UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Silver Spring, MD 20910

APR 14 2008

Rear Admiral Lawrence S. Rice, Director
Environmental Readiness Division N456B
United States Department of the Navy
Office of the Chief of Naval Operations
2000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-2000

Dear Admiral Rice;

On April 11, 2008, pursuant to section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a biological opinion on the effects of the U.S. Navy's proposal to conduct four training exercises in the Cherry Point and Jacksonville-Charleston Operating Areas off the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. between spring and winter 2008 on endangered species, threatened species, and critical habitat that has been designated for those species.

On April 14, 2008, the U.S. Navy asked us to make minor changes to the *Description of the Proposed Action* contained in the April 11, 2008, biological opinion and clarify the terms and conditions contained in the Incidental Take Statement of the biological opinion. Specifically, the U.S. Navy asked us to (1) remove the clause "Navy amphibious ships and U.S. Marine Corps units in maritime and amphibious operations" from lines 2 and 3 of the first paragraph on Page 3, (2) remove the clause "Expeditionary Strike Group" from the second sentence on the second to the last paragraph of Page 3, and (3) revise the last sentence of the first bullet on Page 5 to read "This sonar transmits at a center frequency of 3.5 kHz at source levels up to 235 dB_{rms} re: 1 μPa at 1 meter."

The U.S. Navy also asked us to reconcile language contained in the April 11, 2008, letter that transmitted the April 11, 2008, biological opinion with the Terms and Conditions of the Incidental Take Statement. The transmittal letter references a requirement for the U.S. Navy to provide verbal briefings to the Chief, Endangered Species Division after the Navy completes a training exercise; however, the Terms and Conditions of the biological opinion do not contain that requirement. We have corrected the biological opinion to include that requirement.

These changes do not constitute a change that would require NMFS and the U.S. Navy to reinitiate formal consultation on the Navy's proposed training exercises. As a result, the effects analyses and conclusions contained in NMFS' April 11, 2008, biological opinion are still valid and current. However, this corrected biological opinion subsumes and replaces NMFS' April 11, 2008, biological opinion on the U.S. Navy's proposal to conduct four training exercises in the Cherry Point and Jacksonville-Charleston Operating Areas off the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. between spring and winter 2008.

The U.S. Navy is still required to reinitiate formal consultation where discretionary Federal agency involvement or control over the action has been retained and if: (1) the amount or extent of incidental take is exceeded; (2) new information reveals effects of this action that may affect listed species or designated critical habitat in a manner or to an extent not previously considered in this biological opinion; (3) the identified action is subsequently modified in a manner that causes an effect to the listed species or critical habitat that was not considered in this biological opinion; or (4) a new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by the identified action.

If you have questions regarding the opinion, please contact me or Angela Somma, Chief of our Endangered Species Division at (301) 713-1401.

Sincerely,

James H. Lecky
Director
Office of Protected Resources

National Marine Fisheries Service
Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation
Biological Opinion

Agency:	United States Navy
Activities Considered:	The U.S. Navy's proposal to conduct four training exercises in the Cherry Point, Virginia Capes, and Jacksonville, Range Complexes between spring and winter 2008
Consultation Conducted by:	Endangered Species Division of the Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service
Approved by:	for James H. Lecky
Date:	April 14, 2008

Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA; 16 U.S.C. 1539(a)(2)) requires each federal agency to insure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat of such species. When a federal agency's action "may affect" a protected species, that agency is required to consult formally with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, depending upon the endangered species, threatened species, or designated critical habitat that may be affected by the action (50 CFR 402.14(a)). Federal agencies are exempt from this general requirement if they have concluded that an action "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" endangered species, threatened species, or designated critical habitat and NMFS or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concur with that conclusion (50 CFR 402.14(b)). The United States Navy initiated formal consultation with NMFS on their proposal to conduct four training exercises in the Cherry Point, Virginia Capes, and Jacksonville, Range Complexes between spring and winter 2008. This document represents NMFS' biological opinion (Opinion) on those exercises.

This Opinion is based on our review of the U.S. Navy's October 2007 *Draft Supplement to the Final Comprehensive Overseas Environmental Assessment for Major Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises*, the U. S. Navy's February 2006 *Final Comprehensive Overseas Environmental Assessment for Major Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises*, recovery plans for humpback whales, the National Marine Fisheries Service's Marine Mammal Stock Assessment Reports for marine mammals in the Atlantic, past and current research and population dynamics modeling efforts, published and unpublished scientific information on the biology and ecology of threatened and endangered whales and sea turtles in the action area, and other sources of information gathered and evaluated during the consultation on the proposed exercises. This Opinion has been prepared in accordance with section 7 of the ESA and associated implementing regulations.

Consultation History

On 20 October 2007, the U.S. Navy sent a letter to NMFS' Office of Protected Resources asking for formal consultation on the U.S. Navy's proposal to conduct four major training exercises within and seaward of the Cherry Point, Charleston-Jacksonville, and Virginia Capes Range Complexes from spring through winter of 2008, pursuant to section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1539(a)(2)).

Between October 2007 and December 2007, personnel from the U.S. Navy and NMFS met several times to debate (1) different approaches and methods that could be used to estimate the number of marine mammals that might be exposed to mid-frequency active sonar during exercises; (2) different methods that could be used to estimate the proportion of a "population" of marine mammals that might experience behavioral "harassment" (as that term is defined by the ESA and Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended) given their exposure to mid-frequency active sonar; and (3) different approaches and methods to monitor and mitigate the potential effects of mid-frequency active sonar on marine animals (marine mammals, sea turtles, and fish).

On 4 January 2008, the U.S. Navy submitted a modified Supplemental Overseas Environmental Assessment that replaced their the document they submitted on 20 October 2007. The revised document included a shallow-water component to three of the four exercises and allowing a contingency for a Joint Task Force Training Exercise.

On 7 April 2008, NMFS' Office of Protected Resources provided the U.S. Navy with an electronic copy of a draft biological opinion on the proposed 2008 Atlantic fleet training exercises. On 9 April 2008, the Navy provided its comments on that draft document.

On 11 April 2008, pursuant to section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA), the National Marine Fisheries Service issued a biological opinion on the effects of the U.S. Navy's proposal to conduct four training exercises in the Cherry Point and Jacksonville-Charleston Operating Areas off the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. between spring and winter 2008 on endangered species, threatened species, and critical habitat that has been designated for those species.

On 14 April 2008, the U.S. Navy asked us to make minor changes to the Description of the Proposed Action contained in the 11 April 2008 biological opinion and clarify the terms and conditions contained in the Incidental Take Statement of the biological opinion. Specifically, the U.S. Navy asked us to (1) remove the clause "Navy amphibious ships and U.S. Marine Corps units in maritime and amphibious operations" from lines 2 and 3 of the first paragraph on Page 3. (2) remove the clause "Expeditionary Strike Group" from the second sentence on the second to the last paragraph of Page 3, and (3) revise the last sentence of the first bullet on Page 5 to read "This sonar transmits at a center frequency of 3.5 kHz at source levels up to 235 dB_{rms} re: 1 µPa at 1 meter."

BIOLOGICAL OPINION

Description of the Proposed Action

The U.S. Navy proposes to conduct four major fleet training exercises within and adjacent to three of its training areas off the eastern coast of the United States. As proposed, these exercises would consist of two Carrier Strike Group Composite Training Unit/Joint Task Force Exercises (referenced using the acronym CSG COMPTUEX/JTFEX or COMPTUEX/JTFEX), one Expeditionary Strike Group Composite Training Unit Exercise (referenced using the acronym ESG COMPTUEX or COMPTUEX), and one Carrier Strike Group Joint Task Force Exercises (referenced using the acronym CSG JTFEX) in the Cherry Point and Charleston-Jacksonville Operating Areas. The Navy plans to conduct these exercises according to the following schedule

Table 1. Proposed schedule for the training exercises

Exercise Type	Season	Operating Area for Exercises
Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX/JTFEX	Spring 2008	Cherry Point, Jacksonville, and Charleston
Expeditionary Strike Group COMPTUEX	Summer 2008	Cherry Point and Charleston
Carrier Strike Group JTFEX	Summer 2008	Cherry Point and Charleston
Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX/JTFEX	Winter 2008	Cherry Point, Jacksonville, and Charleston

The boundaries for the four seasons are: (1) Spring: 1 March through 31 May; (2) Summer: 1 June through 31 August; (3) Fall: 1 September through 30 November; and (4) Winter: 1 December through 28 February (all seasons reference calendar year 2008).

Description of the Proposed Carrier Strike Group Composite Unit Training Exercises

Carrier Strike Group Composite Unit Training Exercises involve an aircraft carrier, carrier air wing, surface and submarine units. Carrier Strike Group Composite Unit Training Exercises are nominally 21 days long. During a Carrier Strike Group Composite Training Unit Exercises, a target submarine or submarines follow pre-determined tracks within a specific geographic area while 3 to 6 surface vessels (cruisers, destroyers, and frigates) attempt to locate and track the submarines with passive sonar. Active mid-frequency sonar would be used if vessels in the Surface Group are proximate to a larger Navy vessel they are protecting or if the larger vessel is located beyond the effective range of passive sonar, sonobuoys, or dipping sonar.

During a typical 21-day Carrier Strike Group Composite Training Unit Exercise, the Navy would engage in an average of about 253 hours of mid-frequency active sonar usage, 172 pings from mid-frequency active sonar systems deployed on submarines, deployment of about 112 active sonobuoys, and deployment of about 100 passive sonobuoys.

Description of the Proposed Expeditionary Strike Group Composite Unit Exercises

Expeditionary Strike Group Composite Training Unit Exercises involve Navy amphibious ships and U.S. Marine Corps units in maritime and amphibious operations. The first half of an Expeditionary Strike Group COMPTUEX is designed to prepare amphibious ships of the Strike Group for the missions they will perform when they are deployed, including ship-to-shore raids, urban-combat training, and loading personnel and materiel onto amphibious ships.

During an Expeditionary Strike Group Composite Training Unit Exercises, a target submarine or submarines follow pre-determined tracks within a specific geographic area while 3 to 6 surface vessels (cruisers, destroyers, and frigates) attempt to locate and track the submarines with passive sonar. Active mid-frequency sonar would be used if vessels in the Surface Group are proximate to a larger Navy vessel they are protecting or if the larger vessel is located beyond the effective range of passive sonar, sonobuoys, or dipping sonar.

During a typical 21-day Expeditionary Strike Group Composite Training Unit Exercise, the Navy would engage in average of about 253 hours of mid-frequency active sonar usage, 172 pings from mid-frequency active sonar systems deployed on submarines, deployment of about 112 active sonobuoys, and deployment of about 100 passive sonobuoys.

Description of the Proposed Joint Task Force Exercises

Joint Task Force Training Exercises typically follow Carrier Strike Group Composite Training Unit Exercises and are unscripted, scenario-driven exercises. Joint Task Force Exercises usually involve one Carrier Strike Group consisting of the following participants:

1. *Carrier Strike Group*: 1 multi-purpose carrier with a carrier air wing, 1 guided missile cruiser, 1 to 2 guided missile destroyer, 1 to 2 guided missile frigate, 1 fast combat support ship, and 1 submarine (SSN or SSGN)

2. *Expeditionary Strike Group*: 1 amphibious assault ship (general purpose or multipurpose) with air wing, 1 guided missile cruiser, 1 to 2 guided missile destroyer, 1 to 2 guided missile frigate, 1 ampibious transport dock, 1 dock landing ship, 1 fast combat support ship, 1 submarine (SSN or SSGN), and embarked marines.

During a typical 10-day Carrier Strike Group Joint Task Force Exercise, the Navy would engage in average of about 151 hours of mid-frequency active sonar usage, 45 pings from mid-frequency active sonar systems deployed on submarines, deployment of about 36 active sonobuoys, and deployment of about 69 passive sonobuoys.

Description of the Proposed Composite Training Unit - Joint Task Force Exercises

As proposed, the Navy plans to conduct two Composite Training Unit Exercise and Joint Task Force Exercise concurrently. The Navy considers these training exercises single training events, which typically last 31 days. During a typical 31-day Carrier Strike Group Composite Training Unit Exercise - Joint Task Force Exercise, the Navy would engage in average of about 404 hours of mid-frequency active sonar usage, 217 pings from mid-frequency active sonar systems deployed on submarines, deployment of about 148 active sonobuoys, and deployment of about 169 passive sonobuoys.

Anti-Submarine Warfare Training Operations During the Proposed Exercises

The four training exercises that are being considered in this consultation are proposed to take place from spring through winter 2008. The exercises will employ tactical mid-frequency sonars that are designed to search for, detect, localize, classify, and track submarines. In the proposed exercises, the Navy plans to employ two types of sonars: passive sonar and active sonar. *Passive sonars* only detect incoming sounds and, because they do not emit sound energy in the water, do not acoustically affect the environment. *Active sonars* generate and emit acoustic energy specifically for the purpose of obtaining information concerning a distant object from the received and processed reflected sound energy.

The simplest active sonars emit omnidirectional pulses or "pings" and calculate the length of time the reflected echoes return from the target object to determine the distance between the sonar source and a target. More sophisticated active sonar emits an omnidirectional ping and then scans a steered receiving beam to calculate the direction and distance of a target. More advanced sonars transmit multiple preformed beams, listening to echoes from several directions simultaneously and providing efficient detection of both direction and range.The types of sound sources that would be used in the Proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises include:

Sonar Systems Associated with Surface Ships. A variety of surface ships might participate in the proposed Atlantic fleet training exercises. Some ships (e.g., aircraft carriers) do not have any onboard active sonar systems, other than fathometers. Others, like guided missile cruisers, are equipped with active as well as passive sonars for submarine detection and tracking. For purposes of the analysis, the Navy modeled 75% of the surface ship hours as equivalent to the mid-frequency sonar system designated AN/SQS-53C having a nominal source level of 235 decibels (dB_{rms}) re 1 μPa at 1 m[1] and 25% of the surface ship hours as equivalent to the mid-frequency sonar system designated AN/SQS-56 having a nominal source level of 225 decibels (dB_{rms}) re 1 μPa at 1 m. Although the duration, rise times, and wave form of sonar transmissions that would be used during the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises are classified, some the specifications of the sonar systems are as follows:

1. The AN/SQS-53 is a large active-passive bow-mounted sonar that has been operational since 1975. AN/SQS-53 is the U.S. Navy's most powerful surface ship sonar and is installed on Spruance (10 units), Ticonderoga (27 units), and Arleigh Burke I/II/IIIa class vessels in the U.S. Navy (Polmar 2001, D`Spain *et al*. 2006). This sonar transmits at a center frequency of 3.5 kHz at source levels up to 235 dB_{RMS} re: 1 μPa at 1 meter.

   This sonar has pulse durations between 1 and 2 seconds, with about 24-second intervals between pulses. AN/SQS-53 operates at depths of about 8 meters. The proposed exercises will also include submarine sonar systems (AN/BQQ-5/10 sonar), whose effects are assessed by treating them as if they were additional AN/SQS-53 sonar systems.

2. The AN/SQS-56 is a lighter active-passive bow-mounted sonar that has been operational since 1977. AN/SQS -56 is installed on FFG-7 (33 units) class guided missile frigates in the U.S. Navy (Polmar 2001, D`Spain *et al*. 2006). This sonar transmits at center frequencies of 6.8 kHz, 7.5 kHz, and 8.2 kHz. at 225 dB_{RMS} re: 1 μPa at 1 meter source level. This sonar also has pulse durations between 1 and 2 seconds, with about 24-second intervals between pulses. AN/SQS-56 operates at depths of about 6 meters.

3. The exercises will also include helicopter dipping sonar and sonobuoys. Helicopter dipping sonar (AN/SQS-22/13 sonar) transmit ten pings at the dip point with about 3,000 meters (9,840 feet) and 15 minutes between dips. These dipping sonor systems produce

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[1] All decibels cited in this document use the same reference unless noted otherwise

sounds centered on three different frequencies between 9 and about 11 kHz with source levels of about 113 or 217 dB, depending on the model. They operate at depths of about 400 meters (also depending on the model). Sonobuoys (AN/SSQ-62 sonar DICASS) ping for 30 minutes after being deployed from a fixed-wing aircraft or helicopter. These sonobuoys produce sonar in continuous wave and frequency modulated pulses and operates at depths between about 25 to 750 meters.

Proposed Protective Measures

The U.S. Navy's national defense exemption to the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 places numerous requirements on participants in the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises. The following listing summarizes only those requirements specifically related to threatened and endangered species under the jurisdiction of NMFS and critical habitat that has been designated for them.

1. *General Maritime Protective Measures: Personnel Training*

    - All lookouts onboard platforms involved in ASW training events will review the NMFS-approved Marine Species Awareness Training (MSAT) material prior to mid-frequency active sonar use.

    - All Commanding Officers, Executive Officers, and officers standing watch on the Bridge will have reviewed the MSAT material prior to a training event employing the use of mid-frequency active sonar.

    - Navy lookouts will undertake extensive training in order to qualify as a watchstander in accordance with the Lookout Training Handbook (NAVEDTRA 12968-B).

    - Lookout training will include on-the-job instruction under the supervision of a qualified, experienced watchstander. Following successful completion of this supervised training period, Lookouts will complete the Personal Qualification Standard program, certifying that they have demonstrated the necessary skills (such as detection and reporting of partially submerged objects). This does not forbid personnel being trained as lookouts counted as those listed in previous measures so long as supervisors monitor their progress and performance.

    - Lookouts will be trained in the most effective means to ensure quick and effective communication within the command structure in order to facilitate implementation of protective measures if marine species are spotted

2. *General Maritime Protective Measures: Lookout and Watchstander Responsibilities*

    - On the bridge of surface ships, there will always be at least three people on watch whose duties include observing the water surface around the vessel.

    - All surface ships participating in ASW exercises will, at all times during the exercise have at least two personnel on watch as lookouts.

- Personnel on lookout and officers on watch on the bridge will have at least one set of binoculars available for each person to aid in the detection of marine mammals.
- On surface vessels equipped with MFAS, pedestal mounted "Big Eye" (20 x 110) binoculars will be present and in good working order to assist in the detection of marine mammals in the vicinity of the vessel
- Personnel on lookout will employ visual search procedures employing a scanning methodology in accordance with the Lookout Training Handbook (NAVEDTRA 12968-B).
- After sunset and prior to sunrise, lookouts will employ Night Lookouts Techniques in accordance with the Lookout Training Handbook.
- Personnel on lookout will be responsible for reporting all objects or anomalies sighted in the water (regardless of the distance from the vessel) to the Officer of the Deck, since any object or disturbance (e.g., trash, periscope, surface disturbance, discoloration) in the water may be indicative of a threat to the vessel and its crew or indicative of a marine species that may need to be avoided as warranted.

3. *Operating Procedures*

- A Letter of Instruction, Mitigation Measures Message or Environmental Annex to the Operational Order will be issued prior to the exercise to further disseminate the personnel training requirement and general marine mammal protective measures.
- Commanding Officers will make use of marine species detection cues and information to limit interaction with marine species to the maximum extent possible consistent with safety of the ship.
- All personnel engaged in passive acoustic sonar operation (including aircraft, surface ships, or submarines) will monitor for marine mammal vocalizations and report the detection of any marine mammal to the appropriate watch station for dissemination and appropriate action.
- During mid-frequency active sonar operations, personnel will utilize all available sensor and optical systems (such as Night Vision Goggles) to aid in the detection of marine mammals.
- Navy aircraft participating in exercises at sea will conduct and maintain, when operationally feasible and safe, surveillance for marine species of concern as long as it does not violate safety constraints or interfere with the accomplishment of primary operational duties.
- Aircraft with deployed sonobuoys will use only the passive capability of sonobuoys when marine mammals are detected within 200 yards of the sonobuoy.

- Marine mammal detections will be immediately reported to assigned Aircraft Control Unit for further dissemination to ships in the vicinity of the marine species as appropriate where it is reasonable to conclude that the course of the ship will likely result in a closing of the distance to the detected marine mammal.

- Safety Zones - When marine mammals are detected by any means (aircraft, shipboard lookout, or acoustically) within 1,000 yards of the sonar dome (the bow), the ship or submarine will limit active transmission levels to at least 6 dB below normal operating levels.

  (i) Ships and submarines will continue to limit maximum transmission levels by this 6-dB factor until the animal has been seen to leave the area, has not been detected for 30 minutes, or the vessel has transited more than 2,000 yards beyond the location of the last detection.

  (ii) Should a marine mammal be detected within or closing to inside 500 yards of the sonar dome, active sonar transmissions will be limited to at least 10 dB below the equipment's normal operating level. Ships and submarines will continue to limit maximum ping levels by this 10-dB factor until the animal has been seen to leave the area, has not been detected for 30 minutes, or the vessel has transited more than 2,000 yards beyond the location of the last detection.

  (iii) Should the marine mammal be detected within or closing to inside 200 yards of the sonar dome, active sonar transmissions will cease. Sonar will not resume until the animal has been seen to leave the area, has not been detected for 30 minutes, or the vessel has transited more than 2,000 yards beyond the location of the last detection.

  (iv) If the need for power-down should arise (as detailed in “Safety Zones” above), Navy shall follow the requirements as though they were operating at 235 dB - the normal operating level (i.e., the first power-down will be to 229 dB, regardless of at what level above 235 sonar was being operated).

- Prior to start up or restart of active sonar, operators will check that the Safety Zone radius around the sound source is clear of marine mammals.

- Sonar levels (generally) - Navy will operate sonar at the lowest practicable level, not to exceed 235 dB, except as required to meet tactical training objectives.

- Helicopters shall observe/survey the vicinity of an ASW exercise for 10 minutes before the first deployment of active (dipping) sonar in the water.

- Helicopters shall not dip their sonar within 200 yards of a marine mammal and shall cease pinging if a marine mammal closes within 200 yards after pinging has begun.

- Submarine sonar operators will review detection indicators of close-aboard marine mammals prior to the commencement of ASW operations involving active mid-frequency sonar.

