone, 2003; MacLean and Koski, 2005; Bain and Williams, 2006; Stone and Tasker, 2006). Dall's porpoises seem relatively



tolerant of airgun operations (MacLean and Koski, 2005; Bain and Williams, 2006), although they too have been observed to avoid large arrays of operating airguns (Calambokidis and Osmeck, 1998; Bain and Williams, 2006). This apparent difference in responsiveness of these two porpoise species is consistent with their relative responsiveness to boat traffic and some other acoustic sources (Richardson *et al.*, 1995; Southall *et al.*, 2007).

Most studies of sperm whales exposed to airgun sounds indicate that the sperm whale shows considerable tolerance of airgun pulses (e.g., Stone, 2003; Moulton *et al.*, 2005, 2006a; Stone and Tasker, 2006; Weir, 2008). In most cases the whales do not show strong avoidance, and they continue to call (see Appendix B of L-DEO's environmental analysis for review). However, controlled exposure experiments in the Gulf of Mexico indicate that foraging behavior was altered upon exposure to airgun sound (Jochens *et al.*, 2008; Miller *et al.*, 2009; Tyack, 2009).

There are almost no specific data on the behavioral reactions of beaked whales to seismic surveys. However, some northern bottlenose whales (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*) remained in the general area and continued to produce high-frequency clicks when exposed to sound pulses from distant seismic surveys (Gosselin and Lawson, 2004; Laurinolli and Cochran, 2005; Simard *et al.*, 2005). Most beaked whales tend to avoid approaching vessels of other types (e.g., Wursig *et al.*, 1998). They may also dive for an extended period when approached by a vessel (e.g., Kasuya, 1986), although it is uncertain how much longer such dives may be as compared to dives by undisturbed beaked whales, which also are often quite long (Baird *et al.*, 2006; Tyack *et al.*, 2006). Based on a single observation, Aguilar-Soto *et al.* (2006) suggested that foraging efficiency of Cuvier's beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*) may be reduced by close approach of vessels. In any event, it is likely that most beaked whales would also show strong avoidance of an approaching seismic vessel, although this has not been documented explicitly.

There are increasing indications that some beaked whales tend to strand when naval exercises involving mid-frequency sonar operation are ongoing nearby (e.g., Simmonds and Lopez-Jurado, 1991; Frantzis, 1998; NOAA and USN, 2001; Jepson *et al.*, 2003; Hildebrand, 2005; Barlow and Gisiner, 2006; see also the Stranding and Mortality section in this notice). These

strandings are apparently a disturbance response, although auditory or other injuries or other physiological effects may also be involved. Whether beaked whales would ever react similarly to seismic surveys is unknown. Seismic survey sounds are quite different from those of the sonar in operation during the above-cited incidents.

Odontocete reactions to large arrays of airguns are variable and, at least for delphinids and Dall's porpoises, seem to be confined to a smaller radius than has been observed for the more responsive of the mysticetes, belugas, and harbor porpoises (See Appendix B of L-DEO's environmental analysis).

#### *Hearing Impairment and Other Physical Effects*

Exposure to high intensity sound for a sufficient duration may result in auditory effects such as a noise-induced threshold shift—an increase in the auditory threshold after exposure to noise (Finneran, Carder, Schlundt, and Ridgway, 2005). Factors that influence the amount of threshold shift include the amplitude, duration, frequency content, temporal pattern, and energy distribution of noise exposure. The magnitude of hearing threshold shift normally decreases over time following cessation of the noise exposure. The amount of threshold shift just after exposure is called the initial threshold shift. If the threshold shift eventually returns to zero (i.e., the threshold returns to the pre-exposure value), it is called temporary threshold shift (TTS) (Southall *et al.*, 2007).

Researchers have studied TTS in certain captive odontocetes and pinnipeds exposed to strong sounds (reviewed in Southall *et al.*, 2007). However, there has been no specific documentation of TTS let alone permanent hearing damage, i.e., permanent threshold shift (PTS), in free-ranging marine mammals exposed to sequences of airgun pulses during realistic field conditions.

**Temporary Threshold Shift**—TTS is the mildest form of hearing impairment that can occur during exposure to a strong sound (Kryter, 1985). While experiencing TTS, the hearing threshold rises and a sound must be stronger in order to be heard. At least in terrestrial mammals, TTS can last from minutes or hours to (in cases of strong TTS) days. For sound exposures at or somewhat above the TTS threshold, hearing sensitivity in both terrestrial and marine mammals recovers rapidly after exposure to the noise ends. Few data on sound levels and durations necessary to elicit mild TTS have been obtained for marine mammals, and none of the

published data concern TTS elicited by exposure to multiple pulses of sound. Available data on TTS in marine mammals are summarized in Southall *et al.* (2007). Table 1 presents the distances from the *Langseth's* airguns at which the received energy level (per pulse, flat-weighted) that would be expected to be greater than or equal to 180 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa.

To avoid the potential for injury, NMFS (1995, 2000) concluded that cetaceans should not be exposed to pulsed underwater noise at received levels exceeding 180 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa. NMFS believes that to avoid the potential for permanent physiological damage (Level A harassment), cetaceans should not be exposed to pulsed underwater noise at received levels exceeding 180 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa. The 180-dB level is a shutdown criterion applicable to cetaceans, as specified by NMFS (2000); these levels were used to establish the EZs. NMFS also assumes that cetaceans exposed to levels exceeding 160 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa (rms) may experience Level B harassment.

Researchers have derived TTS information for odontocetes from studies on the bottlenose dolphin and beluga. For the one harbor porpoise tested, the received level of airgun sound that elicited onset of TTS was lower (Lucke *et al.*, 2009). If these results from a single animal are representative, it is inappropriate to assume that onset of TTS occurs at similar received levels in all odontocetes (cf. Southall *et al.*, 2007). Some cetaceans apparently can incur TTS at considerably lower sound exposures than are necessary to elicit TTS in the beluga or bottlenose dolphin.

For baleen whales, there are no data, direct or indirect, on levels or properties of sound that are required to induce TTS. The frequencies to which baleen whales are most sensitive are assumed to be lower than those to which odontocetes are most sensitive, and natural background noise levels at those low frequencies tend to be higher. As a result, auditory thresholds of baleen whales within their frequency band of best hearing are believed to be higher (less sensitive) than are those of odontocetes at their best frequencies (Clark and Ellison, 2004). From this, it is suspected that received levels causing TTS onset may also be higher in baleen whales (Southall *et al.*, 2007). For this proposed study, L-DEO expects no cases of TTS given: (1) The low abundance of baleen whales in the planned study area at the time of the survey; and (2) the strong likelihood that baleen whales would avoid the approaching airguns (or vessel) before

being exposed to levels high enough for TTS to occur.

**Permanent Threshold Shift**—When PTS occurs, there is physical damage to the sound receptors in the ear. In severe cases, there can be total or partial deafness, whereas in other cases, the animal has an impaired ability to hear sounds in specific frequency ranges (Kryter, 1985). There is no specific evidence that exposure to pulses of airgun sound can cause PTS in any marine mammal, even with large arrays of airguns. However, given the possibility that mammals close to an airgun array might incur at least mild TTS, there has been further speculation about the possibility that some individuals occurring very close to airguns might incur PTS (e.g., Richardson *et al.*, 1995, p. 372ff; Gedamke *et al.*, 2008). Single or occasional occurrences of mild TTS are not indicative of permanent auditory damage, but repeated or (in some cases) single exposures to a level well above that causing TTS onset might elicit PTS.

Relationships between TTS and PTS thresholds have not been studied in marine mammals, but are assumed to be similar to those in humans and other terrestrial mammals. PTS might occur at a received sound level at least several decibels above that inducing mild TTS if the animal were exposed to strong sound pulses with rapid rise time—see Appendix B (6) of L-DEO's environmental analysis. Based on data from terrestrial mammals, a precautionary assumption is that the PTS threshold for impulse sounds (such as airgun pulses as received close to the source) is at least 6 dB higher than the TTS threshold on a peak-pressure basis, and probably greater than six dB (Southall *et al.*, 2007).

Given the higher level of sound necessary to cause PTS as compared with TTS, it is considerably less likely that PTS would occur. Baleen whales generally avoid the immediate area around operating seismic vessels, as do some other marine mammals.

**Stranding and Mortality**—Marine mammals close to underwater detonations of high explosives can be killed or severely injured, and the auditory organs are especially susceptible to injury (Ketten *et al.*, 1993; Ketten, 1995). However, explosives are no longer used for marine waters for commercial seismic surveys or (with rare exceptions) for seismic research; they have been replaced entirely by airguns or related non-explosive pulse generators. Airgun pulses are less energetic and have slower rise times, and there is no specific evidence that they can cause serious injury, death, or

stranding even in the case of large airgun arrays. However, the association of strandings of beaked whales with naval exercises involving mid-frequency active sonar and, in one case, an L-DEO seismic survey (Malakoff, 2002; Cox *et al.*, 2006), has raised the possibility that beaked whales exposed to strong “pulsed” sounds may be especially susceptible to injury and/or behavioral reactions that can lead to stranding (e.g., Hildebrand, 2005; Southall *et al.*, 2007). Appendix B (6) of L-DEO's environmental analysis provides additional details.