4. *Coordination and Reporting*

- Navy will coordinate with the local NMFS Stranding Coordinator for any unusual marine mammal behavior, including stranding, beached live or dead cetacean(s), floating marine mammals, or out-of-habitat/milling live cetaceans that may occur at any time during or within 24 hours after completion of mid-frequency active sonar use associated with ASW training activities.
- Navy will submit a report to the Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, within 120 days of the completion of a Major Exercise. This report must contain a discussion of the nature of the effects, if observed, based on both modeled results of real-time events and sightings of marine mammals.

Approach to the Assessment

NMFS completes its section 7 analyses using a sequence of steps. The first step identifies those aspects of proposed actions that are likely to have direct and indirect effect on the physical, chemical, and biotic environment of an action area. As part of this step, we identify the spatial extent of these direct and indirect effects, including changes in that spatial extent over time. The results of this step represents the action area for the consultation. The second step of our analyses identifies the listed resources that are likely to co-occur with these effects in space and time and the nature of that co-occurrence (these represent our *exposure analyses*). In this step of our analyses, we try to identify the number, age (or life stage), and gender of the individuals that are likely to be exposed to an Action's effects and the populations or subpopulations those individuals represent. Once we identify which listed resources are likely to be exposed to an action's effects and the nature of that exposure, we examine the scientific and commercial data available to determine whether and how those listed resources are likely to respond given their exposure (these represent our *response analyses*).

The final steps of our analyses — establishing the risks those responses pose to listed resources — are different for listed species and designated critical habitat (these represent our *risk analyses*). Our jeopardy determinations must be based on an action's effects on the continued existence of threatened or endangered species as those "species" have been listed, which can include true biological species, subspecies, or distinct population segments of vertebrate species. Because the continued existence of listed species depends on the fate of the populations that comprise them, the viability (probability of extinction or probability of persistence) of listed species depends on the viability of the populations that comprise the species. Similarly, the continued existence of populations are determined by the fate of the individuals that comprise them; populations grow or decline as the individuals that comprise the population live, die, grow, mature, migrate, and reproduce (or fail to do so).

Our risk analyses reflect these relationships between listed species and the populations that comprise them, and the individuals that comprise those populations. Our risk analyses begin by identifying the probable risks actions pose to listed individuals that are likely to be exposed to an action's effects. Our analyses then integrate those individuals risks to identify consequences to the populations those individuals represent. Our analyses conclude by determining the consequences of those population-level risks to the species those populations comprise.

We measure risks to listed individuals using the individual's "fitness," which are changes in an individual's growth, survival, annual reproductive success, or lifetime reproductive success. In particular, we examine the scientific and commercial data available to determine if an individual's probable responses to an Action's effects on the environment (which we identify during our response analyses) are likely to have consequences for the individual's fitness.

When individual, listed plants or animals are expected to experience reductions in fitness, we would expect those reductions to also reduce the abundance, reproduction rates, or growth rates (or increase variance in one or more of these rates) of the populations those individuals represent (see Stearns 1992). Reductions in one or more of these variables (or one of the variables we derive from them) is a *necessary* condition for reductions in a population's viability, which is itself a *necessary* condition for reductions in a species' viability. On the other hand, when listed plants or animals exposed to an Action's effects are *not* expected to experience reductions in fitness, we would not expect the Action to have adverse consequences on the viability of the populations those individuals represent or the species those populations comprise (for example, see Anderson 2000, Mills and Beatty 1979, Stearns 1992). If we conclude that listed plants or animals are *not* likely to experience reductions in their fitness, we would conclude our assessment.

If, however, we conclude that listed plants or animals are likely to experience reductions in their fitness, our assessment tries to determine if those fitness reductions are likely to be sufficient to reduce the viability of the populations those individuals represent (measured using changes in the populations' abundance, reproduction, spatial structure and connectivity, growth rates, or variance in these measures to make inferences about the population's extinction risks). In this step of our analyses, we use the population's base condition (established in the *Environmental Baseline* and *Status of Listed Resources* sections of this opinion) as our point of reference. Finally, our assessment tries to determine if changes in population viability are likely to be sufficient to reduce the viability of the species those populations comprise. In this step of our analyses, we use the species' status (established in the *Status of the Species* section of this opinion) as our point of reference.

Evidence Available for the Consultation

To conduct these analyses, we considered all lines of evidence available through published and unpublished sources that represent evidence of adverse consequences or the absence of such consequences. Over the past decade, a considerable body of scientific information on active sonar and its effects on marine mammals and other marine life has become available. Many investigators have studied potential responses of marine mammals and other marine organisms to human-generated sounds in marine environments (for example, Bowles *et al*. 1994; Croll *et al*. 1999, 2001; Frankel and Clark 1998; Gisiner 1998, McCauley and Cato 2001; Norris 1994; Reeves 1992, Richardson *et al*. 1995, Tyack 2000).

To supplement that body of knowledge, we conducted electronic literature searches using the Library of Congress' *First Search* and *Dissertation Abstracts* databases, SCOPUS, *Web of Science*, and Cambridge Abstract's *Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts* (ASFA) database services. The *First Search* databases provide access to general biological literature, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations back to 1980; ASFA provides access to journal articles, magazine articles, and conference proceedings back to 1964. Our searches specifically focus on the *ArticleFirst*, *BasicBiosis*, *Dissertation Abstracts*, *Proceedings* and *ECO* databases, which index the major journals dealing with issues of ecological risk (for example, the journals *Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry*, *Human and Ecological Risk Assessment*), marine mammals (*Journal of Mammalogy*, *Canadian Journal of Zoology*, *Marine Mammal Science*), sea turtles (*Copeia*, *Herpetologia*, *Journal of Herpetology*), ecology (*Ambio*, *Bioscience*, *Journal of Animal Ecology*, *Journal of Applied Ecology*, *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the UK*, *Marine Pollution Bulletin*), and bioacoustics (*Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*).

Our prior experience demonstrated that electronic searches produce the lowest number of false positive (references produced by a search that are not relevant) and false negative (references not produced by a search that are relevant) results if we use paired combinations of the keywords sonar, mid-frequency sonar, acoustic, marine acoustic, military exercises, sound, and noise paired with the keywords cetacean, dolphin, marine mammal, pinniped, porpoise, sea turtle, seal, and whale. To expand these searches, we modify these keyword pairs with the keywords effect, impact, mortality event, response, stranding, unusual mortality event.

We supplemented the results of these electronic searches by acquiring all of the references we had gathered that, based on a reading of their titles or abstracts, appeared to comply with the keywords presented in the preceding paragraph. If a reference's title did not allow us to eliminate it as irrelevant to this inquiry, we acquired it. We continued this process until we gathered all (100 percent) of the relevant references cited by the introduction and discussion sections of the relevant papers, articles, books, and, reports and all of the references cited in the materials and methods, and results sections of those documents. We did not conduct hand searches of published journals for this consultation. We organized the results of these searches using commercial bibliographic software.

We examined the references contained in these documents and any articles we collected through our electronic searches. If, based on a reading of their titles or abstracts, a reference appeared to comply with the keywords presented in the preceding paragraph, we aquired the reference. If a reference's title did not allow us to eliminate it as irrelevant to this inquiry, we acquired it. We continued this process until we identified all (100 percent) of the relevant references cited by the introduction and discussion sections of the relevant papers, articles, books, and, reports and all of the references cited in the materials and methods, and results sections of those documents. We did not conduct hand searches of published journals for this consultation. We organized the results of these searches using commercial bibliographic software.

From each document, we extracted the following: when the information for the study or report was collected, the study design, which species the study gathered information on, the sample size, acoustic source(s) associated with the study (noting whether it was part of the study design or was correlated with an observation), other stressors associated with the study, study objectives, and study results, by species. We estimated the probability of responses from the following information: the known or putative stimulus; exposure profiles (intensity, frequency, duration of exposure, and nature) where information is available; and the entire distribution of responses exhibited by the individuals that have been exposed. Because the response of individual animals to stressors will often vary with time (for example, no responses may be apparent for minutes or hours followed by sudden responses and vice versa) we also noted any temporal differences in responses to an exposure.

We ranked the results of these searches based on the quality of their study design, sample sizes, level of scrutiny prior to and during publication, and study results. Carefully-designed field experiments (for example, experiments that control potentially confounding variables) were rated higher than field experiments that are not designed to control those variables. Carefully-designed field experiments were generally ranked higher than computer simulations. Studies that produce large sample sizes with small variances were generally ranked higher than studies with small sample sizes or large variances.

Despite the information that is available, this assessment involved a large amount of uncertainty about the basic hearing capabilities of marine mammals; how marine mammals use natural sound to communicate; the importance of sound to the normal behavioral and social ecology of marine mammals; the mechanisms by which human-generated sounds affect the behavior and physiology (including the non-auditory physiology) of marine mammals, and the circumstances that are likely to produce outcomes that harm marine mammals (see NRC 2000 for further discussion of these unknowns). Finally, we do not know — and, perhaps, cannot know — how marine mammals interpret sound (including human-generated sounds) or how sound affects their cognitive processes, their behavior, or their social interactions.

The primary sources of information on the effects of sound on marine mammals were reviews conducted by the National Research Council (NRC 1994 1996, 2000, 2003, 2005), Richardson *et al*. (1995) on marine mammals and noise, the Navy's Low Frequency Sound Scientific Research Program, Marine Mammal Research Program (which was developed to address questions associated with the Advanced Research Projects Agency's Acoustic Thermometry of Ocean Climate project, which also uses low frequency sound), and numerous published and unpublished papers and reports.

Application of this Approach in this Consultation

NMFS initially identified several aspects of the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises that represent potential hazards to threatened or endangered species or critical habitat that has been designated for them: (1) the ships and ship traffic associated with the proposed exercise; (2) the mid-frequency active sonar systems that would be employed during the exercise; (3) aircraft operations, (4) amphibious landings, (5) gunfire and missile exercises. After reviewing the measures the Navy proposes to implement during the proposed exercises and information from previous exercises the Navy has conducted in the action area, NMFS concluded that the measures associated with Elements 3 – 5 should prevent those operations from adversely affecting threatened or endangered species or critical habitat that has been designated for them (these conclusions are summarized in the *Status of the Species* section of this opinion).

We analyze the potential risks associated with the active sonar systems that are likely to be employed during anti-submarine warfare exercises by treating the acoustic energy produced by those sonar as a pollutant introduced into the ocean environment. The first step of our analysis evaluates the available evidence to determine the likelihood of listed species or critical habitat being exposed to sound pressure levels associated with mid-frequency sonar, which includes estimating the intensity, duration, and frequency of exposure (for other examples of exposure assessments, see Wu and Schaum 2000). Our analysis assumed that mid-frequency sonar poses no risk to listed species or critical habitat if neither are exposed to sound pressure levels from the mid-frequency sound sources (we recognize that the sonar could have indirect, adverse effects on listed species or critical habitat by disrupting marine food chains, a species' predators, or a species' competitors; however, we did not identify situations where this concern might apply to species under NMFS' jurisdiction). Our analyses also assumed that the potential consequences of exposure to mid-frequency sonar on individual animals would be a function of the intensity (measured in both sound pressure level in decibels and frequency), duration, and frequency of the animal's exposure to the mid-frequency transmissions.

To quantify our exposure analyses, NMFS relied solely on the results of models the U.S. Navy developed for NEPA documents it prepared for the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises (U.S. Navy 2007). Once we identified which listed resources were likely to be exposed to potential stressors associated with the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises and the nature of that exposure, we examined the scientific and commercial data available to determine whether and how those listed resources are likely to respond given their exposure (see Figure 1 for the conceptual model we use for our response analyses). The remainder of our analyses proceeded using the approach we described in the previous section.

Treatment of "Cumulative Impacts" (in the sense of NEPA)

Several organizations have argued that several of our previous biological opinions on the U.S. Navy's use of active sonar failed to consider the "cumulative impact" (in the NEPA sense of the term) of active sonar on the ocean environment and its organisms, particularly endangered and threatened species and critical habitat that has been designated for them (for example, see NRDC 2007 and Ocean Mammal Institute 2007). In each instance, we have had to explain how biological opinions consider "cumulative impacts" (in the NEPA sense of the term).

The U.S. Council on Environmental Quality defined "cumulative effects" (which we refer to as "cumulative impacts" to distinguish between NEPA and ESA uses of the same term) as "the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions" (40 CFR 1508.7). The effects analyses of biological opinions considered the "impacts" on listed species and designated critical habitat that result from the incremental impact of an action by identifying natural and anthropogenic stressors that affect endangered and threatened species throughout their range (the *Status of the Species*) and within an Action Area (the *Environmental Baseline*, which articulate the pre-existing *impacts* of activities that occur in an Action Area, including the past, contemporaneous, and future *impacts* of those activities). We assess the effects of a proposed action by adding their direct and indirect effects to the *impacts* of the activities we identify in an *Environmental*

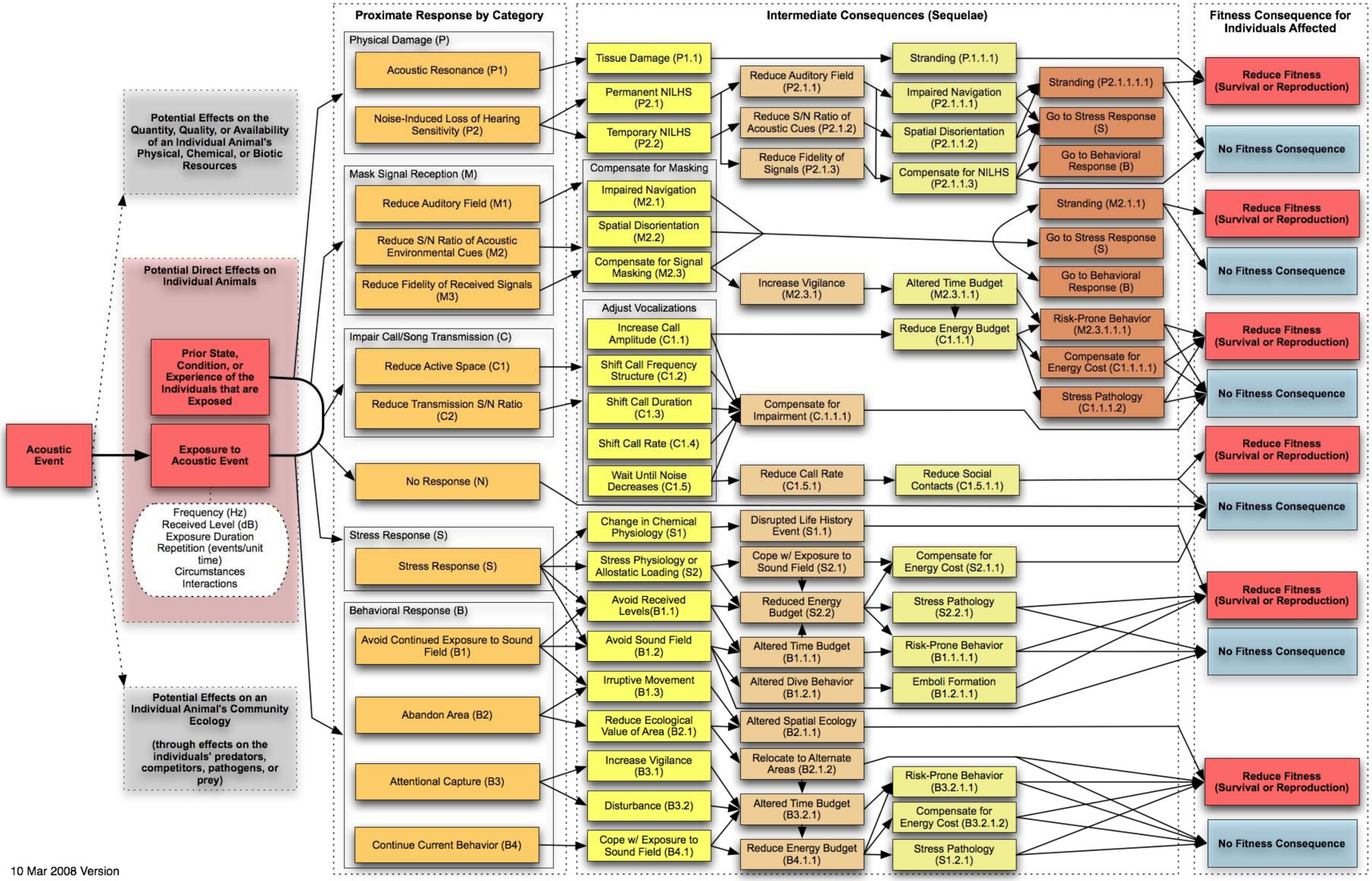

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the potential responses of endangered and threatened species upon being exposed to active sonar and the pathways by which those responses might affect the fitness of individual animals that have been exposed. See text contained in "Application of this Approach" and "Response Analyses" for an explanation and supporting literature.

Baseline (50 CFR 402.02), in light of the impacts of the status of the listed species and designated critical habitat throughout their range; as a result, the results of our effects analyses are equivalent to those contained in the "cumulative impact" sections of NEPA documents.

A Brief Background on Sound

Sound is a wave of pressure variations propagating through a medium (for the sonar considered in this Opinion, the medium is marine water). Pressure variations are created by compressing and relaxing the medium. Sound measurements can be expressed in two forms: *intensity* and *pressure*. Acoustic intensity is the average rate of energy transmitted through a unit area in a specified direction and is expressed in watts per square meter (W/m^2). Acoustic intensity is rarely measured directly, it is derived from ratios of *pressures*; the standard reference pressure for underwater sound is 1 microPascal (μPa); for airborne sound, the standard reference pressure is 20 μPa (Richardson *et al*. 1995).

Acousticians have adopted a logarithmic scale for sound intensities, which is denoted in decibels (dB). Decibel measurements represent the ratio between a measured pressure value and a reference pressure value (in this case 1 μPa or, for airborne sound, 20 μPa.). The logarithmic nature of the scale means that each 10 dB increase is a ten-fold increase in power (e.g., 20 dB is a 100-fold increase, 30 dB is a 1,000-fold increase). Humans perceive a 10 dB increase in noise as a doubling of sound level, or a 10 dB decrease in noise as a halving of sound level. The term "sound pressure level" implies a decibel measure and a reference pressure that is used as the denominator of the ratio. Throughout this opinion, we use 1 microPascal (denoted re: 1μPa) as a standard reference pressure unless noted otherwise.

It is important to note that decibels underwater and decibels in air are not the same and cannot be directly compared. Because of the different densities of air and water and the different decibel standards in water and air, a sound with the same intensity (i.e., power) in air and in water would be approximately 63 dB quieter in air. Thus a sound that is 160 dB loud underwater would have the same effective intensity as a sound that is 97 dB loud in air.

Sound frequency is measured in cycles per second, or Hertz (abbreviated Hz), and is analogous to musical pitch; high-pitched sounds contain high frequencies and low-pitched sounds contain low frequencies. Natural sounds in the ocean span a huge range of frequencies: from earthquake noise at 5 Hz to harbor porpoise clicks at 150,000 Hz. These sounds are so low or so high in pitch that humans cannot even hear them; acousticians call these infrasonic and ultrasonic sounds, respectively. A single sound may be made up of many different frequencies together. Sounds made up of only a small range of frequencies are called "narrowband", and sounds with a broad range of frequencies are called "broadband"; airguns are an example of a broadband sound source and sonars are an example of a narrowband sound source.

When considering the influence of various kinds of noise on the marine environment, it is necessary to understand that different kinds of marine life are sensitive to different frequencies of sound. Most dolphins, for instance, have excellent hearing at very high frequencies between 10,000 and 100,000 Hz. Their sensitivity at lower frequencies below 1000 Hz; however, is quite poor. On the other hand, the hearing sensitivity of most sea turtles appear to be best at frequencies between about 200 Hz and 700 Hz. As a result, sea turtles might be expected to suffer more harmful effects from loud, low frequency noise than would dolphins.

Because ears adapted to function underwater are physiologically different from human ears, comparisons using decibels would still not be adequate to describe the effects of a sound on a whale. When sound travels away from its source, its loudness decreases as the distance traveled by the sound increases. Thus, the loudness of a sound at its source is higher than the loudness of that same sound a kilometer distant. Acousticians often refer to the loudness of a sound at its source as the *source level* and the loudness of sound elsewhere as the *received level*. For example, a humpback whale 3 kilometers from an airgun that has a source level of 230 dB may only be exposed to sound that is 160 dB loud. As a result, it is important not to confuse source levels and received levels when discussing the loudness of sound in the ocean.

As sound moves away from a source, its propagation in water is influenced by various physical characteristics, including water temperature, depth, salinity, and surface and bottom properties that cause refraction, reflection, absorption, and scattering of sound waves. Oceans are not homogeneous and the contribution of each of these individual factors is extremely complex and interrelated. The physical characteristics that determine the sound's speed through the water will change with depth, season, geographic location, and with time of day (as a result, in actual sonar operations, crews will measure oceanic conditions, such as sea water temperature and depth, to calibrate models that determine the path the sonar signal will take as it travels through the ocean and how strong the sound signal will be at given range along a particular transmission path).

Sound tends to follow many paths through the ocean, so that a listener would hear multiple, delayed copies of transmitted signals (Richardson *et al*. 1995). Echoes are a familiar example of this phenomenon in air. In order to determine what the paths of sound transmission are, one rule is to seek paths that deliver the sound to the receiver the fastest. These are called acoustic rays. If the speed of sound were constant throughout the ocean, acoustic rays would consist of straight-line segments, with reflections off the surface and the bottom. However, because the speed of sound varies in the ocean, most acoustic rays are curved.

Sound speed in seawater is about 1,500 m/s (5,000 ft/s) and varies with water density, which is affected by water temperature, salinity (the amount of salt in the water), and depth (pressure). The speed of sound increases as temperature and depth (pressure), and to a lesser extent, salinity, increase. The variation of sound speed with depth of the water is generally presented by a "sound speed profile," which varies with geographic latitude, season, and time of day.

In shallow waters of coastal regions and on continental shelves, sound speed profiles become influenced by surface heating and cooling, salinity changes, and water currents. As a result, these profiles tend to be irregular and unpredictable, and contain numerous gradients that last over short time and space scales. As sound travels through the ocean, the intensity associated with the wavefront diminishes, or attenuates. This decrease in intensity is referred to as propagation loss, also commonly called transmission loss.

Action Area

The action area for this biological opinion consists of the Cherry Point, and Jacksonville-Charleston Operating Areas. The western boundary of the Cherry Point Operating Area is located about 3 nautical miles off coastal North Carolina; the northern boundary is located about 3 nautical miles off the coast immediately north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina; the eastern-most boundary of the Operating Area is about 98 nautical miles (181 kilometers or 112 miles) east of Cape Hatteras; and the southernmost boundary is 113 nautical miles (210 kilometers or 130 miles) southeast of Cape Fear, North Carolina. This Operating Area encompasses about 18,451 square nautical miles (63,285 square kilometers or 24,428 square miles), which is slightly larger than the State of West Virginia (which encompasses 24,229 square miles of lands and water) and is almost twice as large as the State of Maryland (which encompasses about 12,407 square miles of lands and water).

The western boundary of the Jacksonville-Charleston Operating Area is located about 3 nautical miles off the southeast coast of the U.S. except for the area off southern Georgia and northern Florida, where the boundary lies 3 to 7 nautical miles from shore; the northernmost point of this Operating Area is located just north of Wilmington, North Carolina; the easternmost boundary of the Operating Area is located about 244 nautical miles (452 kilometers or 244 miles) east of Jacksonville, Florida. This Operating Area encompasses about 50,218 square nautical miles (172,249 square kilometers or 66,488 square miles), which is slightly larger than the States of Wisconsin (which encompasses 65,497 square miles of lands and water) or Florida (which encompasses about 65,754 square miles of lands and water).

Status of Listed Resources

NMFS has determined that the following species and critical habitat designations may occur in this action area for the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises:

Blue whale	*Balaenoptera musculus*	Endangered
Fin whale	*Balaenoptera physalus*	Endangered
Humpback whale	*Megaptera novaeangliae*	Endangered
North Atlantic right whale	*Eubalaena japonica*	Endangered
Sei whale	*Balaenoptera borealis*	Endangered
Sperm whale	*Physeter macrocephalus*	Endangered
Green sea turtle	*Chelonia mydas*	Threatened
Hawksbill sea turtle	*Eretmochelys imbricate*	Endangered
Leatherback sea turtle	*Dermochelys coriacea*	Endangered
Loggerhead sea turtle	*Caretta caretta*	Threatened

Shortnose sturgeon are an anadromous species that occurs along the Atlantic Coast of North America, from the St. John River in Canada to the St. John's River in Florida. The recovery plan for shortnose sturgeon recognized 19 distinct, wild populations: New Brunswick, Canada (1 population); Maine (2 populations); Massachusetts (1 population); Connecticut (1 population); New York (1 population); New Jersey and Delaware (1 population); Maryland and Virginia (1 population); North Carolina (1 population); South Carolina (4 populations); Georgia (4 populations); and Florida (2 populations). One partially-landlocked population occurs in Holyoke Pool of the Connecticut River. Another landlocked population may exist in Lake

Marion on the Santee River in South Carolina. Because of their coastal distribution, shortnose sturgeon are not likely to be exposed to ship traffic or active sonar associated with the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises and, therefore, are not likely to be adversely affected by the proposed exercises.

Blue whales appear to occur to the north, east, and south of the Action Area, but the surveys conducted in the Action Area over several years have not reported blue whales in the Action Area (CeTAP 1982, Schmidley 1981, Garrison 2003, Hain 1992, Mullin and Fulling 2007). Even acoustic monitoring, which identified blue whales as present when aerial and shipboard surveys did not detect them in Hawai'i, did not detect blue whale vocalizations from the Action Area. Finally, there are no reports of blue whales strandings along the Atlantic coast of the southeastern United States. The apparent rarity of blue whales in the Action Area, as evidenced by the absence of reliable observations of these whales in vessel and aircraft surveys that have been conducted in the area and the rarity of detections using acoustic monitoring, suggests that blue whales have probability of occurring in the Action Area that are low enough to be discountable.

In the event blue whales are exposed to mid-frequency sonar, the information available on blue whales exposed to received levels of active mid-frequency sonar suggests that they are not likely to hear mid-frequency (1 kHz–10 kHz) sounds. Blue whale vocalizations include a variety of sounds described as low frequency moans or long pulses in the 10-100 Hz band (Cummings and Thompson 1971; Edds 1982; Thompson and Friedl 1982; McDonald *et al.* 1995; Clark and Fristrup 1997; Rivers 1997). The most typical signals are very long, patterned sequences of tonal infrasonic sounds in the 15-40 Hz range. Ketten (1997) reports the frequencies of maximum energy between 12 and 18 Hz. Short sequences of rapid calls in the 30-90 Hz band are associated with animals in social groups. The context for the 30-90 Hz calls suggests that they are used to communicate but do not appear to be related to reproduction. Blue whale moans within the frequency range of 12.5-200 Hz, with pulse duration up to 36 seconds, have been recorded off Chile (Cummings and Thompson 1971, 1977). The whale produced a short, 390 Hz pulse during the moan. Based on this information blue whales exposed to received levels of active mid-frequency sonar are not likely to hear mid-frequency sounds; if they do not hear the sounds, they are not likely to respond physiologically or behaviorally to those received levels. Consequently, we conclude that the proposed 2008 Atlantic training exercises "may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect" endangered blue whales so this species will not be considered in greater detail in the remainder of this opinion.

Critical Habitat

Critical habitat has also been designated for the northern right whale in the Atlantic Ocean in Cape Cod Bay, Great South Channel, and off Georgia and Florida (50 CFR 226.13). Critical habitat for green sea turtles has been designated on Culebra Island, Puerto Rico (63 FR 46693), for hawksbill sea turtles on Mona and Monita Islands, Puerto Rico (63 FR 46693), and for leatherback sea turtles on Sandy Point on Saint Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands (44 FR 17710).

Based on the best scientific and commercial data available, critical habitat that has been designated for northern right whales, green sea turtles, hawksbill sea turtles, and leatherback sea turtles is outside of the area that might be exposed to mid-frequency active sonar associated with the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises. As a result, we conclude that the proposed exercises will not affect designated critical habitat. Therefore, critical habitat will not be considered further in this biological opinion.

Introduction to the Status of Species Considered in this Opinion

The remaining narratives in this section of our Opinion focus on the status of the threatened and endangered species that occur in the action area and that may be adversely affected by the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises. The narratives are organized by species and begin with summaries of the distribution and population structure of each species, which lay the foundation for the exposure analyses that appear later in this Opinion. That is, we decide which individuals from the different populations of each species are likely to be exposed to the proposed action based on their distribution and population structure. Then we summarize the status of the different species to provide points of reference for the jeopardy determinations we make later in this Opinion. That is, we rely on a species' status and trend to determine whether or not an action's direct or indirect effects are likely to increase the species' probability of becoming extinct.

The topics that follow the *Status* subsection of the species' narratives serve a different purpose: they present background information that is designed to help readers understand the exposure, response, and risk analyses that we use to organize our assessment of the effects of the proposed action. To fulfill that purpose, the narratives that follow summarize information on the diving and social behavior of the different species because that behavior helps determine whether aerial and ship board surveys are likely to detect each species. We also summarize information on their vocalizations because that background information laws the foundation for our assessment of the how the different species are likely to respond to sounds produced by detonations.

More detailed background information on the status of these species and critical habitat can be found in a number of published documents including status reviews, recovery plans for the blue whale (NMFS 1998a), fin whales (2007), fin and sei whale (NMFS 1998b, NMFS 2007), humpback whale (NMFS 1991a), right whale (NMFS 1991b), a status report on large whales prepared by Perry *et al*. (1999), and recovery plans for sea turtles (NMFS and USFWS 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d, and 1998e). Richardson *et al.* (1995) and Tyack (2000) provide detailed analyses of the functional aspects of cetacean communication and their responses to active sonar. Finally, Croll *et al*. (1999), NRC (1994, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2005), and Richardson *et al*. (1995) provide information on the potential and probable effects of active sonar on the marine animals considered in this Opinion.

Climate Change

One threat is or will be common to all of the species we discuss in this Opinion: changes in global climatic patterns that already appear to have begun. Because climate change is a threat that is common to all of these species discussed in this Opinion, we present this narrative here rather than in each of the species-specific narratives that follow.

Based on forecasts made by the International Panel on Climate Change (Houghton *et al*. 2001, McCarthy *et al*. 2001, Parry *et al*. 2007), climate change is projected to have substantial direct and indirect effects on individuals, populations, species, and the structure and function of marine, coastal, and terrestrial ecosystems in the foreseeable future. The direct effects of climate change would result in increases in atmospheric temperatures, changes in sea surface temperatures, changes in patterns of precipitation, and changes in sea level. Oceanographic models project a weakening of the thermohaline circulation resulting in a reduction of heat transport into high latitudes of Europe, an increase in the mass of the Antarctic ice sheet, and a decrease in the Greenland ice sheet, although the magnitude of these changes remain unknown.

The indirect effects of climate change would result from changes in the distribution of temperatures suitable for calving and rearing calves, the distribution and abundance of prey, and the distribution and abundance of competitors or predators. For example, variations in the recruitment of krill (*Euphausia superba*) and the reproductive success of krill predators have been linked to variations in sea-surface temperatures and the extent of sea-ice cover during the winter months. Although the IPCC (2001) did not detect significant changes in the extent of Antarctic sea-ice using satellite measurements, Curran (2003) analyzed ice-core samples from 1841 to 1995 and concluded Antarctic sea ice cover had declined by about 20% since the 1950s.

The Antarctic Peninsula, which is the northern extension of the Antarctic continent, contains the richest areas of krill in the Southern Ocean. The extent of se ice cover around this Peninsula has the highest degree of variability relative to other areas within the distribution of krill. Relatively small changes in climate conditions are likely to exert a strong influence on the seasonal pack-ice zone in the Peninsula area, which is likely to affect densities of krill in this region. Because krill are important prey for baleen whales or form critical component of the food chains on which baleen whales depend, increasing the variability of krill densities or causing those densities to decline dramatically is likely to have adverse effect on populations of baleen whales in the Southern Ocean.

Reid and Croxall (2001) analyzed a 23-year time series of the reproductive performance of predators that depend on krill for prey — Antarctic fur seals (*Arctocephalus gazella*), gentoo penguins (*Pygoscelis papua*), macaroni penguins (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*), and black-browed albatrosses (*Thalassarche melanophrys*) — at South Georgia Island and concluded that these populations experienced increases in the 1980s followed by significant declines in the 1990s accompanied by an increase in the frequency of years with reduced reproductive success. The authors concluded that macaroni penguins and black-browed albatrosses had declined by as much as 50 percent in the 1990s, although incidental mortalities in longline fisheries probably contributed to the decline of the albatross. These authors concluded, however, that these declines result, at least in part, from changes in the structure of the krill population, particularly reduced recruitment into older age classes, which lowers the number of predators this prey species can sustain. The authors concluded that the biomass of krill within the largest size class was sufficient to support predator demand in the 1980s but not in the 1990s.

Similarly, a study of relationships between climate and sea-temperature changes and the arrival of squid off southwestern England over a 20-year period concluded that veined squid (*Loligo forbesi*) migrate eastwards in the English Channel earlier when water in the preceding months is warmer, and that higher temperatures and early arrival correspond with warm phases of the North Atlantic oscillation (Sims *et al*. 2001). The timing of squid peak abundance advanced by

120- 150 days in the warmest years compared with the coldest. Seabottom temperature were closely linked to the extent of squid movement and temperature increases over the five months prior to and during the month of peak squid abundance did not differ between early and late years. These authors concluded that the temporal variation in peak abundance of squid seen off Plymouth represents temperature-dependent movement, which is in turn mediated by climatic changes associated with the North Atlantic Oscillation.

Climate-mediated changes in the distribution and abundance of keystone prey species like krill and climate-mediated changes in the distribution of cephalopod populations worldwide is likely to affect marine mammal populations as they re-distribute throughout the world's oceans in search of prey. Blue whales, as predators that specialize in eating krill, seem likely to change their distribution in response to changes in the distribution of krill (for example, see Payne *et al*. 1986, 1990 and Weinrich 2001); if they did not change their distribution or could not find the biomass of krill necessary to sustain their population numbers, their populations seem likely to experience declines similar to those observed in other krill predators, which would cause dramatic declines in their population sizes or would increase the year-to-year variation in population size; either of these outcomes would dramatically increase the extinction probabilities of these whales.

Sperm whales, whose diets can be dominated by cephalopods, would have to re-distribute following changes in the distribution and abundance of their prey. This statement assumes that projected changes in global climate would only affect the distribution of cephalopod populations, but would not reduce the number or density of cephalopod populations. If, however, cephalopod populations collapse or decline dramatically, sperm whale populations are likely to collapse or decline dramatically as well.

The response of North Atlantic right whales to changes in the North Atlantic Oscillation also provides insight into the potential consequences of a changing climate on large whales. Changes in the climate of the North Atlantic have been directly linked to the North Atlantic Oscillation, which results from variability in pressure differences between a low pressure system system that lies over Iceland and a high pressure system that lies over the Azore Islands. As these pressure systems shift from east to west, they control the strength of westerly winds and storm tracks across the North Atlantic Ocean. The North Atlantic Oscillation Index, which is positive when both systems are strong (producing increased differences in pressure that produce more and stronger winter storms) and negative when both systems are weak (producing decreased differences in pressure resulting in fewer and weaker winter storms), varies from year to year, but also exhibits a tendency to remain in one phase for intervals lasting several years.

Sea surface temperatures in the North Atlantic Ocean are closely related to this Oscillation and influences the abundance of marine mammal prey such as zooplankton and fish. In the 1970s and 1980s, the North Atlantic Oscillation Index have been positive and sea surface temperatures increased. These increased are believed to have produced conditions that were favorable for the copepod (*Calanus finmarchicus*), which is the principal prey of North Atlantic right whales (Conversi *et al*. 2001) and may have increased calving rates of these whales (we cannot verify this association because systematic data on North Atlantic right whale was not collected until 1982; Greene *et al*. 2003). In the late 1980s and 1990s, the NAO Index was mainly positive but exhibited two substantial, multi-year reversals to negative values. This was followed by two major, multi-year declines in copepod prey abundance (Pershing *et al.* 2001, Drinkwater *et al*. 2003). Calving rates for North Atlantic right whales followed the declining trend in copepod abundance, although there was a time lag between the two (Greene *et al*. 2003).

Although the NAO Index has been positive for the past 25 years, atmospheric models suggest that increases in ocean temperature associated with climate change forecasts may produce more severe fluctuations in the North Atlantic Oscillation. Such fluctuations would be expected to cause dramatic shifts in the reproductive rate of critically endangered North Atlantic right whales (Drinkwater *et al.* 2003; Greene *et al*. 2003) and possibly a northward shift in the location of right whale calving areas (Kenney 2007).

Changes in global climatic patterns are also projected to have profound effect on the coastlines of every continent by increasing sea levels and increasing the intensity, if not the frequency, of hurricanes and tropical storms. Based on computer models, these phenomena would inundate nesting beaches of sea turtles, change patterns of coastal erosion and sand accretion that are necessary to maintain those beaches, and would increase the number of turtle nests that are destroyed by tropical storms and hurricanes. Further, the combination of increasing sea levels, changes in patterns of coastal erosion and accretion, and changes in rainfall patterns are likely to affect coastal estuaries, submerged aquatic vegetation, and reef ecosystems that provide foraging and rearing habitat for several species of sea turtles. Finally, changes in ocean currents associated with climate change projections would affect the migratory patterns of sea turtles. The loss of nesting beaches, by itself, would have catastrophic effect on sea turtles populations globally if they are unable to colonize any new beaches that form of if the beaches that form do not provide the sand depths, grain patterns, elevations above high tides, or temperature regimes necessary to allow turtle eggs to survive. When combined with changes in coastal habitats and oceans currents, the future climates that are forecast place sea turtles at substantially greater risk of extinction than they already face.

Fin whale

Distribution

Fin whales are distributed widely in every ocean except the Arctic Ocean. In the North Pacific Ocean, fin whales occur in summer foraging areas in the Chukchi Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk, around the Aleutian Islands, and the Gulf of Alaska; in the eastern Pacific, they occur south to California; in the western Pacific, they occur south to Japan. Fin whales in the eastern Pacific winter from California south; in the western Pacific, they winter from the Sea of Japan, the East China and Yellow Seas, and the Philippine Sea (Gambell 1985).

In the North Atlantic Ocean, fin whales occur in summer foraging areas from the coast of North America to the Arctic, around Greenland, Iceland, northern Norway, Jan Meyers, Spitzbergen, and the Barents Sea. In the western Atlantic, they winter from the edge of sea ice south to the Gulf of Mexico and the West Indies. In the eastern Atlantic, they winter from southern Norway, the Bay of Biscay, and Spain with some whales migrating into the Mediterranean Sea (Gambell 1985).

In the Southern Hemisphere, fin whales are distributed broadly south of 50° S in the summer and migrate into the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans in the winter, along the coast of South America (as far north as Peru and Brazil), Africa, and the islands in Oceania north of Australia and New Zealand (Gambell 1985).

Fin whales are common off the Atlantic coast of the United States in waters immediately off the coast seaward to the continental shelf (about the 1,000-fathom contour). In this region, they are tend to occur north of Cape Hatteras where they accounted for about 46 percent of the large whales observed in surveys conducted between 1978 and 1982. During the summer months, fin whales in this region tend to congregate in feeding areas between 41°20'N and 51°00'N, from shore seaward to the 1,000-fathom contour.

In the Atlantic Ocean, Clark (1995) reported a general southward pattern of fin whale migration in the fall from the Labrador and Newfoundland region, south past Bermuda, and into the West Indies. The overall distribution may be based on prey availability, and fin whales are found throughout the action area for this consultation in most months of the year. This species preys opportunistically on both invertebrates and fish (Watkins *et al.* 1984). They feed by filtering large volumes of water for the associated prey. Fin whales are larger and faster than humpback and right whales and are less concentrated in nearshore environments.

Population Structure

Fin whales have two recognized subspecies: *Balaoptera physalus physalus* (Linnaeus 1758) occurs in the North Atlantic Ocean while *B. p. quoyi* (Fischer 1829) occurs in the Southern Ocean. These subspecies and the North Pacifc fin whales appear to be organized into separate populations, although the published literature on the population structure of fin whales does not demonstrates a lack of concensus on the population structure of fin whales.

In the North Atlantic Ocean, the International Whaling Commission recognizes seven management units or "stocks" of fin whales: (1) Nova Scotia, (2) Newfoundland-Labrador, (3) West Greenland, (4) East Greenland-Iceland, (5) North Norway, (6) West Norway-Faroe Islands, and (7) British Isles-Spain-Portugal. In addition, the population of fin whales that resides in the Ligurian Sea, in the northwestern Mediterranean Sea is believed to be genetically distinct from other fin whales populations (as used in this Opinion, "populations" are isolated demographically, meaning, they are driven more by internal dynamics — birth and death processes — than by the geographic redistribution of individuals through immigration or emigration. Some usages of the term "stock" are synonymous with this definition of "population" while other usages of "stock" do not).

In the North Pacific Ocean, the International Whaling Commission recognizes two "stocks": (1) East China Sea and (2) rest of the North Pacific (Donovan,1991). However, Mizroch *et al*. (1984) concluded that there were five possible "stocks" of fin whales within the North Pacific based on histological analyses and tagging experiments: (1) East and West Pacific that intermingle around the Aleutian Islands; (2) East China Sea; (3) British Columbia; (4) Southern-Central California to Gulf of Alaska; and (5) Gulf of California. Based on genetic analyses, Berube *et al*. (1998) concluded that fin whales in the Sea of Cortez represent an isolated population that has very little genetic exchange with other populations in the North Pacific Ocean (although the geographic distribution of this population and other populations can overlap seasonally). They also concluded that fin whales in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Gulf of Maine are distinct from fin whales found off Spain and in the Mediterranean Sea.

Regardless of how different authors structure the fin whale population, mark-recapture studies have demonstrate that individual fin whales migrate between management units (Mitchell 1974; Gunnlaugsson and Sigurjónsson 1989), which suggests that these management units are not geographically isolated populations.

The recovery plan that has been drafted for fin whales treats the fin whales that occur off the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. as a single population that overlaps with the population the International Whaling Commission's Nova Scotia management unit (NMFS 2007). Individuals from this "population" of fin whales occur in the action area for this consultation.

Threats to the Species

NATURAL THREATS. Natural sources and rates of mortality are largely unknown, but Aguilar and Lockyer (1987) suggest annual natural mortality rates may range from 0.04 to 0.06 (based on studies of northeast Atlantic fin whales). The occurrence of the nematode *Crassicauda boopis* appears to increase the potential for kidney failure in fin whales and may be preventing some fin whale stocks from recovering from whaling (Lambertsen 1992, as cited in Perry *et al*. 1999). Killer whale or shark attacks may injure or kill very young or sick whales (Perry *et al*. 1999).

ANTHROPOGENIC THREATS. Three human activities are known to threaten fin whales: whaling, commercial fishing, and shipping. Historically, whaling represented the greatest threat to every population of fin whales and was ultimately responsible for listing fin whales as an endangered species. As early as the mid-seventeenth century, the Japanese were capturing fin, blue (*Balaenoptera musculus*), and other large whales using a fairly primitive open-water netting technique (Tønnessen and Johnsen 1982, Cherfas 1989). In 1864, explosive harpoons and steam-powered catcher boats were introduced in Norway, allowing the large-scale exploitation of previously unobtainable whale species. After blue whales were depleted in most areas, fin whales became the focus of whaling operations and more than 700,000 fin whales were landed in the Southern Hemisphere alone between 1904 and 1979 (IWC 1995).