Specific sound-related processes that lead to strandings and mortality are not well documented, but may include:

- (1) Swimming in avoidance of a sound into shallow water;
- (2) A change in behavior (such as a change in diving behavior) that might contribute to tissue damage, gas bubble formation, hypoxia, cardiac arrhythmia, hypertensive hemorrhage or other forms of trauma;
- (3) A physiological change such as a vestibular response leading to a behavioral change or stress-induced hemorrhagic diathesis, leading in turn to tissue damage; and
- (4) Tissue damage directly from sound exposure, such as through acoustically-mediated bubble formation and growth or acoustic resonance of tissues. Some of these mechanisms are unlikely to apply in the case of impulse sounds. However, there are increasing indications that gas-bubble disease (analogous to the bends), induced in supersaturated tissue by a behavioral response to acoustic exposure, could be a pathologic mechanism for the strandings and mortality of some deep-diving cetaceans exposed to sonar. However, the evidence for this remains circumstantial and associated with exposure to naval mid-frequency sonar, not seismic surveys (Cox *et al.*, 2006; Southall *et al.*, 2007).

Seismic pulses and mid-frequency sonar signals are quite different, and some mechanisms by which sonar sounds have been hypothesized to affect beaked whales are unlikely to apply to airgun pulses. Sounds produced by airgun arrays are broadband impulses with most of the energy below one kHz. Typical military mid-frequency sonar emits non-impulse sounds at frequencies of two to 10 kHz, generally with a relatively narrow bandwidth at any one time. A further difference between seismic surveys and naval exercises is that naval exercises can involve sound sources on more than one vessel. Thus, it is not appropriate to assume that there is a direct connection between the effects of military sonar and

seismic surveys on marine mammals. However, evidence that sonar signals can, in special circumstances, lead (at least indirectly) to physical damage and mortality (e.g., Balcomb and Claridge, 2001; NOAA and USN, 2001; Jepson *et al.*, 2003; Fernández *et al.*, 2004, 2005; Hildebrand 2005; Cox *et al.*, 2006) suggests that caution is warranted when dealing with exposure of marine mammals to any high-intensity “pulsed” sound.

There is no conclusive evidence of cetacean strandings or deaths at sea as a result of exposure to seismic surveys, but a few cases of strandings in the general area where a seismic survey was ongoing have led to speculation concerning a possible link between seismic surveys and strandings. Suggestions that there was a link between seismic surveys and strandings of humpback whales in Brazil (Engel *et al.*, 2004) were not well founded (IAGC, 2004; IWC, 2007). In September 2002, there was a stranding of two Cuvier's beaked whales in the Gulf of California, Mexico, when the L DEO vessel R/V *Maurice Ewing* was operating a 20-airgun (8,490 in<sup>3</sup>) array in the general area. The link between the stranding and the seismic surveys was inconclusive and not based on any physical evidence (Hogarth, 2002; Yoder, 2002). Nonetheless, the Gulf of California incident plus the beaked whale strandings near naval exercises involving use of mid-frequency sonar suggests a need for caution in conducting seismic surveys in areas occupied by beaked whales until more is known about effects of seismic surveys on those species (Hildebrand, 2005). No injuries of beaked whales are anticipated during the proposed study because of:

- (1) The high likelihood that any beaked whales nearby would avoid the approaching vessel before being exposed to high sound levels,
- (2) Differences between the sound sources operated by L-DEO and those involved in the naval exercises associated with strandings.

**Non-auditory Physiological Effects**—Non-auditory physiological effects or injuries that theoretically might occur in marine mammals exposed to strong underwater sound include stress, neurological effects, bubble formation, resonance, and other types of organ or tissue damage (Cox *et al.*, 2006; Southall *et al.*, 2007). Studies examining such effects are limited. However, resonance effects (Gentry, 2002) and direct noise-induced bubble formations (Crum *et al.*, 2005) are implausible in the case of exposure to an impulsive broadband source like an airgun array. If seismic

surveys disrupt diving patterns of deep-diving species, this might perhaps result in bubble formation and a form of the bends, as speculated to occur in beaked whales exposed to sonar. However, there is no specific evidence of this upon exposure to airgun pulses.

In general, very little is known about the potential for seismic survey sounds (or other types of strong underwater sounds) to cause non-auditory physical effects in marine mammals. Such effects, if they occur at all, would presumably be limited to short distances and to activities that extend over a prolonged period. The available data do not allow identification of a specific exposure level above which non-auditory effects can be expected (Southall *et al.*, 2007), or any meaningful quantitative predictions of the numbers (if any) of marine mammals that might be affected in those ways. Marine mammals that show behavioral avoidance of seismic vessels, including most baleen whales and some odontocetes, are especially unlikely to incur non-auditory physical effects.

#### *Potential Effects of Other Acoustic Devices*

##### MBES

L-DEO will operate the Kongsberg EM 122 MBES from the source vessel during the planned study. Sounds from the MBES are very short pulses, occurring for two to 15 ms once every five to 20 s, depending on water depth. Most of the energy in the sound pulses emitted by this MBES is at frequencies near 12 kHz, and the maximum source level is 242 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa. The beam is narrow (1 to 2°) in fore-aft extent and wide (150°) in the cross-track extent. Each ping consists of eight (in water greater than 1,000 m deep) or four (less than 1,000 m deep) successive fan-shaped transmissions (segments) at different cross-track angles. Any given mammal at depth near the trackline would be in the main beam for only one or two of the segments. Also, marine mammals that encounter the Kongsberg EM 122 are unlikely to be subjected to repeated pulses because of the narrow fore-aft width of the beam and will receive only limited amounts of pulse energy because of the short pulses. Animals close to the vessel (where the beam is narrowest) are especially unlikely to be ensonified for more than one 2- to 15-ms pulse (or two pulses if in the overlap area). Similarly, Kremser *et al.* (2005) noted that the probability of a cetacean swimming through the area of exposure when an MBES emits a pulse is small. The animal would have to pass the transducer at close range and be

swimming at speeds similar to the vessel in order to receive the multiple pulses that might result in sufficient exposure to cause TTS.

Navy sonars that have been linked to avoidance reactions and stranding of cetaceans: (1) Generally have longer pulse duration than the Kongsberg EM 122; and (2) are often directed close to horizontally versus more downward for the MBES. The area of possible influence of the MBES is much smaller—a narrow band below the source vessel. Also, the duration of exposure for a given marine mammal can be much longer for naval sonar. During L-DEO's operations, the individual pulses will be very short, and a given mammal would not receive many of the downward-directed pulses as the vessel passes by. Possible effects of an MBES on marine mammals are outlined below.

**Masking**—Marine mammal communications will not be masked appreciably by the MBES signals given the low duty cycle of the echosounder and the brief period when an individual mammal is likely to be within its beam. Furthermore, in the case of baleen whales, the MBES signals (12 kHz) do not overlap with the predominant frequencies in the calls, which would avoid any significant masking.

**Behavioral Responses**—Behavioral reactions of free-ranging marine mammals to sonars, echosounders, and other sound sources appear to vary by species and circumstance. Observed reactions have included silencing and dispersal by sperm whales (Watkins *et al.*, 1985), increased vocalizations and no dispersal by pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*) (Rendell and Gordon, 1999), and the previously-mentioned beachings by beaked whales. During exposure to a 21 to 25 kHz “whale-finding” sonar with a source level of 215 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa, gray whales reacted by orienting slightly away from the source and being deflected from their course by approximately 200 m (Frankel, 2005). When a 38-kHz echosounder and a 150-kHz acoustic Doppler current profiler were transmitting during studies in the Eastern Tropical Pacific, baleen whales showed no significant responses, while spotted and spinner dolphins were detected slightly more often and beaked whales less often during visual surveys (Gerrodette and Pettis, 2005).

Captive bottlenose dolphins and a beluga whale exhibited changes in behavior when exposed to 1-s tonal signals at frequencies similar to those that will be emitted by the MBES used by LDEO, and to shorter broadband pulsed signals. Behavioral changes

typically involved what appeared to be deliberate attempts to avoid the sound exposure (Schlundt *et al.*, 2000; Finneran *et al.*, 2002; Finneran and Schlundt, 2004). The relevance of those data to free-ranging odontocetes is uncertain, and in any case, the test sounds were quite different in duration as compared with those from an MBES.