As its legacy, whaling has reduced fin whales to a fraction of their historic population size and, as a result, makes it easier for other human activities to push fin whales closer to extinction. Otherwise, whaling currently does not threaten every fin whale population, although it may threaten specific populations. In the Antarctic Ocean, fin whales are hunted by Japanese whalers who have been allowed to kill up to 10 fin whales each year for the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 seasons under an Antarctic Special Permit. The Japanese whalers plan to kill 50 fin whales per year starting in the 2007-2008 season and continuing for the next 12 years.

Fin whales are also hunted in subsistence fisheries off West Greenland. In 2004, 5 males and 6 females were killed and landed; 2 other fin whales were struck and lost in the same year. In 2003 2 males and 4 females were landed and 2 other fin whales were struck and lost (IWC 2005). Between 2003 and 2007, the IWC set a catch limit of up to 19 fin whales in this subsistence fishery (IWC 2005), however, the IWC's Scientific Committee recommended limiting the number of fin whale killed in this fishery to 1 to 4 individuals until accurate population estimates are produced.

Despite anecdotal observations from fishermen which suggest that large whales swim through their nets rather than get caught in them (NMFS 2000), fin whales have been entangled by fishing gear off Newfoundland and Labrador in small numbers: a total of 14 fin whales are reported to have been captured in coastal fisheries in those two provinces between 1969 and 1990 (Lien 1994, Perkins and Beamish 1979). Of these 14 fin whales, 7 are known to have died as a result of that capture, although most of the animals that died were less than 15 meters in length (Lien 1994). Between 1999 and 2005, there were 10 confirmed reports of fin whales being entangled in fishing gear along the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. and the Maritime Provinces of Canada (Cole *et al*. 2005, Nelson *et al*. 2007). Of these reports, Fin whales were injured in 1 of the entanglements and killed in 3 entanglements. These data suggest that, despite their size and strength, fin whales are likely to be entangled and, in some cases, killed by gear used in modern fisheries.

Fin whales are also killed and injured in collisions with vessels more frequently than any other whale. Of 92 fin whales that stranded along the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. between 1975 and 1996, 31 (33%) showed evidence of collisions with ships (Laist *et al*. 2001). Between 1999 and 2005, there were 15 reports of fin whales being struck by vessels along the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. and the Maritime Provinces of Canada (Cole *et al*. 2005, Nelson *et al*. 2007). Of these reports, 13 were confirmed as ship strikes which were reported as having resulted in the death of 11 fin whales.

Ship strikes were identified as a known or potential cause of death in 8 (20%) of 39 fin whales that stranded on the coast of Italy in the Mediterranean Sea between 1986 and 1997 (Laist *et al*. 2001). Throughout the Mediterranean Sea, 46 of the 287 fin whales that are recorded to have stranded between 1897 and 2001 were confirmed to died from injuries sustained by ship strikes (Panigada *et al*. 2006). Most of these fin whales (n = 43), were killed between 1972 and 2001 and the highest percentage (37 of 45 or ~82%) killed in the Ligurian Sea and adjacent waters, where the Pelagos Sanctuary for Marine Mammals was established. In addition to these ship strikes, there are numerous reports of fin whales being injured as result of ship strikes off the Atlantic coast of France and the United Kingdom (Jensen and Silber 2003).

Status

Fin whales were listed as endangered under the ESA in 1970. In 1976, the IWC protected fin whales from commercial whaling (Allen 1980). Fin whales are listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals (Baillie and Groombridge 1996). They are also protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild flora and fauna and the MMPA. Critical habitat has not been designated for fin whales.

It is difficult to assess the current status of fin whales because (1) there is no general agreement on the size of the fin whale population prior to whaling and (2) estimates of the current size of the different fin whale populations vary widely. We may never know the size of the fin whale population prior to whaling. Chapman (1976) estimated the "original" population size of fin whales off Nova Scotia as 1,200 and 2,400 off Newfoundland, although he offered no explanation or reasoning to support that estimate. Sergeant (1977) suggested that between 30,000 and 50,000 fin whales once populated the North Atlantic Ocean based on assumptions about catch levels during the whaling period. Sigurjónsson (1995) estimated that between 50,000 and 100,000 fin whales once populated the North Atlantic, although he provided no data or evidence to support that estimate. More recently, Palumbi and Roman (2006) estimated that about 360,000 fin whales (95% confidence interval = 249,000 - 481,000) populated the North Atlantic Ocean before whaling based on mutation rates and estimates of genetic diversity.

Similarly, estimates of the current size of the different fin whale populations and estimates of their global abundance also vary widely. The draft recovery plan for fin whales accepts a minimum population estimate of 2,362 fin whales for the North Atlantic Ocean (NMFS 2007); however, the recovery plan also states that this estimate, which is based on on shipboard and aerial surveys conducted in the Georges Bank and Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1999 is the "best" estimate of the size of this fin whale population (NMFS 2006, 2007). However, based on data produced by surveys conducted between 1978-1982 and other data gathered between 1966 and 1989, Hain *et al.* (1992) estimated that the population of fin whales in the western North Atlantic Ocean (specifically, between Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, and Nova Scotia) numbered about 1,500 whales in the winter and 5,000 whales in the spring and summer. Because authors do not always reconcile "new" estimates with earlier estimates, it is not clear whether the current "best" estimate represents a refinement of the estimate that was based on older data or whether the fin whale population in the North Atlantic has declined by about 50% since the early 1980s.

The East Greenland-Iceland fin whale population was estimated at 10,000 animals (95 % confidence interval = 7,600 - 14,200), based on surveys conducted in 1987 and 1989 (Buckland *et al.* 1992). The number of eastern Atlantic fin whales, which includes the British Isles-Spain-Portugal population, has been estimated at 17,000 animals (95% confidence interval = 10,400 - 28,900; Buckland *et al.* 1992). These estimates are both more than 15 years old and the data available do not allow us to determine if they remain valid.

Forcada *et al.* (1996) estimated the fin whale population in the western Mediterranean numbered 3,583 individuals (standard error = 967; 95% confidence interval = 2,130-6,027). This is similar to a more recent estimate published by Notarbartolo-di-Sciara *et al.* (2003). Within the Ligurian Sea, which includes the Pelagos Sanctuary for Marine Mammals and the Gulf of Lions, the fin whale population was estimated to number 901 (standard error = 196.1) whales. (Forcada *et al.* 1995).

Regardless of which of these estimates, if any, have the closest correspondence to the actual size and trend of the fin whale population, all of these estimates suggest that the global population of fin whales consists of tens of thousands of individuals and that the North Atlantic population consists of at least 2,000 individuals. Based on ecological theory and demographic patterns derived from several hundred imperiled species and populations, fin whales appear to exist at population sizes that are large enough to avoid demographic phenomena that are known to increase the extinction probability of species that exist as "small" populations (that is, "small" populations experience phenomena such as demographic stochasticity, inbreeding depression, Allee effects, among others, that cause their population size to become a threat in and of itself). As a result, we assume that fin whales are likely to be threatened more by exogenous threats such as anthropogenic activities (primarily whaling, entanglement, and ship strikes) or natural phenomena (such as disease, predation, or changes in the distribution and abundance of their prey in response to changing climate) than endogenous threats caused by the small size of their population.

Nevertheless, based on the evidence available, the number of fin whales that are recorded to have been killed or injured in the past 20 years by human activities or natural phenomena, does not appear to be increasing the extinction probability of fin whales, although it may slow the rate at which they recover from population declines that were caused by commercial whaling.

Diving and Social Behavior

The percentage of time fin whales spend at the surface varies. Some authors have reported that fin whales make 5-20 shallow dives with each of these dive lasting 13-20 seconds followed by a deep dive lasting between 1.5 and 15 minutes (Gambell 1985). Other authors have reported that the fin whale's most common dives last between 2 and 6 minutes, with 2 to 8 blows between dives (Hain *et al*. 1992, Watkins 1981).

In waters off the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. individual fin whales or pairs represented about 75% of the fin whales observed during the Cetacean and Turtle Assessment Program (Hain *et al*. 1992). Individual whales or groups of less than five individuals represented about 90% of the observations (out of 2,065 observations of fin whales, the mean group size was 2.9, the modal value was 1, and the range was 1 – 65 individuals; Hain *et al*. 1992).

Vocalizations and Hearing

The sounds fin whales produce underwater are one of the most studied *Balaenoptera* sounds. Fin whales produce a variety of low-frequency sounds in the 10-200 Hz band (Watkins 1981; Watkins *et al.* 1987a; Edds 1988; Thompson *et al.* 1992). The most typical signals are long, patterned sequences of short duration (0.5-2s) infrasonic pulses in the 18-35 Hz range (Patterson and Hamilton 1964). Estimated source levels are as high as 190 dB (Patterson and Hamilton 1964; Watkins *et al.* 1987a; Thompson *et al.* 1992; McDonald *et al.* 1995). In temperate waters intense bouts of long patterned sounds are very common from fall through spring, but also occur to a lesser extent during the summer in high latitude feeding areas (Clark and Charif 1998). Short sequences of rapid pulses in the 20-70 Hz band are associated with animals in social groups (McDonald *et al.* 1995, Clark personal communication, McDonald personal communication). Each pulse lasts on the order of one second and contains twenty cycles (Tyack 1999).

During the breeding season, fin whales produce a series of pulses in a regularly repeating pattern. These bouts of pulsing may last for longer than one day (Tyack 1999). The seasonality and stereotype of the bouts of patterned sounds suggest that these sounds are male reproductive displays (Watkins *et al.* 1987a), while the individual counter-calling data of McDonald *et al.* (1995) suggest that the more variable calls are contact calls. Some authors feel there is geographic differences in the frequency, duration and repetition of the pulses (Thompson *et al.* 1992).

As with other vocalizations produced by baleen whales, the function of fin whale vocalizations is unknown, although there are numerous hypotheses (which include include: maintenance of inter-individual distance, species and individual recognition, contextual information transmission, maintenance of social organization, location of topographic features, and location of prey resources; see the review by Thompson *et al.* 1992 for more information on these hypotheses). Responses to conspecific sounds have been demonstrated in a number of mysticetes, and there is no reason to believe that fin whales do not communicate similarly (Edds-Walton 1997). The low-frequency sounds produced by fin whales have the potential to travel over long distances, and it is possible that long-distance communication occurs in fin whales (Payne and Webb 1971; Edds-Walton 1997). Also, there is speculation that the sounds may function for long-range echolocation of large-scale geographic targets such as seamounts, which might be used for orientation and navigation (Tyack 1999).

Cetaceans have an auditory anatomy that follows the basic mammalian pattern, with some modifications to adapt to the demands of hearing in the sea. The typical mammalian ear is divided into the outer ear, middle ear, and inner ear. The outer ear is separated from the inner ear by the tympanic membrane, or eardrum. In terrestrial mammals, the outer ear, eardrum, and middle ear function to transmit airborne sound to the inner ear, where the sound is detected in a fluid. Since cetaceans already live in a fluid medium, they do not require this matching, and thus do not have an air-filled external ear canal. The inner ear is where sound energy is converted into neural signals that are transmitted to the central nervous system via the auditory nerve. Acoustic energy causes the basilar membrane in the cochlea to vibrate. Sensory cells at different positions along the basilar membrane are excited by different frequencies of sound (Tyack 1999). Baleen whales have inner ears that appear to be specialized for low-frequency hearing. In a study of the morphology of the mysticete auditory apparatus, Ketten (1997) hypothesized that large mysticetes have acute infrasonic hearing.

Humpback Whale

Distribution

Humpback whales are a cosmopolitan species that occur in the Atlantic, Indian, Pacific, and Southern Oceans. Humpback whales migrate seasonally between warmer, tropical or sub-tropical waters in winter months (where they reproduce and give birth to calves) and cooler, temperate or sub-Arctic waters in summer months (where they feed). In their summer foraging areas and winter calving areas, humpback whales tend to occupy shallower, coastal waters; during their seasonal migrations, however, humpback whales disperse widely in deep, pelagic waters and tend to avoid shallower coastal waters (Winn and Reichley 1985).

In the North Pacific Ocean, the summer range of humpback whales includes coastal and inland waters from Point Conception, California, north to the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea, and west along the Aleutian Islands to the Kamchatka Peninsula and into the Sea of Okhotsk (Tomlin 1967, Nemoto 1957, Johnson and Wolman 1984 as cited in NMFS 1991b). These whales migrate to Hawai'i, southern Japan, the Mariana Islands, and Mexico during the winter.

In the Atlantic Ocean, humpback whales range from the mid-Atlantic bight, the Gulf of Maine, across the southern coast of Greenland and Iceland, and along coast of Norway in the Barents Sea. These humpback whales migrate to the western coast of Africa and the Caribbean Sea during the winter.

In the Southern Ocean, humpback whales occur in waters off Antarctica. These whales migrate to the waters off Venezuela, Brazil, southern Africa, western and eastern Australia, New Zealand, and islands in the southwest Pacific during the austral winter. A separate population of humpback whales appears to reside in the Arabian Sea in the Indian Ocean off the coasts of Oman, Pakistan, and India (Mikhalev 1997).

Population Structure

Descriptions of the population structure of humpback whales differ depending on whether an author focuses on where humpback whales winter or where they feed. During winter months in northern or southern hemispheres, adult humpback whales migrate to specific areas in warmer, tropical waters to reproduce and give birth to calves. During summer months, humpback whales migrate to specific areas in northern temperate or sub-arctic waters to forage. In summer months, humpback whales from different "reproductive areas" will congregate to feed; in the winter months, whales will migrate from different foraging areas to a single wintering area. In either case, humpback whales appear to form "open" populations; that is, populations that are connected through the movement of individual animals.

For example, NMFS' Stock Assessment Reports recognize four "stocks" of humpback whales in the North Pacific Ocean, based on genetic and photo-identification studies: two Eastern North Pacific stocks, one Central North Pacific stock, and one Western Pacific stock (Hill and DeMaster 1998). The first two of these "stocks" are based on where these humpback whales winter: the central North Pacific "stock" winters in the waters around Hawai'i while the eastern North Pacific "stock" (also called the California-Oregon-Washington-Mexico stock) winters along coasts of Central America and Mexico. However, Calambokidis *et al*. (1997) identified humpback whales from Southeast Alaska (central North Pacific), the California-Oregon-Washington (eastern North Pacific), and Ogasawara Islands (Japan, Western Pacific) groups in the Hawai'ian Islands during the winter; humpback whales from the Kodiak Island, Southeast Alaska, and British Columbia groups in the Ogasawara Islands; and whales from the British Columbia, Southeast Alaska, Prince William Sound, and Shumagin-Aleutian Islands groups in Mexico.

Herman (1979), however, presented extensive evidence and various lines of reasoning to conclude that the humpback whales associated with the main Hawai'ian Islands immigrated to those waters only in the past 200 years. Winn and Reichley (1985) identified genetic exchange between the humpback whales that winter off Hawai'i and those that winter off Mexico (with further mixing on feeding areas in Alaska) and suggested that the humpback whales that winter in Hawai'i may have emigrated from wintering areas in Mexico. Based on these patterns of movement, we conclude that the various "stocks" of humpback whales are not true populations or, at least, they represent populations that experience substantial levels of immigration and emigration.

A "population" of humpback whales winters in an area extending from the South China Sea east through the Philippines, Ryukyu Retto, Ogasawara Gunto, Mariana Islands, and Marshall Islands (Rice 1998). Based on whaling records, humpback whales wintering in this area have also occurred in the southern Marianas through the month of May (Eldredge 1991). There are several recent records of humpback whales in the Mariana Islands, at Guam, Rota, and Saipan during

January through March (Darling and Mori 1993; Eldredge 1991, 2003, Taitano 1991). During the summer, whales from this population migrate to the Kuril Islands, Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, Kodiak, Southeast Alaska, and British Columbia to feed (Angliss and Outlaw 2007; Calambokidis 1997, 2001).

In the Atlantic Ocean, humpback whales aggregate in four feeding areas in the summer months: (1) Gulf of Maine, eastern Canada, (2) west Greenland, (3) Iceland and (4) Norway (Katona and Beard 1990; Smith *et al.* 1999). The principal breeding range for these whales lies from the Antilles and northern Venezuela to Cuba (Winn *et al.* 1975, Balcomb and Nichols 1982, Whitehead and Moore 1982). The largest contemporary breeding aggregations occur off the Greater Antilles where humpback whales from all of the North Atlantic feeding areas have been identified from photographs (Katona and Beard 1990, Clapham *et al.* 1993b, Mattila *et al.* 1994, Palsbøll *et al.* 1997, Smith *et al.* 1999, Stevick *et al.* 2003a). Historically, an important breeding aggregation was located in the eastern Caribbean based on the important humpback whale fisheries this region supported (Mitchell and Reeves 1983, Reeves *et al.* 2001, Smith and Reeves 2003). Although sightings persist in those areas, modern humpback whale abundance appears to be low (Winn *et al.* 1975, Levenson and Leapley 1978, Swartz *et al.* 2003). Winter aggregations also occur at the Cape Verde Islands in the Eastern North Atlantic (Reiner *et al.* 1996, Reeves *et al.* 2002, Moore *et al.* 2003). In another example of the "open" structure of humpback whale populations, an individual humpback whale migrated from the Indian Ocean to the South Atlantic Ocean and demonstrated that individual whales may migrate from one ocean basin to another (Pomilla and Rosenbaum 2005).

As discussed previously, a separate population of humpback whales appears to reside in the Arabian Sea in the Indian Ocean off the coasts of Oman, Pakistan, and India (Mikhalev 1997).

Threats to the Species

NATURAL THREATS. There is limited information on natural phenomena that kill or injure humpback whales. We know that humpback whales are killed by orcas (Dolphin 1989, Florez-González *et al.* 1984, Whitehead and Glass 1985) and are probably killed by false killer whales and sharks. Because 7 female and 7 male humpback whales stranded on the beaches of Cape Cod and had died from toxin produced by dinoflagellates between November 1987 and January 1988, we also know that adult and juvenile humpback whales are killed by naturally-produced biotoxins (Geraci *et al.* 1989).

Other natural sources of mortality, however, remain largely unknown. Similarly, we do not know whether and to what degree natural mortality limits or restricts patterns of growth or variability in humpback whale populations.

ANTHROPOGENIC THREATS. Three human activities are known to threaten humpback whales: whaling, commercial fishing, and shipping. Historically, whaling represented the greatest threat to every population of humpback whales and was ultimately responsible for listing humpback whales as an endangered species. From 1900 to 1965, nearly 30,000 whales were taken in modern whaling operations of the Pacific Ocean. Prior to that, an unknown number of humpback whales were taken (Perry *et al.* 1999). In 1965, the International Whaling Commission banned commercial hunting of humpback whales in the Pacific Ocean. As its legacy, whaling has reduced humpback whales to a fraction of their historic population size and, as a result, makes it easier for other human activities to push these whales closer to extinction.

Humpback whales are also killed or injured during interactions with commercial fishing gear, although the evidence available suggests that these interactions on humpback whale populations may not have significant, adverse consequence for humpback whale populations. Like fin whales, humpback whales have been entangled by fishing gear off Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada: a total of 595 humpback whales are reported to have been captured in coastal fisheries in those two provinces between 1969 and 1990 (Lien 1994, Perkins and Beamish 1979). Of these whales, 94 are known to have died as a result of that capture, although, like fin whales, most of the animals that died were smaller: less than 12 meters in length (Lien 1994). These data suggest that, despite their size and strength, fin whales are likely to be entangled and, in some cases, killed by gear used in modern fisheries.

In 1991, a humpback whale was observed entangled in longline gear and released alive (Hill *et al.* 1997). In 1995, a humpback whale in Maui waters was found trailing numerous lines (not fishery-related) and entangled in mooring lines. The whale was successfully released, but subsequently stranded and was attacked and killed by tiger sharks in the surf zone. Also in 1996, a vessel from Pacific Missile Range Facility in Hawaii rescued an entangled humpback, removing two crab pot floats from the whale; the gear was traced to a recreational fisherman in southeast Alaska. The whale was successfully released, but subsequently became entrapped and was attacked and killed by tiger sharks in the surf zone.

Along the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. and the Maritime Provinces of Canada, there were 160 reports of humpback whales being entangled in fishing gear between 1999 and 2005 (Cole *et al.* 2005, Nelson *et al.* 2007). Of these reports, 95 entanglements were confirmed resulting in the injury of 11 humpback whales and the death of 9 whales. No information is available on the number of humpback whales that have been killed or seriously injured by interactions with fishing fleets outside of U.S. waters.

The number of humpback whales killed by ship strikes is exceeded only by fin whales (Jensen and Silber 2003). On the Pacific coast, a humpback whale is killed about every other year by ship strikes (Barlow *et al.* 1997). The humpback whale calf that was found stranded on Oahu with evidence of vessel collision (propeller cuts) in 1996 suggests that ship collisions might kill adults, juvenile, and calves (NMFS unpublished data). Of 123 hummpback whales that stranded along the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. between 1975 and 1996, 10 (8.1%) showed evidence of collisions with ships (Laist *et al.* 2001). Between 1999 and 2005, there were 18 reports of humpback whales being struck by vessels along the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. and the Maritime Provinces of Canada (Cole *et al.* 2005, Nelson *et al.* 2007). Of these reports, 13 were confirmed as ship strikes which were reported as having resulted in the death of 7 humpback whales. Despite several literature searches, we did not identify information on the number of humpback whales killed or seriously injured by ship strikes outside of U.S. waters.

In addition to ship strikes in North America and Hawai'i, there are several reports of humpback whales being injured as result of ship strikes off the Antarctic Peninsula, in the Caribbean Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, off Australia, Bay of Bengal (Indian Ocean), Brazil, New Zealand, Peru, South Africa,

Status

It is difficult to assess the current status of humpback whales for the same reasons that it is difficult to assess the status of fin whales: (1) there is no general agreement on the size of the humpback whale population prior to whaling and (2) estimates of the current size of the different humpback whale populations vary widely and produce estimates that are not always comparable to one another, although robust estimates of humpback whale populations in the western North Atlantic have been published. We may never know the size of the humpback whale population prior to whaling.

Winn and Reichley (1985) argued that the global population of humpback whales consisted of at least 150,000 whales in the early 1900s, with the largest population historically occurring in the Southern Ocean. Based on analyses of mutation rates and estimates of genetic diversity, Palumbi and Roman (2006) concluded that there may have been as many as 240,000 (95% confidence interval = 156,000 – 401,000) humpback whales in the North Atlantic before whaling began. In the western North Atlantic between Davis Strait, Iceland and the West Indies, Mitchell and Reeves (1983) estimated there were at least 4,685 humpback whales in 1865 based on available whaling records (although the authors note that this does not represent a "pre-exploitation estimate" because whalers from Greenland, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, New England, and the Caribbean Sea had been hunting humpback whales before 1865).

Estimates of the number of humpback whales occurring in the different populations that inhabit the Northern Pacific population have risen over time. In the 1980s, estimates ranged from 1,407 to 2,100 (Baker 1985; Darling and Morowitz 1986; Baker and Herman 1987), while recent estimates place the population size at about 6,000 whales (standard error = 474) in the North Pacific (Calambokidis *et al.* 1997; Cerchio 1998; Mobley *et al.* 1999). Based on data collected between 1980 and 1983, Baker and Herman (1987) used a capture-recapture methodology to produce a population estimate of 1,407 whales (95% confidence interval = 1,113 - 1,701). More recently, (Calambokidis *et al.* 1997) relied on resightings estimated from photographic records of individuals to produce an estimate of 6,010 humpback whales occurred in the North Pacific Ocean. Because the estimates produced by the different methodologies are not directly comparable, it is not clear which of these estimates is more accurate or if the change from 1,407 to 6,000 individuals results from a real increase in the size of the humpback whale population, sampling bias in one or both studies, or assumptions in the methods used to produce estimates from the individuals that were sampled. Since the last of these estimates was published almost 12 years ago, we do not know if the estimates represent current population sizes.

Stevick *et al.* (2003) estimated the size of the North Atlantic humpback whale population between 1979 and 1993 by applying statistical analyses that are commonly used in capture-recapture studies to individual humpback whales that were identified based on natural markings. Between 1979 and 1993, they estimated that the North Atlantic populations (what they call the "West Indies breeding population") consisted of between 5,930 and 12,580 individual whales.

The best estimate they produced (11,570; 95% confidence interval = 10,290 -13,390) was based on samples from 1992 and 1993. If we assume that this population has grown according to the instantaneous rate of increase Stevick *et al*. (2003) estimated for this population ($r = 0.0311$), this would lead us to estimate that this population might consist of about 18,400 individual whales in 2007-2008.

Regardless of which of these estimates, if any, most closely correspond to the actual size and trend of the humpback whale population, all of these estimates suggest that the global population of humpback whales consists of tens of thousands of individuals and that the North Atlantic population consists of at least 2,000 individuals. Based on ecological theory and demographic patterns derived from several hundred imperiled species and populations, humpback whales appear to exist at population sizes that are large enough to avoid demographic phenomena that are known to increase the extinction probability of species that exist as "small" populations (that is, "small" populations experience phenomena such as demographic stochasticity, inbreeding depression, Allee effects, among others, that cause their population size to become a threat in and of itself). As a result, we assume that humpback whales will have elevated extinction probabilities because of exogenous threats caused by anthropogenic activities (primarily whaling, entanglement, and ship strikes) and natural phenomena (such as disease, predation, or changes in the distribution and abundance of their prey in response to changing climate) rather than endogenous threats caused by the small size of their population.

Diving and Social Behavior

In Hawai'ian waters, humpback whales remain almost exclusively within the 1820 m isobath and usually within waters depths less than 182 meters. Maximum diving depths are approximately 150 m (492 ft) (but usually <60 m [197 ft]), with a very deep dive (240 m [787 ft]) recorded off Bermuda (Hamilton *et al.* 1997). They may remain submerged for up to 21 min (Dolphin 1987). Dives on feeding grounds ranged from 2.1-5.1 min in the north Atlantic (Goodyear unpublished manuscript). In southeast Alaska average dive times were 2.8 min for feeding whales, 3.0min for non-feeding whales, and 4.3 min for resting whales (Dolphin 1987). In the Gulf of California humpback whale dive times averaged 3.5 min (Strong 1989). Because most humpback prey is likely found above 300 m depths most humpback dives are probably relatively shallow.

In a review of the social behavior of humpback whales, Clapham (1986) reported that they form small, unstable social groups during the breeding season. During the feeding season they form small groups that occasionally aggregate on concentrations of food. Feeding groups are sometimes stable for long-periods of times. There is good evidence of some territoriality on feeding (Clapham 1994, 1996), and calving areas (Tyack 1981). In calving areas, males sing long complex songs directed towards females, other males or both. The breeding season can best be described as a floating lek or male dominance polygyny (Clapham 1996). Intermale competition for proximity to females can be intense as expected by the sex ratio on the breeding grounds which may be as high as 2.4:1.

Vocalizations and Hearing

Humpback whales produce at least three kinds of vocalization: (1) complex songs with components ranging from at least 20Hz B 4 kHz with estimated source levels from 144 B 174 dB, which are mostly produced by males on the breeding grounds (Payne 1970, Winn *et al.* 1970, Richardson *et al.* 1995); (2) social sounds in the breeding areas that extend from 50 Hz B more than 10 kHz with most energy below 3 kHz (Tyack and Whitehead 1983, Richardson *et al.* 1995); and (3) feeding area vocalizations that are less frequent, but tend to be 20Hz B 2 kHz with estimated sources levels in excess of 175 dB re 1 μPa-m (Thompson *et al.* 1986, Richardson *et al.* 1995). Sounds that investigators associate with aggressive behavior in male humpback whales are very different from songs; they extend from 50 Hz to 10 kHz (or higher), with most energy in components below 3 kHz (Tyack 1983, Silber 1986). These sounds appear to have an effective range of up to 9 kilometers (Tyack and Whitehead 1983). A general description of the anatomy of the ear for cetaceans is provided in the description of the fin whale above; that description is also applicable to humpback whales.

North Atlantic Right Whale

Distribution

Right whales exist as three separate species: North Atlantic right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) that are distributed seasonally from the Gulf of Mexico north to waters off Newfoundlamd and Labrador (on the western Atlantic) and from northern Africa and Spain north to waters north of Scotland and Ireland (the Shetland and Orkney Islands; on the eastern Atlantic coast); North Pacific right whales (*E. japonica*) that historically ranged seasonally from the coast of Baja California north to the northern Bering Sea (on the eastern Pacific) and the south China Sea north to the Sea of Okhotsk and the Kamchatka Peninsula (on the western Pacific); and Southern right whales (*E. australis*) which historically ranged across the Southern Ocean, including waters off southern Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, and southern Africa (north to Madagascar).

In the western Atlantic Ocean, right whales generally occur in northwest Atlantic waters west of the Gulf Stream and are most commonly associated with cooler waters (21°C). North Atlantic right whales are most abundant in Cape Cod Bay between February and April (Hamilton and Mayo 1990 Schevill *et al*. 1986, Watkins and Schevill 1982), in the Great South Channel in May and June (Kenney *et al.* 1986, Payne *et al*. 1990), and off Georgia and Florida from mid-November through March (Slay *et al*. 1996). Right whales also frequent the Bay of Fundy, Browns and Baccaro Banks (in Canadian waters), Stellwagen Bank and Jeffrey's Ledge in the spring and summer months, and use mid-Atlantic waters as a migratory pathway between the winter calving grounds and their spring and summer nursery/feeding areas in the Gulf of Maine. North Atlantic right whales are not found in the Caribbean Sea and have been recorded only rarely in the Gulf of Mexico.

Population Structure

NMFS recognizes two extant groups of right whales in the North Atlantic Ocean (*E. glacialis*): an eastern population and a western population. A third population may have existed in the central Atlantic (migrating from east of Greenland to the Azores or Bermuda), but appears to be extinct, if it existed as a distinct population at all (Perry *et al*. 1999).

The degree to which the two extant populations of North Atlantic right whales are connected through immigration or emigration is unknown, but the two populations are treated as if they are isolated from one another.

Threats to the Species

NATURAL THREATS. Several researchers have suggested that the recovery of right whales in the northern hemisphere has been impeded by competition with other whales for food (Rice 1974, Scarff 1986). Mitchell (1975) analyzed trophic interactions among baleen whales in the western North Atlantic and noted that the foraging grounds of right whales overlapped with the foraging grounds of sei whales and both preferentially feed on copepods. Reeves *et al.* (1978) noted that several species of whales feed on copepods in the eastern North Pacific, so that the foraging pattern and success of right whales would be affected by other whales as well. Mitchell (1975) argued that the right whale population in the North Atlantic had been depleted by several centuries of whaling before steam-driven boats allowed whalers to hunt sei whales; from this, he hypothesized that the decline of the right whale population made more food available to sei whales and helped their population to grow. He then suggested that competition with the sei whale population impedes or prevents the recovery of the right whale population.

ANTHROPOGENIC THREATS. Several human activities are known to threaten North Atlantic right whales: whaling, commercial fishing, shipping, and water pollution. Historically, whaling represented the greatest threat to every population of fin whales and was ultimately responsible for listing fin whales as an endangered species. As its legacy, whaling reduced North Atlantic right whales to about 300 individuals in the western North Atlantic Ocean; the North Atlantic right whales population in the eastern North Atlantic Ocean is probably much smaller, although we cannot estimate the size of that population from the data available.

Of the current threats to North Atlantic right whales, entanglement in commercial fishing gear and ship strikes currently pose the greatest threat to the persistence of North Atlantic right whales. Along the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. and the Maritime Provinces of Canada, there were 43 reports of right whales being entangled in fishing gear between 1999 and 2005 (n = 18; Cole *et al*. 2005, Nelson *et al*. 2007). Of the 39 reports that NMFS could confirm, right whales were injured in 5 of the entanglements and killed in 4 entanglements.

In the same region, there were 18 reports of right whales being struck by vessels between 1999 and 2005 (n = 18; Cole *et al*. 2005, Nelson *et al*. 2007). Of the 17 reports that NMFS could confirm, right whales were injured 2 of the ship strikes and killed in 9.

Status

Right whales (both *E. glacialis* and *E. australi*s) were listed as endangered under the ESA in 1970. In April, 2008, NMFS divided right whales into three separate listings: Northern right whales (*E. glacialis*), North Pacific right whales (*E. japonica*), and Southern right whales (*E. australis*), all of which were listed as endangered. Since 1949, the northern right whale has been protected from commercial whaling by the International Whaling Commission. They are also protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild flora and fauna and the MMPA. NMFS designated critical habitat for the North Atlantic population of right whales on 3 June 1994 (59 FR 28793).

In the Atlantic Ocean, Knowlton *et al*. (1994) concluded, based on data from 1987 through 1992, that the western North Atlantic right whale population was growing at a net annual rate of 2.5%

(coefficient of variation = 0.12). This rate was also used in NMFS' marine mammal Stock Assessment Reports (e.g., Blaylock *et al.* 1995; Waring *et al.,* 1997). Since then, the data used in Knowlton *et al.* (1994) have been re-evaluated, and new attempts to model the trends of the western North Atlantic right whale population have been published (e.g., Kraus 1997, Caswell *et al.* 1999).

Caswell *et al.* (1999), using data on reproduction and survival through 1996, determined that the western North Atlantic right whale population was declining at a rate of 2.4% per year. One model they used suggested that the mortality rate of the right whale population has increased five-fold in less than one generation. According to Caswell *et al.* (1999), if the mortality rate as of 1996 does not decrease and the population performance does not improve, extinction could occur within 100 years and would be certain within 400 years, with a mean time to extinction of 191 years. In the three calving seasons following the Caswell *et al.* (1999) analysis, only 10 calves are known to have been born into the population. However, at least 16 calves (one of which subsequently died of unknown causes) were born during the 2000 to 2001 calving season, providing hope that the right whale's rate of decline may be slowing.

Although the rate at which the population of North Atlantic right whales is growing or declining remains uncertain, since the early 1990s NMFS has reported the population size of northern right whales as fluctuating around 300 animals. A population of 300 individuals is sufficiently small for the population to experience demographic phenomena such as demographic stochasticity, inbreeding depression, Allee effects, among others, that cause their population size to become a threat in and of itself. These phenomena would increase the extinction probability of northern right whales and amplify the potential consequences of human-related activities on this species. Based on their population size and population ecology (that is, slow-growing mammals that give birth to single calves with several years between births), we assume that right whales will have elevated extinction probabilities because of exogenous threats caused by anthropogenic activities (primarily whaling, entanglement, and ship strikes) and natural phenomena (such as disease, predation, or changes in the distribution and abundance of their prey in response to changing climate) *as well as* endogenous threats resulting from the small size of their population.

In general, an individual's contribution to the growth (or decline) of the population it represents depends, in part, on the number of individuals in the population: the smaller the population, the more the performance of a single individual is likely to affect the population's growth or decline (Coulson *et al.* 2006). Given the small size of the northern right whale population, the performance (= "fitness" measured as the longevity of individuals and their reproductive success over their lifespan) of individual whales would be expected to have appreciable consequences for the growth or decline of the northern right whale population. Evidence of the small population dynamics of North Atlantic right whales appears in demographic models that suggest that the death or survival of one or two individual animals is sufficient to determine whether North Atlantic right whales are likely to accelerate or abate the rate at which their population continues to decline (Fujiwara and Caswell 2001). As populations and species become perilously close to extinction, the death, survival, or reproductive success of one or two individuals can be sufficient to make the difference between persistence and extinction.

Diving and Social Behavior

Right whales dive as deep as 306 m (Mate *et al.* 1992). In the Great South Channel, average diving time is close to 2 minutes; average dive depth is 7.3 m with a maximum of 85.3 m (Winn *et al.* 1994). In the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf the average diving time is about 7 min (CeTAP 1982). Northern right whales are primarily seen in groups of less than 12, most often singles or pairs (Jefferson *et al.* 1993). They may form larger groups while on feeding or breeding areas (Jefferson *et al.* 1993).

Vocalizations

A general description of the anatomy of the ear for cetaceans is provided in the description of the blue whale above. Limited data indicate that northern right whales produce moans of less than 400 Hz in frequency (Watkins and Schevill 1972, Thompson *et al.* 1979, Spero 1981). Right whales appear to use low frequency sounds as contact calls while summering in the Bay of Fundy (Spero 1981).

Sei Whale

Distribution

Sei whales occur in every ocean except the Arctic Ocean. The migratory pattern of this species is thought to encompass long distances from high-latitude feeding areas in summer to low-latitude breeding areas in winter; however, the location of winter areas remains largely unknown (Perry *et al.* 1999). Sei whales are often associated with deeper waters and areas along the continental shelf edge (Hain *et al.* 1985); however, this general offshore pattern of sei whale distribution is disrupted during occasional incursions into more shallow and inshore waters (Waring *et al.* 2004).

In the western Atlantic Ocean, sei whales occur from Labrador, Nova Scotia,and Labrador in the summer months and migrate south to Florida, the Gulf of Mexico, and the northern Caribbean (Gambell 1985, Mead 1977). In the eastern Atlantic Ocean, sei whales occur in the Norwegian Sea (as far north as Finnmark in northeastern Norway), occasionally occurring as far north as Spitsbergen Island, and migrate south to Spain, Portugal, and northwest Africa (Jonsgård and Darling 1974, Gambell 1985).

In the north Pacific Ocean, sei whales occur from the Bering Sea south to California (on the east) and the coasts of Japan and Korea (on the west). During the winter, sei whales are found from 20°23°N (Masaki 1977; Gambell 1985). Horwood (1987) reported that 75 - 85% of the North Pacific population of sei whales resides east of 180° longitude.

Sei whales occur throughout the Southern Ocean during the summer months, although they do not migrate as far south to feed as blue or fin whales. During the austral winter, sei whales occur off Brazil and the western and eastern coasts of Southern Africa and Australia.

Population Structure

The population structure of sei whales is largely unknown because there are so few data on this species. The International Whaling Commission's Scientific Committee groups all of the sei whales in the entire North Pacific Ocean into one population (Donovan 1991). However, some mark-recapture, catch distribution, and morphological research suggest more than one "stock" of sei whales may exist in the Pacific: one between 175°W and 155°W longitude, and another east of 155°W longitude (Masaki 1977); however, the amount of movement between these "stocks" suggests that they probably do not represent demographically-isolated populations as we use this concept in this Opinion.

Mitchell and Chapman (1977) divided sei whales in the western North Atlantic in two populations, one that occupies the Nova Scotian Shelf and a second that occupies the Labrador Sea. Sei whales are most common on Georges Bank and into the Gulf of Maine and the Bay of Fundy during spring and summer, primarily in deeper waters. There are occasional influxes of sei whales further into Gulf of Maine waters, presumably in conjunction with years of high copepod abundance inshore. Sei whales are occasionally seen feeding in association with right whales in the southern Gulf of Maine and in the Bay of Fundy.

Threats to the Species

NATURAL THREATS. Sei whales appear to compete with blue, fin, and right whales for prey and that competition may limit the total abundance of each of the species (Rice 1974, Scarff 1986). As discussed previously in the narratives for fin and right whales, the foraging areas of right and sei whales in the western north Atlantic Ocean overlap and both whales feed preferentially on copepods (Mitchell 1975). In the Southern Ocean, the sei whale population was reported to have increased in size after whalers had reduced the number of blue and fin whales in the region (IWC 1974); as these populations increase, the intensity of competition between these species should increase as well and the larger whales are most likely to prevail in that competition.

ANTHROPOGENIC THREATS. Two human activities are known to threaten sei whales: whaling and shipping. Historically, whaling represented the greatest threat to every population of sei whales and was ultimately responsible for listing sei whales as an endangered species. From 1910 to 1975, approximately 74,215 sei whales were caught in the entire North Pacific Ocean (Horwood 1987, Perry *et al.* 1999). From the early 1900s, Japanese whaling operations consisted of a large proportion of sei whales: 300 - 600 sei whales were killed per year from 1911 to 1955. The sei whale catch peaked in 1959, when 1,340 sei whales were killed. In 1971, after a decade of high sei whale catch numbers, sei whales were scarce in Japanese waters.

In the North Atlantic Ocean, sei whales were hunted from land stations in Norway and Iceland in the early- to mid-1880s, when blue whales started to become more scarce. In the late 1890s, whalers began hunting sei whales in Davis Strait and off the coasts of Newfoundland. In the early 1900s, whalers from land stations on the Outer Hebrides and Shetland Islands started to hunt sei whales. Between 1966 and 1972, whalers from land stations on the east coast of Nova Scotia engaged in extensive hunts of sei whales on the Nova Scotia shelf, killing about 825 sei whales (Mitchell and Chapman 1977).

Sei whales are occasionally killed in collisions with vessels. Of 3 sei whales that stranded along the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. between 1975 and 1996, 2 showed evidence of collisions with ships (Laist *et al*. 2001). Between 1999 and 2005, there were 3 reports of sei whales being struck by vessels along the Atlantic Coast of the U.S. and the Maritime Provinces of Canada (Cole *et* *al*. 2005, Nelson *et al*. 2007). Two of these ship strikes were reported as having resulted in the death of the sei whale.

Status

Sei whales were listed as endangered under the ESA in 1973. In the North Pacific, the International Whaling Commission began management of commercial taking of sei whales in 1970, and fin whales were given full protection in 1976 (Allen 1980). Sei whales are also protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild flora and fauna and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. They are listed as endangered under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals (Baillie and Groombridge 1996). Critical habitat has not been designated for sei whales.

Prior to commercial whaling, sei whales in the north Pacific are estimated to have numbered 42,000 individuals (Tillman 1977), although Ohsumi and Fukuda (1975) estimated that sei whales in the north Pacific numbered about 49,000 whales in 1963, had been reduced to 37,000 or 38,000 whales by 1967, and reduced again to 20,600 to 23,700 whales by 1973. Japanese and Soviet catches of sei whales in the North Pacific and Bering Sea increased from 260 whales in 1962 to over 4,500 in 1968 and 1969, after which the sei whale population declined rapidly (Mizroch *et al.* 1984). When commercial whaling for sei whales ended in 1974, the population of sei whales in the North Pacific had been reduced to between 7,260 and 12,620 animals (Tillman 1977). In the same year, the north Atlantic population of sei whales was estimated to number about 2,078 individuals, including 965 whales in the Labrador Sea group and 870 whales in the Nova Scotia group (IWC 1977, Mitchell and Chapman 1977).

About 50 sei whales are estimated to occur in the North Pacific “stock” with another 77 sei whales in the Hawaiian “stock” (Lowry *et al*. 2007). The abundance of sei whales in the Atlantic Ocean remains unknown (Lowry *et al*. 2007). In California waters, only one confirmed and five possible sei whale sightings were recorded during 1991, 1992, and 1993 aerial and ship surveys (Carretta and Forney 1993, Mangels and Gerrodette 1994). No sightings were confirmed off Washington and Oregon during recent aerial surveys. Several researchers have suggested that the recovery of right whales in the northern hemisphere has been slowed by other whales that compete with right whales for food. Mitchell (1975) analyzed trophic interactions among baleen whales in the western north Atlantic and noted that the foraging grounds of right whales overlapped with the foraging grounds of sei whales and both preferentially feed on copepods.

Like blue whales, the information available on the status and trend of sei whales do not allow us to reach any conclusions about the extinction risks facing sei whales as a species, or particular populations of sei whales. With the limited data available on sei whales, we do not know whether these whales exist at population sizes large enough to avoid demographic phenomena that are known to increase the extinction probability of species that exist as “small” populations (that is, “small” populations experience phenomena such as demographic stochasticity, inbreeding depression, Allee effects, among others, that cause their population size to become a threat in and of itself) or if sei whales might are threatened more by exogenous threats such as anthropogenic activities (primarily whaling, entanglement, and ship strikes) or natural phenomena (such as disease, predation, or changes in the distribution and abundance of their prey in response to changing climate). However, sei whales have historically exhibited sudden increases in abundance in particular areas followed by sudden decreases in number. Several authors have reported "invasion years" in which large numbers of sei whales appeared off areas like Norway and Scotland, followed the next year by sudden decreases in population numbers (Jonsgård and Darling 1974).