**Hearing Impairment and Other Physical Effects**—Given recent stranding events that have been associated with the operation of naval sonar, there is concern that mid-frequency sonar sounds can cause serious impacts to marine mammals (see above). However, the MBES proposed for use by L-DEO is quite different than sonar used for navy operations. Pulse duration of the MBES is very short relative to the naval sonar. Also, at any given location, an individual marine mammal would be in the beam of the MBES for much less time given the generally downward orientation of the beam and its narrow fore-aft beamwidth; navy sonar often uses near-horizontally-directed sound. Those factors would all reduce the sound energy received from the MBES rather drastically relative to that from naval sonar.

Based upon the best available science, NMFS believes that the brief exposure of marine mammals to one pulse, or small numbers of signals, from the MBES is not likely to result in the harassment of marine mammals.

##### SBP

L-DEO will also operate an SBP from the source vessel during the proposed survey. Sounds from the SBP are very short pulses, occurring for one to four ms once every second. Most of the energy in the sound pulses emitted by the SBP is at 3.5 kHz, and the beam is directed downward. The sub-bottom profiler on the Langseth has a maximum source level of 222 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa.

Kremser *et al.* (2005) noted that the probability of a cetacean swimming through the area of exposure when a bottom profiler emits a pulse is small—even for an SBP more powerful than that on the Langseth—if the animal was in the area, it would have to pass the transducer at close range and in order to be subjected to sound levels that could cause TTS.

**Masking**—Marine mammal communications will not be masked appreciably by the SBP signals given the directionality of the signal and the brief period when an individual mammal is likely to be within its beam. Furthermore, in the case of most baleen whales, the SBP signals do not overlap with the predominant frequencies in the

calls, which would avoid significant masking.

**Behavioral Responses**—Marine mammal behavioral reactions to other pulsed sound sources are discussed above, and responses to the SBP are likely to be similar to those for other pulsed sources if received at the same levels. However, the pulsed signals from the SBP are considerably weaker than those from the MBES. Therefore, behavioral responses are not expected unless marine mammals are very close to the source.

**Hearing Impairment and Other Physical Effects**—It is unlikely that the SBP produces pulse levels strong enough to cause hearing impairment or other physical injuries even in an animal that is (briefly) in a position near the source. The SBP is usually operated simultaneously with other higher-power acoustic sources. Many marine mammals will move away in response to the approaching higher-power sources or the vessel itself before the mammals would be close enough for there to be any possibility of effects from the less intense sounds from the SBP. Based upon the best available science, NMFS believes that the brief exposure of marine mammals to signals from the SBP is not likely to result in the harassment of marine mammals.

The potential effects to marine mammals described in this section of the document do not take into consideration the proposed monitoring and mitigation measures described later in this document (see the “Proposed Mitigation” and “Proposed Monitoring and Reporting” sections) which, as noted are designed to effect the least practicable adverse impact on affected marine mammal species and stocks.

#### **Anticipated Effects on Marine Mammal Habitat**

The proposed seismic survey is not anticipated to have any permanent impact on habitats used by the marine mammals in the proposed survey area, including the food sources they use (*i.e.*, fish and invertebrates). Additionally, no physical damage to any habitat is anticipated as a result of conducting the proposed seismic survey. While it is anticipated that the specified activity may result in marine mammals avoiding certain areas due to temporary ensonification, this impact to habitat is temporary and reversible and was considered in further detail earlier in this document, as behavioral modification. The main impact associated with the proposed activity will be temporarily elevated noise levels and the associated direct effects on marine mammals, previously discussed

in this notice. The next section discusses the potential impacts of anthropogenic sound sources on common marine mammal prey in the proposed survey area (*i.e.*, fish and invertebrates).

#### **Anticipated Effects on Fish**

One reason for the adoption of airguns as the standard energy source for marine seismic surveys is that, unlike explosives, they have not been associated with large-scale fish kills. However, existing information on the impacts of seismic surveys on marine fish populations is limited (see Appendix D of L-DEO’s environmental analysis). There are three types of potential effects of exposure to seismic surveys: (1) Pathological, (2) physiological, and (3) behavioral. Pathological effects involve lethal and temporary or permanent sub-lethal injury. Physiological effects involve temporary and permanent primary and secondary stress responses, such as changes in levels of enzymes and proteins. Behavioral effects refer to temporary and (if they occur) permanent changes in exhibited behavior (*e.g.*, startle and avoidance behavior). The three categories are interrelated in complex ways. For example, it is possible that certain physiological and behavioral changes could potentially lead to an ultimate pathological effect on individuals (*i.e.*, mortality).

The specific received sound levels at which permanent adverse effects to fish potentially could occur are little studied and largely unknown. Furthermore, the available information on the impacts of seismic surveys on marine fish is from studies of individuals or portions of a population; there have been no studies at the population scale. The studies of individual fish have often been on caged fish that were exposed to airgun pulses in situations not representative of an actual seismic survey. Thus, available information provides limited insight on possible real-world effects at the ocean or population scale.

Hastings and Popper (2005), Popper (2009), and Popper and Hastings (2009a,b) provided recent critical reviews of the known effects of sound on fish. The following sections provide a general synopsis of the available information on the effects of exposure to seismic and other anthropogenic sound as relevant to fish. The information comprises results from scientific studies of varying degrees of rigor plus some anecdotal information. Some of the data sources may have serious shortcomings in methods, analysis, interpretation, and reproducibility that must be considered when interpreting their results (see

Hastings and Popper, 2005). Potential adverse effects of the program’s sound sources on marine fish are then noted.

**Pathological Effects**—The potential for pathological damage to hearing structures in fish depends on the energy level of the received sound and the physiology and hearing capability of the species in question (see Appendix D L-DEO’s environmental analysis). For a given sound to result in hearing loss, the sound must exceed, by some substantial amount, the hearing threshold of the fish for that sound (Popper, 2005). The consequences of temporary or permanent hearing loss in individual fish on a fish population are unknown; however, they likely depend on the number of individuals affected and whether critical behaviors involving sound (*e.g.*, predator avoidance, prey capture, orientation and navigation, reproduction, *etc.*) are adversely affected.

Little is known about the mechanisms and characteristics of damage to fish that may be inflicted by exposure to seismic survey sounds. Few data have been presented in the peer-reviewed scientific literature. As far as we know, there are only two papers with proper experimental methods, controls, and careful pathological investigation implicating sounds produced by actual seismic survey airguns in causing adverse anatomical effects. One such study indicated anatomical damage, and the second indicated TTS in fish hearing. The anatomical case is McCauley *et al.* (2003), who found that exposure to airgun sound caused observable anatomical damage to the auditory maculae of pink snapper (*Pagrus auratus*). This damage in the ears had not been repaired in fish sacrificed and examined almost two months after exposure. On the other hand, Popper *et al.* (2005) documented only TTS (as determined by auditory brainstem response) in two of three fish species from the Mackenzie River Delta. This study found that broad whitefish (*Coregonus nasus*) exposed to five airgun shots were not significantly different from those of controls. During both studies, the repetitive exposure to sound was greater than would have occurred during a typical seismic survey. However, the substantial low-frequency energy produced by the airguns [less than 400 Hz in the study by McCauley *et al.* (2003) and less than approximately 200 Hz in Popper *et al.* (2005)] likely did not propagate to the fish because the water in the study areas was very shallow (approximately 9 m in the former case and less than two m in the latter). Water depth sets a lower limit on the lowest sound frequency that

will propagate (the “cutoff frequency”) at about one-quarter wavelength (Urick, 1983; Rogers and Cox, 1988).

Wardle *et al.* (2001) suggested that in water, acute injury and death of organisms exposed to seismic energy depends primarily on two features of the sound source: (1) The received peak pressure and (2) the time required for the pressure to rise and decay. Generally, as received pressure increases, the period for the pressure to rise and decay decreases, and the chance of acute pathological effects increases. According to Buchanan *et al.* (2004), for the types of seismic airguns and arrays involved with the proposed program, the pathological (mortality) zone for fish would be expected to be within a few meters of the seismic source. Numerous other studies provide examples of no fish mortality upon exposure to seismic sources (Falk and Lawrence, 1973; Holliday *et al.*, 1987; La Bella *et al.*, 1996; Santulli *et al.*, 1999; McCauley *et al.*, 2000a,b, 2003; Bjarti, 2002; Thomsen, 2002; Hassel *et al.*, 2003; Popper *et al.*, 2005; Boeger *et al.*, 2006).

Some studies have reported, some equivocally, that mortality of fish, fish eggs, or larvae can occur close to seismic sources (Kostyuchenko, 1973; Dalen and Knutsen, 1986; Booman *et al.*, 1996; Dalen *et al.*, 1996). Some of the reports claimed seismic effects from treatments quite different from actual seismic survey sounds or even reasonable surrogates. However, Payne *et al.* (2009) reported no statistical differences in mortality/morbidity between control and exposed groups of capelin eggs or monkfish larvae. Saetre and Ona (1996) applied a ‘worst-case scenario’ mathematical model to investigate the effects of seismic energy on fish eggs and larvae. They concluded that mortality rates caused by exposure to seismic surveys are so low, as compared to natural mortality rates, that the impact of seismic surveying on recruitment to a fish stock must be regarded as insignificant.