With the evidence available, we do not know if this year-to-year variation still occurs in sei whales. However, if sei whales exist as a fraction of their historic population sizes, large amounts of variation in their abundance would increase the extinction probabilities of individual populations (Fagan and Holmes 2006, Fagan *et al*. 1999, 2001).

Diving and Social Behavior

Generally, sei whales make 5-20 shallow dives of 20-30 sec duration followed by a deep dive of up to 15 min (Gambell 1985). The depths of sei whale dives have not been studied, however the composition of their diet suggests that they do not perform dives in excess of 300 meters. Sei whales are usually found in small groups of up to 6 individuals, but they commonly form larger groupings when they are on feeding grounds (Gambell 1985).

Vocalizations and Hearing

There is a limited amount of information on the vocal behavior of sei whales. McDonald *et al*. (2005) recorded sei whale vocalizations off the Antarctic Peninsula that included broadband sounds in the 100-600 Hz range with 1.5 second duration and tonal and upsweep call in the 200-600 Hz range 1-3 second duration. During visual and acoustic surveys conducted in the Hawai'ian Islands in 2002, Rankin and Barlow (2007) recorded 107 sei whale vocalizations, which they classified as two variations of low-frequency downswept calls. The first variation consisted of sweeps from 100 Hz to 44 Hz, over 1.0 seconds. The second variation, which was more common (105 out of 107) consisted of low frequency calls which swept from 39 Hz to 21 Hz over 1.3 seconds. These vocalization are different from sounds attributed to sei whales in the Atlantic and Southern Oceans but are similar to sounds that had previously been attributed to fin whales in Hawaiian waters.

A general description of the anatomy of the ear for cetaceans is provided in the description of the blue whale above.

Sperm Whale

Distribution

Sperm whales occur in every ocean except the Arctic Ocean. Sperm whales are found throughout the North Pacific and are distributed broadly from tropical and temperate waters to the Bering Sea as far north as Cape Navarin. Mature, female, and immature sperm whales of both sexes are found in more temperate and tropical waters from the equator to around 45˚ N throughout the year. These groups of adult females and immature sperm whales are rarely found at latitudes higher than 50˚ N and 50˚ S (Reeves and Whitehead 1997). Sexually mature males join these groups throughout the winter. During the summer, mature male sperm whales are thought to move north into the Aleutian Islands, Gulf of Alaska, and the Bering Sea.

In the western Atlantic Ocean, sperm whales are distributed in a distinct seasonal cycle, concentrated east-northeast of Cape Hatteras in winter and shifting northward in spring when whales are found throughout the Mid-Atlantic Bight. Distribution extends further northward to areas north of Georges Bank and the Northeast Channel region in summer and then south of New England in fall, back to the Mid-Atlantic Bight.

In the eastern Atlantic Ocean, mature male sperm whales have been recorded as far north as Spitsbergen (Oien, 1990). Recent observations of sperm whales and stranding events involving sperm whales from the eastern North Atlantic suggest that solitary and paired mature male sperm whales predominantly occur in waters off Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and the Norwegian Sea (Gunnlaugsson and Sigurjonsson 1990, Oien 1990, Christensen *et al*. 1992).

In the Mediterranean Sea sperm whales are found from the Alboran Sea to the Levant Basin, mostly over steep slope and deep offshore waters. Sperm whales are rarely sighted in the Sicilian Channel, and are vagrant in the northern Adriatic and Aegean Seas (Notarbartolo di Sciara and Demma 1997). In the Italian seas sperm whales are more frequently associated with the continental slope off western Liguria, western Sardinia, northern and eastern Sicily, and both coasts of Calabria.

Sperm whales are found throughout the North Pacific and are distributed broadly from tropical and temperate waters to the Bering Sea as far north as Cape Navarin. Mature female and immature sperm whales of both sexes are found in more temperate and tropical waters from the equator to around 45°N throughout the year. However, groups of adult females and immature sperm whales are rarely found at latitudes higher than 50°N and 50°S (Reeves and Whitehead 1997). Sexually mature males join these groups throughout the winter. During the summer, mature male sperm whales are thought to migrate into the Aleutian Islands, Gulf of Alaska, and the Bering Sea.

Sperm whales commonly concentrate around oceanic islands in areas of upwelling, and along the outer continental shelf and mid-ocean waters. Because they inhabit deeper pelagic waters, their distribution does not include the broad continental shelf of the Eastern Bering Sea and these whales generally remain offshore in the eastern Aleutian Islands, Gulf of Alaska, and the Bering Sea.

Sperm whales have a strong preference for the 3,280 feet (1,000 meters) depth contour and seaward. Berzin (1971) reported that they are restricted to waters deeper than 300 meters (984 feet), while Watkins (1977) and Reeves and Whitehead (1997) reported that they are usually not found in waters less than 1,000 meters (3,281 feet) deep. While deep water is their typical habitat, sperm whales have been observed near Long Island, New York, in water between 41-55 meters (135-180 feet; Scott and Sadove 1997). When they are found relatively close to shore, sperm whales are usually associated with sharp increases in bottom depth where upwelling occurs and biological production is high, implying the presence of a good food supply (Clarke 1956).

Population Structure

The population structure of sperm whales is largely unknown. Lyrholm and Gyllenstein (1998) reported moderate, but statistically significant, differences in sperm whale mitochondrial (mtDNA) between ocean basins, although sperm whales throughout the world appear to be homogenous genetically (Whitehead 2003). Genetic studies also suggest that sperm whales of both genders commonly move across over ocean basins and that males, but not females, often breed in ocean basins that are different from the one in which they were born (Whitehead, 2003).

Sperm whales may not form "populations" as that term is normally conceived. Jaquet (1996) outlined a hierarchical social and spatial structure that includes temporary clusters of animals, family units of 10 or 12 females and their young, groups of about 20 animals that remain together for hours or days, "aggregations" and "super-aggregations" of 40 or more whales, and "concentrations" that include 1,000 or more animals (Peterson 1986, Whitehead and Wiegart 1990, Whitehead *et al*. 1991). The "family unit" forms the foundation for sperm whale society and most females probably spend their entire life in the same family unit (Whitehead 2002). The dynamic nature of these relationships and the large spatial areas they are believed to occupy might complicate or preclude attempts to apply traditional population concepts, which tend to rely on group fidelity to geographic distributions that are relatively static over time.

Atlantic Ocean

Based on harvests of tagged sperm whales or sperm whales with other distinctive marking, sperm whales in the North Atlantic Ocean appear to represent a single population, with the possible exception of the sperm whales that appear to reside in the Gulf of Mexico. Mitchell (1975) reported one sperm whale that was tagged on the Scotian Shelf and killed about 7 years later off Spain. Donovan (1991) reported five to six handheld harpoons from the Azore sperm whale fishery that were recovered from whales killed off northwest Spain, with another Azorean harpoon recovered from a male sperm whale killed off Iceland (Martin 1982). These patterns suggest that at least some sperm whales migrate across the North Atlantic Ocean.

Female and immature animals stay in Atlantic temperate or tropical waters year round. In the western North Atlantic, groups of female and immature sperm whales concentrate in the Caribbean Sea (Gosho *et al*. 1984) and south of New England in continental-slope and deep-ocean waters along the eastern United States (Blaylock *et al*., 1995). In eastern Atlantic waters, groups of female and immature sperm whales aggregate in waters off the Azores, Madeira, Canary, and Cape Verde Islands (Tomilin 1967).

Several investigators have suggested that the sperm whales that occupy the northern Gulf of Mexico are distinct from sperm whales elsewhere in the North Atlantic Ocean (Schmidly 1981, Fritts 1983, and Hansen *et al*. 1995), although the International Whaling Commission groups does not treat these sperm whales as a separate population or "stock."

In the Mediterranean Sea sperm whales are found from the Alboran Sea to the Levant Basin, mostly over steep slope and deep offshore waters. Sperm whales are rarely sighted in the Sicilian Channel, and are vagrant in the northern Adriatic and Aegean Seas (Notarbartolo di Sciara and Demma 1997). In the Italian seas sperm whales are more frequently associated with the continental slope off western Liguria, western Sardinia, northern and eastern Sicily, and both coasts of Calabria.

Bayed and Beaubrun (1987) suggested that the frequent observation of neonates in the Mediterranean Sea and the scarcity of sperm whale sightings from the Gibraltar area may be evidence of a resident population of sperm whales in the Mediterranean.

Indian Ocean

In the Northern Indian Ocean the International Whaling Commission recognized differences between sperm whales in the northern and southern Indian Ocean (Donovan 1991). Little is known about the Northern Indian Ocean population of sperm whales (Perry *et al.* 1999).

Pacific Ocean

Several authors have proposed population structures that recognize at least three sperm whales populations in the North Pacific for management purposes (Kasuya 1991, Bannister and Mitchell 1980). At the same time, the IWC's Scientific Committee designated two sperm whale stocks in the North Pacific: a western and eastern stock or population (Donovan 1991). The line separating these populations has been debated since their acceptance by the IWC's Scientific Committee. For stock assessment purposes, NMFS recognizes three discrete population centers of sperm whales in the Pacific: (1) Alaska, (2) California-Oregon-Washington, and (3) Hawai'i.
Sperm whales are widely distributed throughout the Hawai'ian Islands year-round (Rice 1960, Shallenberger 1981, Lee 1993, and Mobley *et al.* 2000). Sperm whale clicks recorded from hydrophones off Oahu confirm the presence of sperm whales near the Hawai'ian Islands throughout the year (Thompson and Friedl 1982). The primary area of occurrence for the sperm whale is seaward of the shelf break in the Hawai'ian Islands.

Sperm whales have been sighted in the Kauai Channel, the Alenuihaha Channel between Maui and the island of Hawaii, and off the island of Hawaii (Lee 1993, Mobley *et al.*1999, Forney *et al*. 2000). Additionally, the sounds of sperm whales have been recorded throughout the year off Oahu (Thompson and Friedl 1982). Twenty-one sperm whales were sighted during aerial surveys conducted in Hawaiian waters conducted from 1993 through 1998. Sperm whales sighted during the survey tended to be on the outer edge of a 50 - 70 km distance from the Hawaiian Islands, indicating that presence may increase with distance from shore. However, from the results of these surveys, NMFS has calculated a minimum abundance of sperm whales within 46 km of Hawaii to be 43 individuals (Forney *et al*. 2000).

Southern Ocean

Sperm whales south of the equator are generally treated as a single "population," although the International Whaling Commission divides these whales into nine different divisions that are based more on evaluations of whaling captures than the biology of sperm whales (Donovan 1991). Several authors, however, have argued that the sperm whales that occur off the Galapagos Islands, mainland Ecuador, and northern Peru are geographically distinct from other sperm whales in the Southern Hemisphere (Rice 1977, Wade and Gerrodette 1993, and Dufault and Whitehead 1995).

Threats to the Species

NATURAL THREATS. Sperm whales are hunted by killer whales (*Orcinus orca*), false killer whales (*Pseudorca crassidens*), and short-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*; Arnbom *et al*. 1987, Palacios and Mate 1996, Rice 1989, Weller *et al*. 1996, Whitehead 1995) and papilloma virus (Lambertson *et al*. 1987). Sperm whales have been observed with bleeding wounds their heads and tail flukes after attacks by these species (Arnbom *et al*. 1987, Dufault and Whitehead 1995). In October 1997, 25 killer whales were documented to have attacked a group of mature sperm whales off Point Conception, California (personal communication from K Roberts cited in Perry *et al*. 1999) and successfully killing one of these mature sperm whales.

Studies on sperm whales in the North Pacific and North Atlantic Oceans have demonstrated that sperm whales are infected by calciviruses and papillomavirus (Smith and Latham 1978, Lambertsen *et al*. 1987). In some instances, these diseases have been demonstrated to affect 10 percent of the sperm whales sampled (Lambertsen *et al*. 1987).

ANTHROPOGENIC THREATS. Three human activities are known to threaten sperm whales: whaling, entanglement in fishing gear, and shipping. Historically, whaling represented the greatest threat to every population of sperm whales and was ultimately responsible for listing sperm whales as an endangered species. Sperm whales were hunted all over the world during the 1800s, largely for its spermaceti oil and ambergris. Harvesting of sperm whales subsided by 1880 when petroleum replaced the need for sperm whale oil (Whitehead 2003).

The actual number of sperm whales killed by whalers remains unknown and some of the estimates of harvest numbers are contradictory. Between 1800 and 1900, the International Whaling Commission estimated that nearly 250,000 sperm whales were killed globally by whalers. From 1910 to 1982, another 700,000 sperm whales were killed globally by whalers (IWC Statistics 1959-1983). These estimates are substantially higher than a more recent estimate produced by Caretta *et al*. (2005), however, who estimated that at least 436,000 sperm whales were killed by whalers between 1800 and 1987. Hill and DeMaster (1999) concluded that about 258,000 sperm whales were harvested in the North Pacific between 1947 and 1987 by commercial whalers. They reported that catches in the North Pacific increased until 1968, when 16,357 sperm whales were harvested, then declined after 1968 because of harvest limits imposed by the IWC. Perry *et al*. (1999) estimated that, on average, more than 20,000 sperm whales were harvested in the Southern Hemisphere each year between 1956 and 1976.

These reports probably underestimate the actual number of sperm whales that were killed by whalers, particularly because they could not have incorporated realistic estimates of the number of sperm whales killed by Soviet whaling fleets, which often went unreported. Between 1947 and 1973, Soviet whaling fleets engaged in illegal whaling in the Indian, North Pacific, and southern Oceans. In the Southern Hemisphere, these whalers killed an estimated 100,000 whales that they did not report to the International Whaling Commission (Yablokov *et al*. 1998). Illegal catches in the Northern Hemisphere (primarily in the North Pacific) were smaller but still caused sperm whales to disappear from large areas of the North Pacific Ocean (Yablokov and Zemsky 2000).

In addition to large and illegal harvests of sperm whales, Soviet whalers had disproportionate effect on sperm whale populations because they commonly killed adult females in any reproductive condition (pregnant or lactating) as well as immature sperm whales of either gender.

When the International Whaling Commission introduced the International Observer Scheme in 1972, the IWC relaxed regulations that limited the minimum length of sperm whales that could be caught from 11.6 meters to 9.2 meters out of a concern that too many male sperm whales were being caught so reducing this size limit would encourage fleets to catch more females. Unfortunately, the IWC's decision had been based on data from the Soviet fleets who commonly reported female sperm whales as males. As a result, the new regulations allowed the Soviet whalers to continue their harvests of female and immature sperm whales legally, with substantial consequences for sperm whale populations. Berzin noted in a report he wrote in 1977, "the result of this was that some breeding areas for sperm whales became deserts" (Berzin 2007).

Although the International Whaling Commission protected sperm whales from commercial harvest in 1981, Japanese whalers continued to hunt sperm whales in the North Pacific until 1988 (Reeves and Whitehead 1997). More recently, the Japanese Whaling Association began hunting sperm whales for research. In 2000, the Japanese Whaling Association announced that it planned to kill 10 sperm whales in the Pacific Ocean for research, which was the first time sperm whales have been hunted since the international ban on commercial whaling. Despite protests from the U.S. government and members of the IWC, the Japanese government harvested 5 sperm whales and 43 Bryde's whales in the last six months of 2000. According to the Japanese Institute of Cetacean Research (Institute of Cetacean Research undated), another 5 sperm whales were killed for research in 2002 – 2003. The consequences of these deaths on the status and trend of sperm whales remains uncertain, given that they probably have not recovered from the legacy of whaling; however, the renewal of a program that intentionally targets and kills sperm whales before we can be certain they recovered from a history of over-harvest places this species at risk in the foreseeable future.

Sperm whales are still hunted for subsistence purposes by whalers from Lamalera, Indonesia, which is on the south coast of the island of Lembata and from Lamakera on the islands of Solor. These whalers hunt in a traditional manner: with bamboo spears and using small wooden outriggers, 10–12 m long and 2 m wide, constructed without nails and with sails woven from palm fronds. The animals are killed by the harpooner leaping onto the back of the animal from the boat to drive in the harpoon. The maximum number of sperm whales killed by these hunters in any given year was 56 sperm whales killed in 1969.

In U.S. waters in the Pacific Ocean, sperm whales are known to have been incidentally captured only in drift gillnet operations, which killed or seriously injured an average of 9 sperm whales per year from 1991 - 1995 (Barlow *et al.* 1997). Interactions between longline fisheries and sperm whales in the Gulf of Alaska have been reported over the past decade (Rice 1989, Hill and DeMaster 1999). Observers aboard Alaskan sablefish and halibut longline vessels have documented sperm whales feeding on fish caught in longline gear in the Gulf of Alaska. During 1997, the first entanglement of a sperm whale in Alaska's longline fishery was recorded, although the animal was not seriously injured (Hill and DeMaster 1998). The available evidence does not indicate sperm whales are being killed or seriously injured as a result of these interactions, although the nature and extent of interactions between sperm whales and long-line gear is not yet clear.

Sperm whales are also killed by ship strikes. In May 1994 a sperm whale that had been struck by a ship was observed south of Nova Scotia (Reeves and Whitehead 1997) and in May 2000 a merchant ship reported a strike in Block Canyon (NMFS, unpublished data), which is a major pathway for sperm whales entering southern New England continental shelf waters in pursuit of migrating squid (CeTAP 1982, Scott and Sadove 1997).

Status

Sperm whales were listed as endangered under the ESA in 1973. Sperm whales have been protected from commercial harvest by the International Whaling Commission since 1981, although the Japanese continued to harvest sperm whales in the North Pacific until 1988 (Reeves and Whitehead 1997). They are also protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna and the MMPA. Critical habitat has not been designated for sperm whales.

The status and trend of sperm whales at the time of this summary is largely unknown. Hill and DeMaster (1999) and Angliss and Lodge (2004) reported that estimates for population abundance, status, and trends for sperm whales off the coast of Alaska were not available when they prepared the Stock Assessment Report for marine mammals off Alaska. Similarly, No information was available to support estimates of sperm whales status and trends in the western North Atlantic Ocean (Waring *et al.* 2004), the Indian Ocean (Perry *et al.* 1999), or the Mediterranean Sea.

Nevertheless, several authors and organizations have published “best estimates” of the global abundance of sperm whales or their abundance in different geographic areas. Based on historic whaling data,190,000 sperm whales were estimated to have been in the entire North Atlantic, but the IWC considers data that produced this estimate unreliable (Perry *et al.* 1999). Whitehead (2002) estimated that prior to whaling sperm whales numbered around 1,110,000 and that the current global abundance of sperm whales is around 360,000 (coefficient of variation = 0.36) whales. Whitehead’s current population estimate (2002) is about 20% of past global abundance estimates which were based on historic whaling data.

Waring *et al*. (2007) concluded that the best estimate of the number of sperm whales along the Atlantic coast of the U.S. was 4,029 (coefficient of variation = 0.38) in 1998 and 4,804 (coefficient of variation = 0.38) in 2004, with a minimum estimate of 3,539 sperm whales in the western North Atlantic Ocean.

Barlow and Taylor (2005) derived two estimates of sperm whale abundance in a 7.8 million km^2 study area in the northeastern temperate Pacific: when they used acoustic detection methods they produced an estimate of 32,100 sperm whales (coefficient of variation = 0.36); when they used visual surveys, they produced an estimate of 26,300 sperm whales (coefficient of variation = 0.81). Caretta *et al*. (2005) concluded that the most precise estimate of sperm whale abundance off California, Oregon, and Washington was 1,233 (coefficient of variation = 0.41; based on ship surveys conducted in the summer and fall of 1996 and 2001). Their best estimate of the abundance of sperm whales in Hawai'i was 7,082 sperm whales (coefficient of variation = 0.30) based on ship-board surveys conducted in 2002.

Mark and recapture data from sperm whales led Whitehead and his co-workers to conclude that sperm whale numbers off the Galapagos Islands decreased by about 20% a year between 1985 and 1995 (Whitehead *et al*. 1997). In 1985 Whitehead *et al.* (1997) estimated there were about 4,000 female and immature sperm whales, whereas in 1995 they estimated that there were only a few hundred. They suggested that sperm whales migrated to waters off the Central and South American mainland to feed in productive waters of the Humboldt Current, which had been depopulated of sperm whales as a result of intensive whaling.

The information available on the status and trend of sperm whales do not allow us to make definitive statement about the extinction risks facing sperm whales as a species or particular populations of sperm whales. However, the evidence available suggests that sperm whale populations probably exhibit the dynamics of small populations, causing their population dynamics to become a threat in and of itself. The number of sperm whales killed by Soviet whaling fleets in the 1960s and 1970s would have substantial and adverse consequence for sperm whale populations and their ability to recover from the effects of whaling on their population. The number of adult female killed by Soviet whaling fleets, including pregnant and lactating females whose death would also have resulted in the death of their calves, would have had a devastating effect on sperm whale populations. In addition to decimating their population size, whaling would have skewed sex ratios in their populations, created gaps in the age structure of their populations, and would have had lasting and adverse effect on the ability of these populations to recover (for example, see Whitehead 2003).

Populations of sperm whales could not have recovered from the overharvests of adult females and immature whales in the 30 to 40 years that have passed since the end of whaling, but the information available does not allow us to determine whether and to what degree those populations might have stabilized or whether they have begun the process of recovering from the effects of whaling. Absent information to the contrary, we assume that sperm whales will have elevated extinction probabilities because of both exogenous threats caused by anthropogenic activities (primarily whaling, entanglement, and ship strikes) and natural phenomena (such as disease, predation, or changes in the distribution and abundance of their prey in response to changing climate) as well as endogenous threats caused by the legacy of overharvests of adult females and immature whales on their populations (that is, a population with a disproportion of adult males and older animals coupled with a small percentage of juvenile whales that recruit into the adult population).

Diving and Social Behavior

Sperm whales are probably the deepest and longest diving mammal: they can dive to depths of at least 2000 meters (6562 ft), and may remain submerged for an hour or more (Watkins *et al.* 1993). Typical foraging dives last 40 min and descend to about 400 m followed by approximately 8 min of resting at the surface (Gordon 1987; Papastavrou *et al.* 1989). However, dives of over 2 hr and as deep as 3,000 m have been recorded (Clarke 1976; Watkins *et al.* 1985). Descent rates recorded from echo-sounders were approximately 1.7m/sec and nearly vertical (Goold and Jones 1995). There are no data on diurnal differences in dive depths in sperm whales. However, like most diving vertebrates for which there are data (e.g. rorqual whales, fur seals, chinstrap penguins), sperm whales probably make relatively shallow dives at night when organisms from the ocean's deep scattering layers move toward the ocean's surface.

The groups of closely related females and their offspring develop dialects specific to the group (Weilgart and Whitehead 1997) and females other than birth mothers will guard young at the surface (Whitehead 1996) and will nurse young calves (Reeves and Whitehead 1997).

Vocalizations and Hearing

Sperm whales produce loud broad-band clicks from about 0.1 to 20 kHz (Weilgart and Whitehead 1993, 1997; Goold and Jones 1995). These have source levels estimated at 171 dB re 1 μPa (Levenson 1974). Current evidence suggests that the disproportionately large head of the sperm whale is an adaptation to produce these vocalizations (Norris and Harvey 1972; Cranford 1992; but see Clarke 1979). This suggests that the production of these loud low frequency clicks is extremely important to the survival of individual sperm whales. The function of these vocalizations is relatively well-studied (Weilgart and Whitehead 1993, 1997; Goold and Jones 1995). Long series of monotonous regularly spaced clicks are associated with feeding and are thought to be produced for echolocation. Distinctive, short, patterned series of clicks, called codas, are associated with social behavior and intragroup interactions; they are thought to facilitate intra-specific communication, perhaps to maintain social cohesion with the group (Weilgart and Whitehead 1993).

A general description of the anatomy of the ear for cetaceans is provided in the description of the blue whale above. The only data on the hearing range of sperm whales are evoked potentials from a stranded neonate (Carder and Ridgway 1990). These data suggest that neonatal sperm whales respond to sounds from 2.5-60 kHz. Sperm whales have been observed to frequently stop echolocating in the presence of underwater pulses made by echosounders and submarine sonar (Watkins and Schevill 1975; Watkins *et al.* 1985). They also stop vocalizing for brief periods when codas are being produced by other individuals, perhaps because they can hear better when not vocalizing themselves (Goold and Jones 1995). Sperm whales have moved out of areas after the start of air gun seismic testing (Davis *et al.* 1995). Seismic air guns produce loud, broadband, impulsive noise (source levels are on the order of 250 dB) with "shots" every 15 seconds, 240 shots per hour, 24 hours per day during active tests. Because they spend large amounts of time at depth and use low frequency sound sperm whales are likely to be susceptible to low frequency sound in the ocean (Croll *et al* 1999). Furthermore, because of their apparent role as important predators of mesopelagic squid and fish, changing the abundance of sperm whales should affect the distribution and abundance of other marine species.

Green Sea Turtle

Distribution

Green turtles are found in the Pacific Ocean, Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, Carribean Sea, and Mediterranean Sea, primarily in tropical or, to a lesser extent, subtropical waters. These regions can be further divided into nesting aggregations within the eastern, central, and western Pacific Ocean; the western, northern, and eastern Indian Ocean; Mediterranean Sea; and eastern, southern, and western Atlantic Ocean, including the Carribean Sea.

Green turtles appear to prefer waters that usually remain around 20°C in the coldest month. During warm spells (e.g., El Niño), green turtles may be found considerably north of their normal distribution. Stinson (1984) found green turtles to appear most frequently in U.S. coastal waters with temperatures exceeding 18°C. An east Pacific green turtle equipped with a satellite transmitter was tracked along the California coast and showed a distinct preference for waters with temperatures above 20°C (Eckert, unpublished data).

Further, green sea turtles seem to occur preferentially in drift lines or surface current convergences, probably because of the prevalence of cover and higher densities of their food items associated with these oceanic phenomena. For example, in the western Atlantic Ocean, drift lines commonly contain floating *Sargassum* capable of providing small turtles with shelter and sufficient buoyancy to raft upon (NMFS and USFWS 1998). Underwater resting sites include coral recesses, the underside of ledges, and sand bottom areas that are relatively free of strong currents and disturbance from natural predators and humans. Available information indicates that green turtle resting areas are in proximity to their feeding pastures (NMFS 2000).

Population Structure

The population dynamics of green sea turtles and all of the other sea turtles we consider in this Opinion are usually described based on the distribution and habit of nesting females, rather than their male counterparts. The spatial structure of male sea turtles and their fidelity to specific coastal areas is unknown; however, we describe sea turtle populations based on the nesting beaches that female sea turtles return to when they mature. Because the patterns of increase or decrease in the abundance of sea turtle nests over time are determined by internal dynamics rather than external dynamics, we make inferences about the growth or decline of sea turtle populations based on the status and trend of their nests.

Primary nesting aggregations of green turtles (i.e. sites with greater than 500 nesting females per year) include: Ascension Island (south Atlantic Ocean), Australia, Brazil, Comoros Islands, Costa Rica, Ecuador (Galapagos Archipelago), Equatorial Guinea (Bioko Island), Guinea-Gissau (Bijagos Archipelago), Iles Eparses Islands (Tromelin Island, Europa Island), Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Oman, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles Islands, Suriname, and United States (Florida; Seminoff 2002, NMFS and USFWS 1998a).

Smaller nesting aggregations include: Angola, Bangladesh, Bikar Atoll, Brazil, Chagos Archipelago, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of Yemen, Dominican Republic, d'Entrecasteaux Reef, French Guiana, Ghana, Guyana, India, Iran, Japan, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives Islands, Mayotte Archipelago, Mexico, Micronesia, Pakistan, Palmerston Atoll, Papua New Guinea, Primieras Islands, Sao Tome é Principe, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Scilly Atoll, United States (Hawaii), Venezuela, and Vietnam (Seminoff 2002).

Molecular genetic techniques have helped researchers gain insight into the distribution and ecology of migrating and nesting green turtles. In the Pacific Ocean, green sea turtles group into two distinct regional clades: (1) western Pacific and South Pacific islands, and (2) eastern Pacific and central Pacific, including the rookery at French Frigate Shoals, Hawaii. In the eastern Pacific, greens forage coastally from San Diego Bay, California in the north to Mejillones, Chile in the South. Based on mtDNA analyses, green turtles found on foraging grounds along Chile's coast originate from the Galapagos nesting beaches, while those greens foraging in the Gulf of California originate primarily from the Michoacan nesting stock. Green turtles foraging in San Diego Bay and along the Pacific coast of Baja California originate primarily from rookeries of the Islas Revillagigedos (Dutton 2003).

Threats to the Species

NATURAL THREATS. The various habitat types green sea turtles occupy throughout their lives exposes these sea turtles to a wide variety of natural threats. The beaches on which green sea turtles nest and the nests themselves are threatened by hurricanes and tropical storms as well as the storm surges, sand accretion, and rainfall that are associated with hurricanes. Hatchlings are hunted by predators like herons, gulls, dogfish, and sharks. Larger green sea turtles, including adults, are also killed by sharks and other large, marine predators.

Green turtles in the northwest Hawaiian Islands are afflicted with a tumor disease, fibropapilloma, which is of an unknown etiology and often fatal, as well as spirochidiasis, both of which are the major causes of strandings of this species. The presence of fibropapillomatosis among stranded turtles has increased significantly over the past 17 years, ranging from 47-69 percent during the past decade (Murakawa *et al*. 2000). Green turtles captured off Molokai from 1982-96 showed a massive increase in the disease over this period, peaking at 61% prevalence in 1995 (Balazs *et al*. 1998). Preliminary evidence suggests an association between the distribution of fibropapillomatosis in the Hawaiian Islands and the distribution of toxic benthic dinoflagellates (*Prorocentrum* spp.) known to produce a tumor promoter, okadaic acid (Landsberg *et al*. 1999). Fibropapillomatosis is considered to decrease growth rates in afflicted turtles and may inhibit the growth rate of Hawaiian green turtle populations (Balazs *et al*. 1998).

ANTHROPOGENIC THREATS. Three human activities are known to threaten green sea turtles: overharvests of individual animals, incidental capture in commercial fisheries, and human development of coastlines. Historically, the primary cause of the global decline of green sea turtles populations were the number of eggs and adults captured and killed on nesting beaches in combination with the number of juveniles and adults captured and killed in coastal feeding areas. Some population of green sea turtles still lose large number of eggs, juveniles, and adults to subsistence hunters, local communities that have a tradition of harvesting sea turtles, and poachers in search of turtle eggs and meat.

Directed harvests of eggs and other life stages of green sea turtles were identified as a "major problem" in American Samoa, Guam, Palau, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Unincorporated Islands (Wake, Johnston, Kingman, Palmyra, Jarvis, Howland, Baker, and Midway). In the Atlantic, green sea turtles are captured and killed in turtle fisheries in Colombia, Grenada, the Lesser Antilles, Nicaragua, St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Bräutigam and Eckert 2006); the turtle fishery along the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, by itself, captures more than 11,000 green sea turtles each year for the past 10 years (Bräutigam and Eckert 2006, Lagueux 1998).

Severe overharvests have resulted from a number of factors in modern times: (1) the loss of traditional restrictions limiting the number of turtles taken by island residents; (2) modernized hunting gear; (3) easier boat access to remote islands; (4) extensive commercial exploitation for turtle products in both domestic markets and international trade; (5) loss of the spiritual significance of turtles; (6) inadequate regulations; and (7) lack of enforcement (NMFS and USFWS 1998a).

Green sea turtles are also captured and killed in commercial fisheries. Gillnets account for the highest number of green sea turtles that are captured and killed, but they are also captured and killed in trawls, traps and pots, longlines, and dredges. Along the Atlantic coast of the U.S., NMFS estimated that almost 19,000 green sea turtles are captured in shrimp trawl fisheries each year in the Gulf of Mexico, with 514 of those sea turtles dying as a result of their capture (see Table X). Each year, several hundred green sea turtles are captured in herring fisheries; mackerel, squid, and butterfish fisheries; monkfish fisheries; pound net fisheries, summer flounder and scup fisheries; Atlantic pelagic longline fisheries; and gillnet fisheries in Pamlico Sound. Although most of these turtles are released alive, these fisheries are expected to kill almost 100 green sea turtles each year; the health effects of being captured on the sea turtles that survive remain unknown.

Green sea turtles are also threatened by domestic or domesticated animals which prey on their nests; artificial lighting that disorients adult female and hatchling sea turtles, which can dramatically increase the mortality rates of hatchling sea turtles; beach replenishment; ingestion and entanglement in marine debris; and environmental contaminants.

Status

Green turtles are listed as threatened under the ESA, except for breeding populations found in Florida and the Pacific coast of Mexico, which are listed as endangered. Using a precautionary approach, Seminoff (2002) estimates that the global green turtle population has declined by 34% to 58% over the last three generations (approximately 150 years) although actual declines may be closer to 70% to 80%. Causes for this decline include harvest of eggs, subadults and adults, incidental capture by fisheries, loss of habitat, and disease.

While some nesting populations of green turtles appear to be stable or increasing in the Atlantic Ocean (e.g. Bujigos Archipelago (Guinea-Bissau), Ascension Island, Tortuguero (Costa Rica), Yucatan Peninsula (Mexico), and Florida), declines of over 50% have been documented in the eastern (Bioko Island, Equatorial Guinea) and western Atlantic (Aves Island, Venezuela). Nesting populations in Turkey (Mediterranean Sea) have declined between 42% and 88% since the late 1970s. Population trend variations also appear in the Indian Ocean. Declines greater than 50% have been documented at Sharma (Republic of Yemen) and Assumption and Aldabra (Seychelles), while no changes have occurred at Karan Island (Saudi Arabia) or at Ras al Hadd (Oman). The number of females nesting annually in the Indian Ocean has increased at the Comoros Islands, Tromelin and maybe Europa Island (Iles Esparses; Seminoff 2002).

Green turtles are thought to be declining throughout the Pacific Ocean, with the exception of Hawaii, as a direct consequence of a historical combination of overexploitation and habitat loss (Eckert 1993, Seminoff 2002). They are also thought to be declining in the Atlantic Ocean.

However, like several of the species we have already discussed, the information available on the status and trend of green sea turtles do not allow us to make definitive statement about the global extinction risks facing these sea turtles or risks facing particular populations (nesting aggregations) of these turtles. With the limited data available on green sea turtles, we do not know whether green sea turtles exist at population sizes large enough to avoid demographic phenomena that are known to increase the extinction probability of species that exist as “small” populations (that is, “small” populations experience phenomena such as demographic stochasticity, inbreeding depression, Allee effects, among others, that cause their population size to become a threat in and of itself) or if green sea turtles might are threatened more by exogenous threats such as anthropogenic activities (entanglement, habitat loss, overharvests, etc.) or natural phenomena (such as disease, predation, or changes in the distribution and abundance of their prey in response to changing climate). Nevertheless, with the exception of the Hawai’ian nesting aggregations, we assume that green sea turtles are endangered because of both anthropogenic and natural threats as well as changes in their population dynamics.

Diving and Social Behavior

Based on the behavior of post-hatchlings and juvenile green turtles raised in captivity, it is presumed that those in pelagic habitats live and feed at or near the ocean surface, and that their dives do not normally exceed several meters in depth (NMFS and USFWS 1998). The maximum recorded dive depth for an adult green turtle was 110 meters (Berkson 1967, *in* Lutcavage and Lutz 1997), while subadults routinely dive 20 meters for 9-23 minutes, with a maximum recorded dive of 66 minutes (Brill *et al.* 1995, *in* Lutcavage and Lutz, 1997).

Vocalizations and Hearing

The information on green turtle hearing is very limited. Ridgway *et al.* (1969) studied the auditory evoked potentials of three green sea turtles (in air and through mechanical stimulation of the ear) and concluded that their maximum sensitivity occurred from 300 to 400 Hz with rapid declines for tones at lower and higher frequencies. They reported an upper limit for cochlear potentials without injury of 2000 Hz and a practical limit of about 1000 Hz. This is similar to estimates for loggerhead sea turtles, which had most sensitive hearing between 250 and 1000 Hz, with rapid decline above 1000 Hz (Bartol *et al.* 1999).

In a study of the auditory brainstem responses of subadult green sea turtles, Bartol and Ketten (2006) reported responses to frequencies between 100 and 500 Hz; with highest sensitivity between 200 and 400 Hz. They reported that two juvenile green turtles had hearing sensitivities that were slightly broader in range: they responded to sounds at freqnencies from 100 to 800 Hz, with highest hearing sensitivities from 600 to 700 Hz.

These hearing sensitivities are similar to the hearing sensitivities reported for two terrestrial species: pond turtles (*Pseudemys scripta*) and wood turtles (*Chrysemys inscuplta*). Pond turtles are reported to have best hearing responsiveness between 200 and 700 Hz, with slow declines below 100 Hz and rapid declines above 700 Hz and almost no sensitivity above 3000 Hz (Wever and Vernon 1956) the latter has sensitivities up to about 500 Hz, followed by a rapid decline above 1000 Hz and almost no responses beyond 3000 or 4000 Hz (Peterson 1966).

Hawksbill Sea Turtle

Distribution

Hawksbill sea turtles occur in tropical and subtropical seas of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. The species is widely distributed in the Caribbean Sea and western Atlantic Ocean, with individuals from several life history stages occurring regularly along southern Florida and the northern Gulf of Mexico (especially Texas); in the Greater and Lesser Antilles; and along the Central American mainland south to Brazil. Within the United States, hawksbills are most common in Puerto Rico and its associated islands, and in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In the continental U.S., hawksbill sea turtles have been reported in every state on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico and along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean from Florida to Massachusetts, except for Connecticut; however, sightings of hawksbill sea turtles north of Florida are rare. The only states where hawksbill sea turtles occur with any regularity are Florida (particularly in the Florida Keys and the reefs off Palm Beach County on Florida’s Atlantic coast, where the warm waters of the Gulf Stream pass close to shore) and Texas. In both of these states, most sightings are of post-hatchlings and juveniles that are believed to have originated from nesting beaches in Mexico.

Hawksbill sea turtles have stranded along the almost the entire Atlantic coast of the United States, although most stranding records occur south of Cape Canaveral, Florida, particularly in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties (Florida Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage database). Hawksbill sea turtles are very rare north of Florida, although they have been recorded as far north as Massachusetts. During their pelagic-stage, hawksbills disperse from the Gulf of Mexico and southern Florida in the Gulfstream Current, which would carry them offshore of Georgia and the Carolinas. As evidence of this, a pelagic-stage hawksbill was captured 37 nautical miles east of Sapelo Island, Georgia in May 1994 (Parker 1995). There are also records of hawksbill sea turtles stranding on the coast of Georgia (Ruckdeschel *et al.* 2000), being captured in pound nets off Savannah, and neing captured in summer flounder trawls (Epperly *et al.* 1995), gillnets (Epperly *et al.* 1995), and power plants off Georgia and the Carolinas.

Within United States territories and U.S. dependencies in the Caribbean Region, hawksbill sea turtles nest principally in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, particularly on Mona Island and Buck Island. They also nest on other beaches on St. Croix, Culebra Island, Vieques Island, mainland Puerto Rico, St. John, and St. Thomas. Within the continental United States, hawksbill sea turtles nest only on beaches along the southeast coast of Florida and in the Florida Keys.

Hawksbill sea turtles occupy different habitats depending on their life history stage. After entering the sea, hawksbill sea turtles occupy pelagic waters and occupy weedlines that accumulate at convergence points. When they growth to about 20-25 cm carapace length, hawksbill sea turtles reenter coastal waters where they inhabit and forage in coral reefs as juveniles, subadults and adults. Hawksbill sea turtles also occur around rocky outcrops and high energy shoals, where sponges grow and provide forage, and they are known to inhabit mangrove-fringed bays and estuaries, particularly along the eastern shore of continents where coral reefs are absent (Hildebrand 1987, Amos 1989).

Population Structure

Hawksbill sea turtles, like other sea turtles, are divided into regional groupings that represent major oceans or seas: the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, Caribbean Sea and Mediterranean Sea. In these regions, the population structure of hawksbill turtles are usually based on the distribution of their nesting aggregations (Table 2).

Table 2. Nesting aggregations of hawksbill sea turtles that have been identified using molecular genetics (after Albreu and LeRoux 2006 and Spotila 2004)

Ocean Basin/Nesting Aggregations	Estimated Number of Nesting Females
Atlantic (eastern)	**200-400**
Democratic Republic of Sao Tomé and Principe and Equatorial Guinea (particularly, the Island of Bioko)	
Atlantic (western) and Caribbean	**5,000 – 6,000**
Antigua, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Jamaica, Martinique, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Turks and Caicos, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Venezuela	
Indian Ocean	**6,000 – 7,000**
Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Australia, British Indian Ocean Territories (Cagos Peninsula and southern Maldives), Seychelles, Burma, East Africa, Egypt, Maldives, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Sudan, and Yemen	
Pacific Ocean	**10,000**
Australia (Great Barrier Reef to Arnhem Land), Indonesia, Malaysia, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Phillipines, Solomon Islands, Thailand	

Threats to the Species

NATURAL THREATS. The various habitat types hawksbill sea turtles occupy throughout their lives exposes these sea turtles to a wide variety of natural threats. The beaches on which hawksbill sea turtles nest and the nests themselves are threatened by hurricanes and tropical storms as well as the storm surges, sand accretion, and rainfall that are associated with hurricanes. Hatchlings are hunted by predators like herons, gulls, dogfish, and sharks. Adult hawksbill sea turtles are also killed by sharks and other large, marine predators.

ANTHROPOGENIC THREATS. Three human activities are known to threaten hawkbill sea turtles: overharvests of individual animals, incidental capture in commercial fisheries, and human development of coastlines. Historically, the primary cause of the global decline of hawkbill sea turtle populations was was overharvests by humans for subsistence and commercial purposes. In the Atlantic, hawksbill sea turtles are still captured and killed in turtle fisheries in Colombia, Grenada, the Lesser Antilles, Nicaragua, St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Bräutigam and Eckert 2006).

For centuries, hawksbill sea turtles have been captured for their shells, which have commercial value, rather than food (the meat of hawksbill sea turtles is considered to have a bad taste and can be toxic to humans; NMFS and USFWS 1998). Until recently, tens of thousands of hawksbills were captured and killed each year to meet demand for jewelry, ornamentation, and whole stuffed turtles (Milliken and Tokunaga *1987 cited in* Eckert 1993). In 1988, Japan's imports from Jamaica, Haiti and Cuba represented some 13,383 hawksbills: it is extremely unlikely that this volume could have originated solely from local waters (Greenpeace 1989 *cited in* Eckert 1993).

Although Japan banned the importation of turtle shell in 1994, domestic harvests of eggs and turtles continue in the United States, its territories, and dependencies, particularly in the Caribbean and Pacific Island territories. Large numbers of nesting and foraging hawksbill sea turtles are captured and killed for trade in Micronesia, the Mexican Pacific coast, southeast Asia and Indonesia (NMFS and USFWS 1998). In addition to the demand for the hawksbill's shell, there is a demand for other products including leather, oil, perfume, and cosmetics. Before the U.S. certidied Japan under the Pelly Amendment, Japan had been importing about 20 metric tons of hawksbill shell per year, representing approximately 19,000 turtles.