**Physiological Effects**—Physiological effects refer to cellular and/or biochemical responses of fish to acoustic stress. Such stress potentially could affect fish populations by increasing mortality or reducing reproductive success. Primary and secondary stress responses of fish after exposure to seismic survey sound appear to be temporary in all studies done to date (Sverdrup *et al.*, 1994; Santulli *et al.*, 1999; McCauley *et al.*, 2000a,b). The periods necessary for the biochemical changes to return to normal are variable and depend on numerous aspects of the biology of the species and

of the sound stimulus (see Appendix D of L-DEO’s environmental analysis).

**Behavioral Effects**—Behavioral effects include changes in the distribution, migration, mating, and catchability of fish populations. Studies investigating the possible effects of sound (including seismic survey sound) on fish behavior have been conducted on both uncaged and caged individuals (*e.g.*, Chapman and Hawkins, 1969; Pearson *et al.*, 1992; Santulli *et al.*, 1999; Wardle *et al.*, 2001; Hassel *et al.*, 2003). Typically, in these studies fish exhibited a sharp startle response at the onset of a sound followed by habituation and a return to normal behavior after the sound ceased.

There is general concern about potential adverse effects of seismic operations on fisheries, namely a potential reduction in the “catchability” of fish involved in fisheries. Although reduced catch rates have been observed in some marine fisheries during seismic testing, in a number of cases the findings are confounded by other sources of disturbance (Dalen and Raknes, 1985; Dalen and Knutsen, 1986; Lokkeborg, 1991; Skalski *et al.*, 1992; Engas *et al.*, 1996). In other airgun experiments, there was no change in catch per unit effort (CPUE) of fish when airgun pulses were emitted, particularly in the immediate vicinity of the seismic survey (Pickett *et al.*, 1994; La Bella *et al.*, 1996). For some species, reductions in catch may have resulted from a change in behavior of the fish, *e.g.*, a change in vertical or horizontal distribution, as reported in Slotte *et al.* (2004).

In general, any adverse effects on fish behavior or fisheries attributable to seismic testing may depend on the species in question and the nature of the fishery (season, duration, fishing method). They may also depend on the age of the fish, its motivational state, its size, and numerous other factors that are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify at this point, given such limited data on effects of airguns on fish, particularly under realistic at-sea conditions.

#### *Anticipated Effects on Invertebrates*

The existing body of information on the impacts of seismic survey sound on marine invertebrates is very limited. However, there is some unpublished and very limited evidence of the potential for adverse effects on invertebrates, thereby justifying further discussion and analysis of this issue. The three types of potential effects of exposure to seismic surveys on marine invertebrates are pathological, physiological, and behavioral. Based on the physical structure of their sensory organs, marine invertebrates appear to

be specialized to respond to particle displacement components of an impinging sound field and not to the pressure component (Popper *et al.*, 2001; see also Appendix E of L-DEO’s environmental analysis).

The only information available on the impacts of seismic surveys on marine invertebrates involves studies of individuals; there have been no studies at the population scale. Thus, available information provides limited insight on possible real-world effects at the regional or ocean scale. The most important aspect of potential impacts concerns how exposure to seismic survey sound ultimately affects invertebrate populations and their viability, including availability to fisheries.

Literature reviews of the effects of seismic and other underwater sound on invertebrates were provided by Moriyasu *et al.* (2004) and Payne *et al.* (2008). The following sections provide a synopsis of available information on the effects of exposure to seismic survey sound on species of decapod crustaceans and cephalopods, the two taxonomic groups of invertebrates on which most such studies have been conducted. The available information is from studies with variable degrees of scientific soundness and from anecdotal information. A more detailed review of the literature on the effects of seismic survey sound on invertebrates is provided in Appendix E of L-DEO’s environmental analysis.

**Pathological Effects**—In water, lethal and sub-lethal injury to organisms exposed to seismic survey sound appears to depend on at least two features of the sound source: (1) The received peak pressure; and (2) the time required for the pressure to rise and decay. Generally, as received pressure increases, the period for the pressure to rise and decay decreases, and the chance of acute pathological effects increases. For the type of airgun array planned for the proposed program, the pathological (mortality) zone for crustaceans and cephalopods is expected to be within a few meters of the seismic source, at most; however, very few specific data are available on levels of seismic signals that might damage these animals. This premise is based on the peak pressure and rise/decay time characteristics of seismic airgun arrays currently in use around the world.

Some studies have suggested that seismic survey sound has a limited pathological impact on early developmental stages of crustaceans (Pearson *et al.*, 1994; Christian *et al.*, 2003; DFO, 2004). However, the impacts

appear to be either temporary or insignificant compared to what occurs under natural conditions. Controlled field experiments on adult crustaceans (Christian *et al.*, 2003, 2004; DFO, 2004) and adult cephalopods (McCauley *et al.*, 2000a,b) exposed to seismic survey sound have not resulted in any significant pathological impacts on the animals. It has been suggested that exposure to commercial seismic survey activities has injured giant squid (Guerra *et al.*, 2004), but the article provides little evidence to support this claim.

**Physiological Effects**—Physiological effects refer mainly to biochemical responses by marine invertebrates to acoustic stress. Such stress potentially could affect invertebrate populations by increasing mortality or reducing reproductive success. Primary and secondary stress responses (*i.e.*, changes in haemolymph levels of enzymes, proteins, *etc.*) of crustaceans have been noted several days or months after exposure to seismic survey sounds (Payne *et al.*, 2007). The periods necessary for these biochemical changes to return to normal are variable and depend on numerous aspects of the biology of the species and of the sound stimulus.

**Behavioral Effects**—There is increasing interest in assessing the possible direct and indirect effects of seismic and other sounds on invertebrate behavior, particularly in relation to the consequences for fisheries. Changes in behavior could potentially affect such aspects as reproductive success, distribution, susceptibility to predation, and catchability by fisheries. Studies investigating the possible behavioral effects of exposure to seismic survey sound on crustaceans and cephalopods have been conducted on both uncaged and caged animals. In some cases, invertebrates exhibited startle responses (*e.g.*, squid in McCauley *et al.*, 2000a,b). In other cases, no behavioral impacts were noted (*e.g.*, crustaceans in Christian *et al.*, 2003, 2004; DFO 2004). There have been anecdotal reports of reduced catch rates of shrimp shortly after exposure to seismic surveys; however, other studies have not observed any significant changes in shrimp catch rate (Andriguetto-Filho *et al.*, 2005). Similarly, Parry and Gason (2006) did not find any evidence that lobster catch rates were affected by seismic surveys. Any adverse effects on crustacean and cephalopod behavior or fisheries attributable to seismic survey sound depend on the species in question and the nature of the fishery (season, duration, fishing method).

### Proposed Mitigation

In order to issue an incidental take authorization (ITA) under section 101(a)(5)(D) of the MMPA, NMFS must set forth the permissible methods of taking pursuant to such activity, and other means of effecting the least practicable adverse impact on such species or stock and its habitat, paying particular attention to rookeries, mating grounds, and areas of similar significance, and the availability of such species or stock for taking for certain subsistence uses.

L-DEO has based the mitigation measures described herein, to be implemented for the proposed seismic survey, on the following:

(1) Protocols used during previous L-DEO seismic research cruises as approved by NMFS;

(2) Previous IHA applications and IHAs approved and authorized by NMFS; and

(3) Recommended best practices in Richardson *et al.* (1995), Pierson *et al.* (1998), and Weir and Dolman, (2007).

To reduce the potential for disturbance from acoustic stimuli associated with the activities, L-DEO and/or its designees has proposed to implement the following mitigation measures for marine mammals:

(1) Proposed exclusion zones (EZ);

(2) Power-down procedures;

(3) Shutdown procedures; and

(4) Ramp-up procedures.

**Proposed Exclusion Zones**—L-DEO uses safety radii to designate exclusion zones and to estimate take (described in greater detail in Section IV and Appendix A of L-DEO's environmental analysis) for marine mammals. Table 1 shows the distances at which two sound levels (160- and 180-dB) are expected to be received from the 36-airgun array and a single airgun. The 180-dB level shutdown criterion is applicable to cetaceans, as specified by NMFS (2000); and L-DEO used these levels to establish the EZs. If the protected species visual observer (PSVO) detects marine mammal(s) within or about to enter the appropriate EZ, the *Langseth* crew will immediately power down the airgun array, or perform a shut down if necessary (see Shut-down Procedures).

**Power-down Procedures**—A power-down involves decreasing the number of airguns in use such that the radius of the 180-dB zone is decreased to the extent that marine mammals are no longer in or about to enter the EZ. A power down of the airgun array can also occur when the vessel is moving from one seismic line to another. During a power-down for mitigation, L-DEO will operate one airgun. The continued

operation of one airgun is intended to alert marine mammals to the presence of the seismic vessel in the area. In contrast, a shut down occurs when the *Langseth* suspends all airgun activity.

If the PSVO detects a marine mammal outside the EZ, which is likely to enter the EZ, L-DEO will power down the airguns before the animal enters the EZ. Likewise, if a mammal is already within the EZ, when first detected L-DEO will power down the airguns immediately. During a power down of the airgun array, L-DEO will operate the 40-in<sup>3</sup> airgun. If a marine mammal is detected within or near the smaller EZ around that single airgun (Table 1), L-DEO will shut down the airgun (see next section).

Following a power-down, L-DEO will not resume airgun activity until the marine mammal has cleared the safety zone. L-DEO will consider the animal to have cleared the EZ if

- A PSVO has visually observed the animal leave the EZ; or
- A PSVO has not sighted the animal within the EZ for 15 min for small odontocetes, or 30 min for mysticetes and large odontocetes, including sperm, pygmy sperm, dwarf sperm, and beaked whales; or
- The vessel has moved outside the EZ (*e.g.*, if a marine mammal is sighted close to the vessel and the ship speed is 8.5 km km/h (5.3 mph), it would take the vessel approximately eight minutes to leave the vicinity of the marine mammal).

During airgun operations following a power-down (or shut-down) whose duration has exceeded the time limits specified previously, L-DEO will ramp-up the airgun array gradually (see Shut-down Procedures).

**Shut-down Procedures**—L-DEO will shut down the operating airgun(s) if a marine mammal is seen within or approaching the EZ for the single airgun. L-DEO will implement a shut-down:

- (1) If an animal enters the EZ of the single airgun after L-DEO has initiated a power down, or
- (2) If an animal is initially seen within the EZ of the single airgun when more than one airgun (typically the full airgun array) is operating.

L-DEO will not resume airgun activity until the marine mammal has cleared the EZ, or until the PSVO is confident that the animal has left the vicinity of the vessel. Criteria for judging that the animal has cleared the EZ will be as described in the preceding section.

**Ramp-up Procedures**—L-DEO will follow a ramp-up procedure when the airgun subarrays begin operating after a specified period without airgun

operations or when a power down has exceeded that period. L-DEO proposes that, for the present cruise, this period would be approximately eight minutes. This period is based on the 180-dB radius for the 36-airgun array towed at a depth of nine m (29.5 ft) in relation to the minimum planned speed of the *Langseth* while shooting (8.5 km/h; 5.3 mph; 4.6 kts). L-DEO has used similar periods (8–10 min) during previous L-DEO surveys. L-DEO will not resume operations if a marine mammal has not cleared the EZ as described earlier.

Ramp-up will begin with the smallest airgun in the array (40-in<sup>3</sup>). Airguns will be added in a sequence such that the source level of the array will increase in steps not exceeding six dB per five-minute period over a total duration of approximately 30 min. During ramp-up, the PSVOs will monitor the EZ, and if he/she sights a marine mammal, L-DEO will implement a power down or shut down as though the full airgun array were operational.

If the complete EZ is not visible to the PSVO for at least 30 min prior to the start of operations in either daylight or nighttime, L-DEO will not commence the ramp-up unless at least one airgun (40-in<sup>3</sup> or similar) has been operating during the interruption of seismic survey operations. Given these provisions, it is likely that L-DEO will not ramp up the airgun array from a complete shut-down at night or in thick fog, because the outer part of the EZ for that array will not be visible during those conditions. If one airgun has operated during a power-down period, ramp-up to full power will be permissible at night or in poor visibility, on the assumption that marine mammals will be alerted to the approaching seismic vessel by the sounds from the single airgun and could move away. L-DEO will not initiate a ramp-up of the airguns if a marine mammal is sighted within or near the applicable EZs during the day or close to the vessel at night.

NMFS has carefully evaluated the applicant's proposed mitigation measures and has considered a range of other measures in the context of ensuring that NMFS prescribes the means of effecting the least practicable adverse impact on the affected marine mammal species and stocks and their habitat. Our evaluation of potential measures included consideration of the following factors in relation to one another: (1) The manner in which, and the degree to which, the successful implementation of the measure is expected to minimize adverse impacts to marine mammals; (2) the proven or likely efficacy of the specific measure to

minimize adverse impacts as planned; and (3) the practicability of the measure for applicant implementation.

Based on our evaluation of the applicant's proposed measures, NMFS has preliminarily determined that the proposed mitigation measures provide the means of effecting the least practicable adverse impacts on marine mammals species or stocks and their habitat, paying particular attention to rookeries, mating grounds, and areas of similar significance.

#### *Proposed Monitoring and Reporting*

In order to issue an ITA for an activity, section 101(a)(5)(D) of the MMPA states that NMFS must set forth "requirements pertaining to the monitoring and reporting of such taking." The MMPA implementing regulations at 50 CFR 216.104 (a)(13) indicate that requests for IHAs must include the suggested means of accomplishing the necessary monitoring and reporting that will result in increased knowledge of the species and of the level of taking or impacts on populations of marine mammals that are expected to be present in the action area.

#### *Monitoring*

L-DEO proposes to sponsor marine mammal monitoring during the present project, in order to implement the proposed mitigation measures that require real-time monitoring, and to satisfy the anticipated monitoring requirements of the IHA. L-DEO's proposed Monitoring Plan is described below this section. L-DEO understands that this monitoring plan will be subject to review by NMFS, and that refinements may be required. The monitoring work described here has been planned as a self-contained project independent of any other related monitoring projects that may be occurring simultaneously in the same regions. L-DEO is prepared to discuss coordination of its monitoring program with any related work that might be done by other groups insofar as this is practical and desirable.

#### *Vessel-Based Visual Monitoring*

L-DEO will position PSVOs aboard the seismic source vessel to watch for marine mammals near the vessel during daytime airgun operations and during any start-ups at night. PSVOs will also watch for marine mammals near the seismic vessel for at least 30 min prior to the start of airgun operations after an extended shut down. PSVOs will conduct observations during daytime periods when the seismic system is not operating for comparison of sighting

rates and behavior with and without airgun operations and between acquisition periods.

Based on PSVO observations, the *Langseth* will power down or shut down the airguns when marine mammals are observed within or about to enter a designated EZ. The EZ is a region in which a possibility exists of adverse effects on animal hearing or other physical effects.

During seismic operations, at least four PSVOs will be based aboard the *Langseth*. L-DEO will appoint the PSVOs with NMFS' concurrence. During all daytime periods, two PSVOs will be on duty from the observation tower to monitor and PSVOs will be on duty in shifts of duration no longer than four hours. During mealtimes it is sometimes difficult to have two PSVOs on effort, but at least one PSVO will be on watch during bathroom breaks and mealtimes. Use of two simultaneous observers increases the effectiveness of detecting animals near the source vessel.

L-DEO will also instruct other crew to assist in detecting marine mammals and implementing mitigation requirements (if practical). Before the start of the seismic survey, L-DEO will give the crew additional instruction regarding how to accomplish this task.

The *Langseth* is a suitable platform for marine mammal observations. When stationed on the observation platform, the eye level will be approximately 21.5 m (70.5 ft) above sea level, and the observer will have a good view around the entire vessel. During daytime, the PSVOs will scan the area around the vessel systematically with reticle binoculars (e.g., 7 x 50 Fujinon), Big-eye binoculars (25 x 150), and with the naked eye. During darkness, night vision devices (NVDs) will be available (ITT F500 Series Generation 3 binocular-image intensifier or equivalent), when required. Laser range-finding binoculars (Leica LRF 1200 laser rangefinder or equivalent) will be available to assist with distance estimation. Those are useful in training observers to estimate distances visually, but are generally not useful in measuring distances to animals directly; that is done primarily with the reticles in the binoculars.

#### *Passive Acoustic Monitoring*

Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) will complement the visual monitoring program, when practicable. Visual monitoring typically is not effective during periods of poor visibility or at night, and even with good visibility, is unable to detect marine mammals when



they are below the surface or beyond visual range.

Besides the four PSVOs, an additional Protected Species Acoustic Observer (PSAO) with primary responsibility for PAM will also be aboard the vessel. L-DEO can use acoustical monitoring in addition to visual observations to improve detection, identification, and localization of cetaceans. The acoustic monitoring will serve to alert visual observers (if on duty) when vocalizing cetaceans are detected. It is only useful when marine mammals call, but it can be effective either by day or by night, and does not depend on good visibility. It will be monitored in real time so that the visual observers can be advised when cetaceans are detected. When bearings (primary and mirror-image) to calling cetacean(s) are determined, the bearings will be relayed to the visual observer to help him/her sight the calling animal(s).

The PAM system consists of hardware (i.e., hydrophones) and software. The "wet end" of the system consists of a towed hydrophone array that is connected to the vessel by a cable. The tow cable is 250 m (820.2 ft) long, and the hydrophones are fitted in the last 10 m (32.8 ft) of cable. A depth gauge is attached to the free end of the cable, and the cable is typically towed at depths less than 20 m (65.6 ft). The array will be deployed from a winch located on the back deck. A deck cable will connect the tow cable to the electronics unit in the main computer lab where the acoustic station, signal conditioning, and processing system will be located. The acoustic signals received by the hydrophones are amplified, digitized, and then processed by the Panguard software. The system can detect marine mammal vocalizations at frequencies up to 250 kHz.

The PSAO will monitor the towed hydrophones 24 h per day during airgun operations and during most periods when the *Langseth* is underway while the airguns are not operating. However, PAM may not be possible if damage occurs to both the primary and back-up hydrophone arrays during operations. The primary PAM streamer on the *Langseth* is a digital hydrophone streamer. Should the digital streamer fail, back-up systems should include an analog spare streamer and a hull-mounted hydrophone. Every effort would be made to have a working PAM system during the cruise. In the unlikely event that all three of these systems were to fail, L-DEO would continue science acquisition with the visual-based observer program. The PAM system is a supplementary enhancement to the visual monitoring program. If

weather conditions were to prevent the use of PAM, then conditions would also likely prevent the use of the airgun array.

The PSAO will monitor the acoustic detection system at any one time, by listening to the signals from two channels via headphones and/or speakers and watching the real-time spectrographic display for frequency ranges produced by cetaceans. PSAOs monitoring the acoustical data will be on shift for one to six hours at a time. Besides the PSAO, all PSVOs are expected to rotate through the PAM position, although the most experienced with acoustics will be on PAM duty more frequently.

When a vocalization is detected while visual observations are in progress, the PSAO on duty will contact the visual PSVO immediately, to alert him/her to the presence of cetaceans (if they have not already been seen), and to allow a power down or shut down to be initiated, if required. The information regarding the call will be entered into a database. Data entry will include an acoustic encounter identification number, whether it was linked with a visual sighting, date, time when first and last heard and whenever any additional information was recorded, position and water depth when first detected, bearing if determinable, species or species group (e.g., unidentified dolphin, sperm whale), types and nature of sounds heard (e.g., clicks, continuous, sporadic, whistles, creaks, burst pulses, strength of signal, etc.), and any other notable information. The acoustic detection can also be recorded for further analysis.

#### *PSVO Data and Documentation*

PSVOs will record data to estimate the numbers of marine mammals exposed to various received sound levels and to document apparent disturbance reactions or lack thereof. Data will be used to estimate numbers of animals potentially "taken" by harassment (as defined in the MMPA). They will also provide information needed to order a power down or shut down of the airguns when a marine mammal is within or near the EZ.

When a sighting is made, the following information about the sighting will be recorded:

1. Species, group size, age/size/sex categories (if determinable), behavior when first sighted and after initial sighting, heading (if consistent), bearing and distance from seismic vessel, sighting cue, apparent reaction to the airguns or vessel (e.g., none, avoidance, approach, paralleling, etc.), and behavioral pace.

2. Time, location, heading, speed, activity of the vessel, sea state, visibility, and sun glare.

The data listed under (2) will also be recorded at the start and end of each observation watch, and during a watch whenever there is a change in one or more of the variables.

All observations and power downs or shut downs will be recorded in a standardized format. Data will be entered into an electronic database. The accuracy of the data entry will be verified by computerized data validity checks as the data are entered and by subsequent manual checking of the database. These procedures will allow initial summaries of data to be prepared during and shortly after the field program, and will facilitate transfer of the data to statistical, graphical, and other programs for further processing and archiving.

Results from the vessel-based observations will provide:

1. The basis for real-time mitigation (airgun power down or shut down).
2. Information needed to estimate the number of marine mammals potentially taken by harassment, which must be reported to NMFS.
3. Data on the occurrence, distribution, and activities of marine mammals and turtles in the area where the seismic study is conducted.
4. Information to compare the distance and distribution of marine mammals and turtles relative to the source vessel at times with and without seismic activity.
5. Data on the behavior and movement patterns of marine mammals seen at times with and without seismic activity.

L-DEO will submit a report to NMFS and NSF within 90 days after the end of the cruise. The report will describe the operations that were conducted and sightings of marine mammals and turtles near the operations. The report will provide full documentation of methods, results, and interpretation pertaining to all monitoring. The 90-day report will summarize the dates and locations of seismic operations, and all marine mammal sightings (dates, times, locations, activities, associated seismic survey activities). The report will also include estimates of the number and nature of exposures that could result in "takes" of marine mammals by harassment or in other ways.

In the unanticipated event that the specified activity clearly causes the take of a marine mammal in a manner prohibited by the IHA (if issued), such as an injury (Level A harassment), serious injury or mortality (e.g., ship-strike, gear interaction, and/or



entanglement), L-DEO shall immediately cease the specified activities and immediately report the incident to the Chief of the Permits, Conservation, and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, at 301-427-8401 and/or by e-mail to [Michael.Payne@noaa.gov](mailto:Michael.Payne@noaa.gov) and [ITP.Cody@noaa.gov](mailto:ITP.Cody@noaa.gov) and the Pacific Islands Regional Stranding Coordinator at 808-944-2269

([David.Schofield@noaa.gov](mailto:David.Schofield@noaa.gov)). The report must include the following information:

- Time, date, and location (latitude/longitude) of the incident;
- Name and type of vessel involved;
- Vessel's speed during and leading up to the incident;
- Description of the incident;
- Status of all sound source use in the 24 hours preceding the incident;
- Water depth;
- Environmental conditions (*e.g.*, wind speed and direction, Beaufort sea state, cloud cover, and visibility);
- Description of all marine mammal observations in the 24 hours preceding the incident;
- Species identification or description of the animal(s) involved;
- Fate of the animal(s); and
- Photographs or video footage of the animal(s) (if equipment is available).

Activities will not resume until NMFS is able to review the circumstances of the prohibited take. NMFS will work with L-DEO to determine what is necessary to minimize the likelihood of further prohibited take and ensure MMPA compliance. L-DEO may not resume their activities until notified by NMFS via letter, e-mail, or telephone.

In the event that L-DEO discovers an injured or dead marine mammal, and the lead PSVO determines that the cause of the injury or death is unknown and the death is relatively recent (*i.e.*, in less than a moderate state of decomposition as described in the next paragraph), L-DEO will immediately report the incident to the Chief of the Permits, Conservation, and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, at 301-427-8401 and/or by e-mail to [Michael.Payne@noaa.gov](mailto:Michael.Payne@noaa.gov) and [ITP.Cody@noaa.gov](mailto:ITP.Cody@noaa.gov) and the Pacific Islands Regional Stranding Coordinator at 808-944-2269

([David.Schofield@noaa.gov](mailto:David.Schofield@noaa.gov)). The report must include the same information identified in the paragraph above.

Activities may continue while NMFS reviews the circumstances of the incident. NMFS will work with L-DEO to determine whether modifications in the activities are appropriate.

In the event that L-DEO discovers an injured or dead marine mammal, and the lead PSVO determines that the

injury or death is not associated with or related to the activities authorized in the IHA (*e.g.*, previously wounded animal, carcass with moderate to advanced decomposition, or scavenger damage), L-DEO will report the incident to the Chief of the Permits, Conservation, and Education Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, at 301-427-8401 and/or by e-mail to

[Michael.Payne@noaa.gov](mailto:Michael.Payne@noaa.gov) and [ITP.Cody@noaa.gov](mailto:ITP.Cody@noaa.gov) and the Pacific Islands Regional Stranding Coordinator at 808-944-2269

([David.Schofield@noaa.gov](mailto:David.Schofield@noaa.gov)), within 24 hours of the discovery. L-DEO will provide photographs or video footage (if available) or other documentation of the stranded animal sighting to NMFS.

#### Estimated Take by Incidental Harassment

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].

Only take by Level B harassment is anticipated and proposed to be authorized as a result of the proposed marine geophysical survey in the central Pacific Ocean. Acoustic stimuli (*i.e.*, increased underwater sound) generated during the operation of the seismic airgun array may have the potential to cause marine mammals in the survey area to be exposed to sounds at or greater than 160 decibels (dB) or cause temporary, short-term changes in behavior. There is no evidence that the planned activities could result in injury, serious injury or mortality within the specified geographic area for which L-DEO seeks the IHA. The required mitigation and monitoring measures will minimize any potential risk for injury or mortality.

The following sections describe L-DEO's methods to estimate take by incidental harassment and present the applicant's estimates of the numbers of marine mammals that could be affected during the proposed geophysical survey. The estimates are based on a consideration of the number of marine mammals that could be disturbed appreciably by operations with the 36-airgun array to be used during approximately 2,120 km (1,317.3 mi) of survey lines.

L-DEO assumes that, during simultaneous operations of the airgun array and the other sources, any marine mammals close enough to be affected by the MBES and SBP would already be affected by the airguns. However, whether or not the airguns are operating simultaneously with the other sources, marine mammals are expected to exhibit no more than short-term and inconsequential responses to the MBES and SBP given their characteristics (*e.g.*, narrow downward-directed beam) and other considerations described previously. Based on the best available science, such reactions are not considered to constitute "taking" (NMFS, 2001). Therefore, L-DEO provides no additional allowance for animals that could be affected by sound sources other than airguns.

Density data on the marine mammal species in the proposed survey area are available from two sources: (1) The NMFS Southwest Fishery Science Center (SWFSC) habitat model that estimates cetacean densities on a finer spatial scale than traditional line-transect analyses by using a continuous function of habitat variables, *e.g.*, sea surface temperature, depth, distance from shore, and prey density (Barlow *et al.*, 2009b); and (2) densities from the offshore stratum of the surveys of Hawaiian waters conducted in August–November 2002 (Barlow, 2006).

For the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean (ETP), the SWFSC based the models on data from 12 SWFSC ship-based cetacean and ecosystem assessment surveys conducted during July–December 1986–2006, extending just into the proposed survey area.

The models have been incorporated into a Web-based Geographic Information System (GIS) developed by Duke University's Department of Defense Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program (SERDP) team in close collaboration with the SWFSC SERDP team (Read *et al.*, 2009). For the cetacean species in the model, we used the GIS to obtain mean densities in the proposed survey area, *i.e.*, in a rectangle bounded by 150 and 156° W and 5 and 10° N.

Table 3 in L-DEO's application shows estimated densities for each cetacean species that could occur in the proposed survey area. They have corrected the densities for both trackline detection probability and availability bias by the authors. Trackline detection probability bias is associated with diminishing sightability with increasing lateral distance from the trackline [ $f(0)$ ]. Availability bias refers to the fact that there is less than a 100 percent

probability of sighting an animal that is present along the survey trackline [g(0)]. Because survey effort within the proposed survey area is limited, and densities for some species are from offshore Hawaiian waters, there is some uncertainty about the representativeness of the data and the assumptions used in the calculations below. However, the approach used here is believed to be the best available approach.

L-DEO's estimates of exposures to various sound levels assume that the proposed surveys will be completed. As is typical during offshore ship surveys, inclement weather and equipment malfunctions are likely to cause delays and may limit the number of useful line-kilometers of seismic operations that can be undertaken. L-DEO has included an additional 25% of line transects to account for mission uncertainty and to accommodate turns and lines that may need to be repeated. Furthermore, any marine mammal sightings within or near the designated exclusion zones will result in the power down or shut down of seismic operations as a mitigation measure. Thus, the following estimates of the numbers of marine mammals potentially exposed to sound levels of 160 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa are precautionary and probably overestimate the actual numbers of marine mammals that might be involved. These estimates also assume that there will be no weather, equipment, or mitigation delays, which is highly unlikely.

L-DEO estimated the number of different individuals that may be exposed to airgun sounds with received levels greater than or equal to 160 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa on one or more occasions by considering the total marine area that would be within the 160-dB radius around the operating airgun array on at least one occasion and the expected density of marine mammals. The number of possible exposures (including repeated exposures of the same individuals) can be estimated by considering the total marine area that

would be within the 160-dB radius around the operating airguns, including areas of overlap. In the proposed survey, the seismic lines are parallel and in close proximity; thus individuals could be exposed on two or more occasions. The area including overlap is 1.5 times the area excluding overlap. Thus a marine mammal that stayed in the survey area during the entire survey could be exposed two times, on average. Moreover, it is unlikely that a particular animal would stay in the area during the entire survey.

The number of different individuals potentially exposed to received levels greater than or equal to 160 re: 1  $\mu$ Pa was calculated by multiplying:

- (1) The expected species density, times; and
- (2) The anticipated area to be ensonified to that level during airgun operations excluding overlap, which is approximately 10,971 square kilometers (km<sup>2</sup>) (4,235.9 square miles (mi<sup>2</sup>)).

The area expected to be ensonified was determined by entering the planned survey lines into a MapInfo GIS, using the GIS to identify the relevant areas by "drawing" the applicable 160-dB buffer (see Table 1) around each seismic line, and then calculating the total area within the buffers. Areas of overlap were included only once when estimating the number of individuals exposed. Applying this approach, approximately 13,714 km<sup>2</sup> (5,295 mi<sup>2</sup>) would be within the 160-dB isopleth on one or more occasions during the survey. Because this approach does not allow for turnover in the mammal populations in the study area during the course of the survey, the actual number of individuals exposed could be underestimated. However, the approach assumes that no cetaceans will move away from or toward the trackline as the *Langseth* approaches in response to increasing sound levels prior to the time the levels reach 160 dB, which will result in overestimates for those species known to avoid seismic vessels.

Table 3 in this notice shows estimates of the number of individual cetaceans that potentially could be exposed to greater than or equal to 160 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa during the seismic survey if no animals moved away from the survey vessel. The requested take authorization is shown in the far right column of Table 3. For endangered species, the requested take authorization reflects the mean group size in the ETP (Jackson *et al.*, 2008) for the particular species in cases where the calculated number of individuals exposed was between 0.05 and the mean group size (*i.e.*, for the blue whale). For non-listed species, the requested take authorization reflects the mean group size in the SWFSC survey area (Barlow *et al.*, 2008) for the particular species in cases where the calculated number of individuals exposed was between one and the mean group size.

The total estimate of the number of individual cetaceans that could be exposed to seismic sounds with received levels greater than or equal to 160 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa during the proposed survey is 5,124 (see Table 3 in this notice; Table 4 in L-DEO's application). That total includes: Eight Bryde's whales or 0.6 percent of the regional population; two blue whales (endangered under the ESA) or less than 0.01 percent of the regional population; and 41 sperm whales (also listed as endangered) or 2.97 percent of the regional population could be exposed during the survey. In addition, 110 beaked whales (91 Cuvier's, six Longman's, 14 Longman's beaked whales, and five *Mesoplodon* spp.) could be exposed during the survey (see Table 3 in this notice; Table 4 in L-DEO's application). Most (94.8 percent) of the cetaceans that could be potentially exposed are delphinids (*e.g.*, spinner, pantropical spotted, and striped dolphins are estimated to be the most common species in the area) with maximum estimates ranging from five to 2,516 species exposed to levels greater than or equal to 160 dB re: 1  $\mu$ Pa.

TABLE 3—ESTIMATES OF THE POSSIBLE NUMBERS OF MARINE MAMMALS EXPOSED TO DIFFERENT SOUND LEVELS DURING L-DEO'S PROPOSED SEISMIC SURVEY IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC OCEAN DURING NOVEMBER, 2011 THROUGH JANUARY, 2012

Species	Estimated number of individuals exposed to sound levels $\geq$ 160 dB re: 1 $\mu$ Pa <sup>1</sup>	Approximate percent of regional population <sup>2</sup>	Requested take authorization
Bryde's whale .....	8	0.06	8
Blue whale .....	0	<0.01	4 2
Sperm whale .....	41	0.17	41
Dwarf sperm whale .....	105	0.94	105
Cuvier's beaked whale .....	91	0.46	91

TABLE 3—ESTIMATES OF THE POSSIBLE NUMBERS OF MARINE MAMMALS EXPOSED TO DIFFERENT SOUND LEVELS DURING L-DEO'S PROPOSED SEISMIC SURVEY IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC OCEAN DURING NOVEMBER, 2011 THROUGH JANUARY, 2012—Continued

Species	Estimated number of individuals exposed to sound levels $\geq 160$ dB re: 1 $\mu$ Pa <sup>1</sup>	Approximate percent of regional population <sup>2</sup>	Requested take authorization
Longman's beaked whale .....	6	2.07	<sup>4</sup> 14
<i>Mesoplodon</i> spp <sup>3</sup> .....	5	0.02	5
Rough-toothed dolphin .....	17	0.02	17
Bottlenose dolphin .....	68	0.02	68
Pantropical spotted dolphin .....	1,651	0.13	1,651
Spinner dolphin .....	2,516	0.14	2,516
Striped dolphin .....	226	0.02	226
Fraser's dolphin .....	61	0.02	<sup>4</sup> 182
Risso's dolphin .....	11	0.01	<sup>4</sup> 14
Melon-headed whale .....	18	0.04	<sup>4</sup> 101
False killer whale .....	1	<0.01	<sup>4</sup> 9
Killer whale .....	2	0.02	<sup>4</sup> 5
Short-finned pilot whale .....	69	0.01	69

<sup>1</sup> Estimates are based on densities from Table 3 and an ensenified area (including 25 percent contingency) of 13,714 km<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Regional population size estimates are from Table 2.

<sup>3</sup> Includes ginkgo-toothed and Blainville's beaked whales.

<sup>4</sup> Requested take authorization increased to mean group size (see text on page 59).

Based upon densities estimates for humpback, sei, fin, minke, pygmy sperm, and pygmy killer whales (Barlow *et al.*, 2009; Read *et al.*, 2009) within the action area, L-DEO has not requested take for these species. NMFS preliminarily concurs with this analyses and the proposed authorization will not include authorize take for these species.

#### Encouraging and Coordinating Research

L-DEO and NSF will coordinate the planned marine mammal monitoring program associated with the seismic survey in the central Pacific Ocean with other parties that may have interest in the area and/or be conducting marine mammal studies in the same region during the proposed seismic survey.

#### Negligible Impact and Small Numbers Analysis and Preliminary Determination

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." In making a negligible impact determination, NMFS considers:

(1) The number of anticipated mortalities;

(2) The number and nature of anticipated injuries;

(3) The number, nature, and intensity, and duration of Level B harassment; and

(4) The context in which the takes occur.

As mentioned previously, NMFS estimates that 20 species of marine mammals could be potentially affected by Level B harassment over the course of the IHA.

For reasons stated previously in this document, no injuries or mortalities are anticipated to occur as a result of L-DEO's proposed seismic survey, and none are proposed to be authorized by NMFS. Additionally, for reasons presented earlier in this document, temporary hearing impairment (and especially permanent hearing impairment) is not anticipated to occur during the proposed specified activity.

Impacts to marine mammals are anticipated to be in the form of Level B behavioral harassment only, due to the brief duration and sporadic nature of the survey. Certain species may have a behavioral reaction (*e.g.*, increased swim speed, avoidance of the area, *etc.*) to the sound emitted during the proposed marine seismic survey. Behavioral modifications, including temporarily vacating the area during the operation of the airgun(s), may be made by these species to avoid the resultant acoustic disturbance. However, alternate areas are available to these species. The location of the survey is not a known feeding ground for these species and it is not used for breeding or nursing.

For reasons stated previously in this document, the specified activities associated with the proposed survey are not likely to cause TTS, PTS or other

non-auditory injury, serious injury, or death to affected marine mammals because:

(1) The likelihood that, given sufficient notice through relatively slow ship speed, marine mammals are expected to move away from a noise source that is annoying prior to its becoming potentially injurious;

(2) The fact that cetaceans would have to be closer than 400 m (1,312 ft) in deep water when the 36-airgun array is in use at a 9 m (29.5 ft) tow depth from the vessel to be exposed to levels of sound believed to have even a minimal chance of causing PTS;

(3) The fact that marine mammals would have to be closer than 3,850 m (2.4 mi) in deep water when the full array is in use at a 9 m (29.5 ft) tow depth from the vessel to be exposed to levels of sound (160 dB) believed to have even a minimal chance at causing TTS; and

(4) The likelihood that marine mammal detection ability by trained observers is high at that short distance from the vessel.

Table 3 in this document outlines the number of Level B harassment takes that are anticipated as a result of the proposed activities. No mortality or injury is expected to occur, and due to the nature, degree, and context of behavioral harassment anticipated, the activity is not expected to impact rates of recruitment or survival. The proposed survey would not occur in any areas designated as critical habitat for ESA-listed species. Additionally, as

mentioned previously in this document, the proposed seismic survey will not destroy marine mammal habitat.

Of the 26 marine mammal species likely to occur in the proposed survey area, six are listed as endangered under the ESA: The humpback, sei, fin, blue, and sperm whale and the Hawaiian monk seal. These species are also considered depleted under the MMPA. However, no take of endangered humpback, sei, or fin, whales was requested because of the low likelihood of encountering these species during the cruise.

For the 20 species for which take was requested, the requested take numbers are small (each, less than two and one-half percent) relative to the population size. The population estimates for the species that may potentially be taken as a result of L-DEO's proposed seismic survey were presented earlier in this document. For reasons described earlier in this document, the maximum calculated number of individual marine mammals for each species that could potentially be taken by harassment is small relative to the overall population sizes (0.06 percent for Bryde's whales, less than 0.01 percent for the endangered blue whale, 0.17 percent for the endangered sperm whale, and less than 2.5 percent of the other 15 mammal populations or stocks).

Based on the analysis contained herein of the likely effects of the specified activity on marine mammals and their habitat, and taking into consideration the implementation of the mitigation and monitoring measures, NMFS preliminarily finds that L-DEO's planned research activities, will result in the incidental take of small numbers of marine mammals, by Level B harassment only, and that the total taking from the marine geophysical survey will have a negligible impact on the affected species or stocks.

#### **Impact on Availability of Affected Species or Stock for Taking for Subsistence Uses**

There are no relevant subsistence uses of marine mammals implicated by this action.

#### **Endangered Species Act**

Of the species of marine mammals that may occur in the proposed survey area, six are listed as endangered under the ESA, including the humpback, sei, fin, blue, and sperm whales and the Hawaiian monk seal. However, L-DEO is only requested Level B incidental harassment of two species: The humpback and sperm whales. L-DEO did not request take of endangered humpback, sei, or fin, whales because of

the low likelihood of encountering these species during the cruise. Under section 7 of the ESA, NSF has initiated formal consultation with the NMFS, Office of Protected Resources, Endangered Species Division, on this proposed seismic survey. NMFS' Office of Protected Resources, Permits, Conservation and Education Division, has initiated formal consultation under section 7 of the ESA with NMFS' Office of Protected Resources, Endangered Species Division, to obtain a Biological Opinion evaluating the effects of issuing the IHA on threatened and endangered marine mammals and, if appropriate, authorizing incidental take. NMFS will conclude formal section 7 consultation prior to making a determination on whether or not to issue the IHA. If the IHA is issued, L-DEO, in addition to the mitigation and monitoring requirements included in the IHA, will be required to comply with the Terms and Conditions of the Incidental Take Statement corresponding to NMFS' Biological Opinion issued to both NSF and NMFS' Office of Protected Resources.

#### **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**

To meet NMFS' National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) requirements for the issuance of an IHA to L-DEO, NMFS will prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) titled "Issuance of an Incidental Harassment Authorization to the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory to Take Marine Mammals by Harassment Incidental to a Marine Geophysical Survey in the Central Pacific Ocean, November, 2011 through January, 2012." This EA will incorporate the NSF's Environmental Analysis Pursuant To Executive Order 12114 (NSF, 2010) and an associated report (Report) prepared by LGL Limited Environmental Research Associates (LGL) for NSF, titled, "Environmental Assessment of a Marine Geophysical Survey by the R/V *Marcus G. Langseth* in the Central Pacific Ocean, November–December 2011," by reference pursuant to 40 CFR 1502.21 and NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216–6 § 5.09(d). Prior to making a final decision on the IHA application, NMFS will make a decision of whether or not to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

#### **Proposed Authorization**

As a result of these preliminary determinations, NMFS proposes to authorize the take of marine mammals incidental to L-DEO's proposed marine seismic survey in the central Pacific Ocean, provided the previously

mentioned mitigation, monitoring, and reporting requirements are incorporated.

Dated: September 14, 2011.

**James H. Lecky,**

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

[FR Doc. 2011–23985 Filed 9–16–11; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 3510–22–P**

## **DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

### **Office of the Secretary**

#### **Meeting of the Department of Defense Wage Committee**

**AGENCY:** Department of Defense.

**ACTION:** Notice of closed meetings.

**SUMMARY:** Pursuant to the provisions of section 10 of Public Law 92–463, the Federal Advisory Committee Act, notice is hereby given that a closed meeting of the Department of Defense Wage Committee will be held on Tuesday, October 4, 2011, at 10 a.m. at 1400 Key Boulevard, Level A, Room A101, Rosslyn, Virginia 22209.

Under the provisions of section 10(d) of Public Law 92–463, the Department of Defense has determined that the meetings meet the criteria to close meetings to the public because the matters to be considered are related to internal rules and practices of the Department of Defense and the detailed wage data to be considered were obtained from officials of private establishments with a guarantee that the data will be held in confidence.

However, members of the public who may wish to do so are invited to submit material in writing to the chairman concerning matters believed to be deserving of the Committee's attention.

Additional information concerning the meetings may be obtained by writing to the Chairman, Department of Defense Wage Committee, 4000 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301–4000.

Dated: September 13, 2011.

**Patricia L. Toppings,**

*OSD Federal Register Liaison Officer,  
Department of Defense.*

[FR Doc. 2011–23919 Filed 9–16–11; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 5001–06–P**

## **DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

### **Office of the Secretary**

#### **Meeting of the Department of Defense Wage Committee**

**AGENCY:** Department of Defense.

**ACTION:** Notice of closed meetings.