The second most important threat to hawksbill sea turtles is the loss of nesting habitat caused by the expansion of resident human populations in coastal areas of the world and increased destruction or modification of coastal ecosystems to support tourism. Hawksbill sea turtles are also captured and killed in commercial fisheries. Along the Atlantic coast of the U.S., NMFS estimated that about 650 hawksbill sea turtles are captured in shrimp trawl fisheries each year in the Gulf of Mexico, with most of those sea turtles dying as a result of their capture (see Table 4). Each year, about 35 hawksbill sea turtles are captured in Atlantic pelagic longline fisheries. Although most of these turtles are released alive, these fisheries are expected to kill about 50 hawksbill sea turtles each year; the health effects of being captured on the sea turtles that survive remain unknown.

Like green sea turtles, hawksbill sea turtles are threatened by domestic or domesticated animals that prey on their nests; artificial lighting that disorients adult female and hatchling sea turtles, which can dramatically increase the mortality rates of hatchling sea turtles; beach replenishment; ingestion and entanglement in marine debris; and environmental contaminants.

Status

Hawksbill sea turtles were listed as endangered under the ESA in 1970. Under Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, hawksbill sea turtles are identified as "most endangered."

Hawksbill sea turtles are solitary nesters, which makes it difficult to estimate the size of their populations. There are no global estimates of the number of hawksbill sea turtles, but a minimum of 15,000 to 25,000 females are thought to nest annually in more than 60 geopolitical entities (Groombridge and Luxmoore 1989). Moderate populations appear to persist around the Solomon Islands, northern Australia, Palau, Persian Gule islands, Oman, and parts of the Seychelles (Groombridge 1982). In a more recent review, Groombridge and Luxmoore (1989) list Papua New Guinea, Queensland, and Western Australia as likely to host 500-1,000 nesting females per year, while Indonesia and the Seychelles may support >1,000 nesting females. The largest known nesting colony in the world is located on Milman Island, Queensland, Australia where Loop (1995) tagged 365 hawksbills nesting within an 11 week period. With the exception of Mexico, and possibly Cuba, nearly all Wider Caribbean countries are estimated to receive <100 nesting females per year (Meylan 1989).

Of the 65 geopolitical units on which hawksbill sea turtles nest and where hawksbill nesting densities can be estimated, 38 geopolitical units have hawksbill populations that are suspected or known to be declining. Another 18 geopolitical units have experienced well-substantiated declines (NMFS and USFWS 1995). The largest remaining nesting concentrations occur on remote oceanic islands off Australia (Torres Strait) and the Indian Ocean (Seychelles).

Hawksbill sea turtles, like green sea turtles, are thought to be declining globally as a direct consequence of a historical combination of overexploitation and habitat loss. However, like several of the species we have already discussed, the information available on the status and trend of hawksbill sea turtles do not allow us to make definitive statements about the global extinction risks facing these sea turtles or the risks facing particular populations (nesting aggregations) of these turtles. However, the limited data available suggests that several hawksbill sea turtles populations exist at sizes small enough to be classified as "small" populations (that is, populations that exhibit population dynamics that increase the extinction probabilities of the species or several of its populations) while others are large enough to avoid these problems. Exogenous threats such as overharvests and entanglement in fishing gear only increase their probabilities of becoming extinct in the foreseeable future.

Diving and Social Behavior

The duration of foraging dives in hawksbill sea turtles commonly depends on the size of the turtle: larger turtles diving deeper and longer. At a study site also in the northern Caribbean, foraging dives were made only during the day and dive durations ranged from 19-26 minutes in duration at depths of 8-10 m. At night, resting dives ranged from 35-47 minutes in duration (Dam and Diez, 1997a).

Vocalizations and Hearing

There is no information on hawksbill sea turtle vocalizations or hearing. However, we assume that their hearing sensitivities will be similar to those of green and loggerhead sea turtle: their best hearing sensitivity will be in the low frequency range: from 200 to 400 Hz with rapid declines for tones at lower and higher frequencies. Their hearing will probably have a practical upper limit of about 1000 Hz (Bartol *et al.* 1999, Ridgway *et al.* 1969).

These hearing sensitivities are similar to the hearing sensitivities reported for two terrestrial species: pond turtles (*Pseudemys scripta*) and wood turtles (*Chrysemys inscuplta*). Pond turtles are reported to have best hearing responsiveness between 200 and 700 Hz, with slow declines below 100 Hz and rapid declines above 700 Hz and almost no sensitivity above 3000 Hz (Wever and Vernon 1956) the latter has sensitivities up to about 500 Hz, followed by a rapid decline above 1000 Hz and almost no responses beyond 3000 or 4000 Hz (Peterson 1966).

Leatherback Sea Turtle

Distribution

Leatherback turtles are widely distributed throughout the oceans of the world. The species is found in four main regions of the world: the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans, and the Caribbean Sea. Leatherbacks also occur in the Mediterranean Sea, although they are not known to nest there. The four main regional areas may further be divided into nesting aggregations. Leatherback turtles are found on the western and eastern coasts of the Pacific Ocean, with nesting aggregations in Mexico and Costa Rica (eastern Pacific) and Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, and Fiji (western Pacific). In the Atlantic Ocean, leatherback nesting aggregations have been documented in Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, French Guiana, Suriname, and Florida. In the Caribbean, leatherbacks nest in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. In the Indian Ocean, leatherback nesting aggregations are reported in India and Sri Lanka.

Leatherback sea turtles are highly migratory, exploiting convergence zones and upwelling areas in the open ocean, along continental margins, and in archipelagic waters (Morreale *et al*. 1994, Eckert 1998, Eckert 1999a). In a single year, a leatherback may swim more than 10,000 kilometers (Eckert 1998). In the North Atlantic Ocean, leatherback turtles regularly occur in deep waters (>328 ft), and an aerial survey study in the north Atlantic sighted leatherback turtles in water depths ranging from 3 to 13,618 ft, with a median sighting depth of 131.6 ft (CeTAP 1982). This same study found leatherbacks in waters ranging from 7 to 27.2°C. In the Pacific Ocean, leatherback turtles have the most extensive range of any living reptile and have been reported in all pelagic waters of the Pacific between 71°N and 47°S latitude and in all other major pelagic ocean habitats (NMFS and USFWS 1998). Leatherback turtles lead a completely pelagic existence, foraging widely in temperate waters except during the nesting season, when gravid females return to tropical beaches to lay eggs. Males are rarely observed near nesting areas, and it has been hypothesized that leatherback sea turtles probably mate outside of tropical waters, before females swim to their nesting beaches (Eckert and Eckert 1988).

Leatherback turtles are uncommon in the insular Pacific Ocean, but individual leatherback turtles are sometimes encountered in deep water and prominent archipelagoes. To a large extent, the oceanic distribution of leatherback turtles may reflect the distribution and abundance of their macroplanktonic prey, which includes medusae, siphonophores, and salpae in temperate and boreal latitudes (NMFS and USFWS 1996). There is little information available on their diet in subarctic waters.

Population Structure

Leatherback turtles are widely distributed throughout the oceans of the world. The species is divided into four main populations in the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans, and the Caribbean Sea. Leatherbacks also occur in the Mediterranean Sea, although they are not known to nest there. The four main populations are further divided into nesting aggregations. Leatherback turtles are found on the western and eastern coasts of the Pacific Ocean, with nesting aggregations in Mexico and Costa Rica (eastern Pacific) and Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, and Fiji (western Pacific). In the Atlantic Ocean, leatherback nesting aggregations have been documented in Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, French Guiana, Suriname, and Florida. In the Caribbean, leatherbacks nest in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. In the Indian Ocean, leatherback nesting aggregations are reported in India, Sri Lanka, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Threats to the Species

NATURAL THREATS. The various habitat types leatherback sea turtles occupy throughout their lives exposes these sea turtles to a wide variety of natural threats. The beaches on which leatherback sea turtles nest and the nests themselves are threatened by hurricanes and tropical storms as well as the storm surges, sand accretion, and rainfall that are associated with hurricanes. Hatchlings are hunted by predators like herons, gulls, dogfish, and sharks. Larger leatherback sea turtles, including adults, are also killed by sharks and other large, marine predators.

ANTHROPOGENIC THREATS. Leatherback sea turtles are endangered by several human activities, including fisheries interactions, entanglement in fishing gear (e.g., gillnets, longlines, lobster pots, weirs), direct harvest, egg collection, the destruction and degradation of nesting and coastal habitat, boat collisions, and ingestion of marine debris (NMFS and USFWS 1997).

The foremost threat is the number of leatherback turtles killed or injured in fisheries. Spotila (2000) concluded that a conservative estimate of annual leatherback fishery-related mortality (from longlines, trawls and gillnets) in the Pacific Ocean during the 1990s is 1,500 animals. He estimates that this represented about a 23% mortality rate (or 33% if most mortality was focused on the East Pacific population). Spotila (2000) asserts that most of the mortality associated with the Playa Grande nesting site was fishery related.

Leatherback sea turtles are exposed to commercial fisheries in many areas of the Atlantic Ocean. For example, leatherback entanglements in fishing gear are common in Canadian waters where Goff and Lien (1988) reported that 14 of 20 leatherbacks encountered off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador were entangled in fishing gear including salmon net, herring net, gillnet, trawl line and crab pot line. Leatherbacks are reported taken by the many other nations that participate in Atlantic pelagic longline fisheries (see NMFS 2001, for a complete description of take records), including Taiwan, Brazil, Trinidad, Morocco, Cyprus, Venezuela, Korea, Mexico, Cuba, U.K., Bermuda, People's Republic of China, Grenada, Canada, Belize, France, and Ireland.

Leatherback sea turtles are also captured and killed in commercial fisheries managed by the United States government. Shrimp trawls in the Gulf of Mexico capture the largest number of leatherback sea turtles: each year, they have been estimated to capture about 3,000 leatherback sea turtles with 80 of those sea turtles dying as a result. Along the Atlantic coast of the U.S., NMFS estimated that about 800 leatherback sea turtles are captured in pelagic longline fisheries, bottom longline and drift gillnet fisheries for sharks as well as lobster, deep-sea red crab, Jonah crab, dolphin fish and wahoo, and Pamlico Sound gillnet fisheries (see Table 5). Although most of these turtles are released alive, these fisheries are combine to kill about 300 leatherback sea turtles each year; the health effects of being captured on the sea turtles that survive remain unknown.

Leatherback sea turtles are known to drown in fish nets set in coastal waters of Sao Tome, West Africa (Castroviejo *et al.* 1994; Graff 1995). Gillnets are one of the suspected causes for the decline in the leatherback turtle population in French Guiana (Chevalier *et al.* 1999), and gillnets targeting green and hawksbill turtles in the waters of coastal Nicaragua also incidentally catch leatherback turtles (Lagueux *et al.,* 1998). Observers on shrimp trawlers operating in the northeastern region of Venezuela documented the capture of six leatherbacks from 13,600 trawls (Marcano and Alio, 2000). An estimated 1,000 mature female leatherback turtles are caught annually off of Trinidad and Tobago with mortality estimated to be between 50-95% (Eckert and Lien, 1999). However, many of the turtles do not die as a result of drowning, but rather because the fishermen butcher them in order to get them out of their nets (NMFS 2001). There are known to be many sizeable populations of leatherbacks nesting in West Africa, possibly as many as 20,000 females nesting annually (Fretey 2001). In Ghana, nearly two thirds of the leatherback turtles that come up to nest on the beach are killed by local fishermen.

On some beaches, nearly 100% of the eggs laid have been harvested. Eckert (1996) and Spotila *et al*. (1996) note that adult mortality has also increased significantly, particularly as a result of driftnet and longline fisheries. Like green and hawksbill sea turtles, leatherback sea turtles are threatened by domestic or domesticated animals that prey on their nests; artificial lighting that disorients adult female and hatchling sea turtles, which can dramatically increase the mortality rates of hatchling sea turtles; beach replenishment; ingestion and entanglement in marine debris; and environmental contaminants.

Status

The leatherback turtle is listed as endangered under the ESA throughout its global range. Increases in the number of nesting females have been noted at some sites in the Atlantic Ocean, but these are far outweighed by local extinctions, especially of island populations, and the demise of populations throughout the Pacific, such as in Malaysia and Mexico. Spotila *et al.* (1996) estimated the global population of female leatherback turtles to be only 34,500 (confidence limits: 26,200 to 42,900) nesting females; however, the eastern Pacific population has continued to decline since that estimate, leading some researchers to conclude that the leatherback is now on the verge of extinction in the Pacific Ocean (e.g. Spotila *et al*. 1996, Spotila, *et al*. 2000).

Globally, leatherback turtle populations have been decimated worldwide. In 1980, the global leatherback population was estimated at approximately 115,000 adult females (Pritchard 1982). By 1995, this global population (of adult females) is estimated to have declined to 34,500 (Spotila *et al.* 1996). Populations have declined in Mexico, Costa Rica, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Trinidad, Tobago, and Papua New Guinea. Throughout the Pacific, leatherbacks are seriously declining at all major nesting beaches.

In the Atlantic and Caribbean, the largest nesting assemblages of leatherbacks are found in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Florida. Since the early 1980s, nesting data has been collected at these locations. Populations in the eastern Atlantic (*i.e.* off Africa) and Caribbean appear to be stable; however, information regarding the status of the entire leatherback population in the Atlantic is lacking and it is certain that some nesting populations (*e.g.*, St. John and St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands) have been extirpated (NMFS and USFWS 1995). Data collected in southeast Florida clearly indicate increasing numbers of nests for the past twenty years (9.1-11.5% increase), although it is critical to note that there was also an increase in the survey area in Florida over time (NMFS 2001). However, the largest leatherback rookery in the western North Atlantic remains along the northern coast of South America in French Guiana and Suriname. Recent information suggests that Western Atlantic populations declined from 18,800 nesting females in 1996 (Spotila *et al*. 1996) to 15,000 nesting females by 2000 (Spotila, personal communication *cited in* NMFS 2001). The nesting population of leatherback turtles in the Suriname-French Guiana trans-boundary region has been declining since 1992 (Chevalier and Girondot, 1998). Poaching and fishing gear interactions are believed to be the major contributors to the decline of leatherbacks in the area.

Leatherback sea turtles appear to be in a critical state of decline in the North Pacific Ocean. The leatherback population that nests along the east Pacific Ocean was estimated to be over 91,000 adults in 1980 (Spotila 1996), but is now estimated to number less than 3,000 total adult and subadult animals (Spotila 2000). Leatherback turtles have experienced major declines at all major Pacific basin rookeries. At Mexiquillo, Michoacan, Mexico, Sarti *et al.* (1996) reported an average annual decline in nesting of about 23% between 1984 and 1996. The total number of females nesting on the Pacific coast of Mexico during the 1995-1996 season was estimated at fewer than 1,000. Less than 700 females are estimated for Central America (Spotila 2000). In the western Pacific, the decline is equally severe. Current nestings at Terengganu, Malaysia represent 1% of the levels recorded in the 1950s (Chan and Liew 1996).

While Spotila *et al.* (1996) indicated that turtles may have been shifting their nesting from French Guiana to Suriname due to beach erosion, analyses show that the overall area trend in number of nests has been negative since 1987 at a rate of 15.0 -17.3 % per year (NMFS 2001). If turtles are not nesting elsewhere, it appears that the Western Atlantic portion of the population is being subjected to mortality beyond sustainable levels, resulting in a continued decline in numbers of nesting females.

Based on published estimates of nesting female abundance, leatherback populations are declining at all major Pacific basin nesting beaches, particularly in the last two decades (Spotila *et al.* 1996, NMFS and USFWS 1998, Spotila *et al.* 2000). Declines in nesting populations have been documented through systematic beach counts or surveys in Malaysia (Rantau Abang, Terengganu), Mexico and Costa Rica. In other leatherback nesting areas, such as Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and the Solomon Islands, there have been no systematic consistent nesting surveys, so it is difficult to assess the status and trends of leatherback turtles at these beaches. In all areas where leatherback nesting has been documented, however, current nesting populations are reported by scientists, government officials, and local observers to be well below abundance levels of several decades ago. The collapse of these nesting populations was most likely precipitated by a tremendous overharvest of eggs coupled with incidental mortality from fishing (Sarti *et al.* 1996, Eckert, 1997).

Based on recent modeling efforts, some authors concluded that leatherback turtle populations cannot withstand more than a 1% human-related mortality level which translates to 150 nesting females (Spotila *et al.* 1996). As noted previously, there are many human-related sources of mortality to leatherbacks; every year, 1,800 leatherback turtles are expected to be captured or killed as a result of federally-managed activities in the U.S. (this total includes both lethal and non-lethal take). An unknown number of leatherbacks are captured or killed in fisheries managed by states. Spotila *et al.* (1996) recommended not only reducing fishery-related mortalities, but also advocated protecting eggs and hatchlings. Zug and Parham (1996) point out that a combination of the loss of long-lived adults in fishery-related mortalities and a lack of recruitment stemming from elimination of annual influxes of hatchlings because of intense egg harvesting has caused the sharp decline in leatherback populations.

For several years, NMFS' biological opinions have established that leatherback populations currently face high probabilities of extinction as a result of both environmental and demographic stochasticity. Demographic stochasticity, which is chance variation in the birth or death of an individual of the population, is facilitated by the increases in mortality rates of leatherback populations resulting from the premature deaths of individual sea turtles associated with human activities (either removal of eggs or adult females that are killed on nesting beaches or that die as a result of being captured in fisheries) or incidental capture and mortality of individuals in various fisheries.

In the Pacific Ocean, leatherback sea turtles are critically endangered as a direct consequence of a historical combination of overexploitation and habitat loss. The information available suggests that leatherback sea turtles have high probabilities of becoming extinct in the Pacific Ocean unless they are protected from the combined threats of entanglements in fishing gear, overharvests, and loss of their nesting habitat. The limited data available suggests that leatherback sea turtles exist at population sizes small enough to be calssified as "small" populations (that is, populations that exhibit population dynamics that increase the extinction probabilities of the species or several of its populations) as evidenced by biases in the male to female ratios in the Pacific. The status of leatherback sea turtles in the Atlantic Ocean remains uncertain.

Diving and Social Behavior

The maximum dive depths for post-nesting female leatherbacks in the Caribbean have been recorded at 475 meters and over 1,000 meters, with routine dives recorded at between 50 and 84 meters. The maximum dive length recorded for such female leatherback turtles was 37.4 minutes, while routine dives ranged from 4 -14.5 minutes (*in* Lutcavage and Lutz 1997). Leatherback turtles also appear to spend almost the entire portion of each dive traveling to and from maximum depth, suggesting that maximum exploitation of the water column is of paramount importance to the leatherback (Eckert *et al.* 1989).

A total of six adult female leatherback turtles from Playa Grande, Costa Rica were monitored at sea during their internesting intervals and during the 1995 through 1998 nesting seasons. The turtles dived continuously for the majority of their time at sea, spending 57 - 68% of their time submerged. Mean dive depth was 19 ± 1 meters and the mean dive duration was 7.4 ± 0.6 minutes (Southwood *et al.* 1999). Similarly, Eckert (1999) placed transmitters on nine leatherback females nesting at Mexiquillo Beach and recorded dive behavior during the nesting season. The majority of the dives were less than 150 meters depth, although maximum depths ranged from 132 meters to over 750 meters. Although the dive durations varied between individuals, the majority of them made a large proportion of very short dives (less than two minutes), although Eckert (1999) speculates that these short duration dives most likely represent just surfacing activity after each dive. Excluding these short dives, five of the turtles had dive durations greater than 24 minutes, while three others had dive durations between 12 - 16 minutes.

Migrating leatherback turtles also spend a majority of time at sea submerged, and they display a pattern of continual diving (Standora *et al.* 1984, *cited in* Southwood *et al.* 1999). Based on depth profiles of four leatherbacks tagged and tracked from Monterey Bay, California in 2000 and 2001, using satellite-linked dive recorders, most of the dives were to depths of less than 100 meters and most of the time was spent shallower than 80 meters. Based on preliminary analyses of the data, 75-90% of the time the leatherback turtles were at depths less than 80 meters.

Vocalizations and Hearing

There is no information on the vocalizations or hearing of leatherback sea turtles. However, we assume that their hearing sensitivities will be similar to those of green and loggerhead sea turtle: their best hearing sensitivity will be in the low frequency range: from 200 to 400 Hz with rapid declines for tones at lower and higher frequencies. Their hearing will probably have a practical upper limit of about 1000 Hz (Bartol *et al*. 1999, Ridgway *et al*. 1969).

These hearing sensitivities are similar to the hearing sensitivities reported for two terrestrial species: pond turtles (*Pseudemys scripta*) and wood turtles (*Chrysemys inscuplta*). Pond turtles are reported to have best hearing responsiveness between 200 and 700 Hz, with slow declines below 100 Hz and rapid declines above 700 Hz and almost no sensitivity above 3000 Hz (Wever and Vernon 1956) the latter has sensitivities up to about 500 Hz, followed by a rapid decline above 1000 Hz and almost no responses beyond 3000 or 4000 Hz (Peterson 1966).

Loggerhead Sea Turtle

Distribution

Loggerheads are circumglobal, inhabiting continental shelves, bays, estuaries, and lagoons in temperate, subtropical, and tropical waters. Major nesting grounds are generally located in temperate and subtropical regions, with scattered nesting in the tropics (*in* NMFS and USFWS 1998).

Population Structure

Loggerhead sea turtles, like other sea turtles, are divided into regional groupings that represent major oceans or seas: the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, Caribbean Sea and Mediterranean Sea. In these regions, the population structure of loggerhead turtles are usually based on the distribution of their nesting aggregations (see Table 2). In the Pacific Ocean, loggerhead turtles are represented by a northwestern Pacific nesting aggregation (located in Japan) which may be comprised of separate nesting groups (Hatase *et al.* 2002) and a smaller southwestern nesting aggregation that occurs in Australia (Great Barrier Reef and Queensland), New Caledonia, New Zealand, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. One of the largest loggerhead nesting aggregations in the world is found in Oman, in the Indian Ocean.

Based on genetic analyses of loggerhead sea turtles captured in pelagic longline fisheries in the same general area as that of the proposed action, loogerhead sea turtles along the southeastern coast of the United States might originate from one of the five major nesting aggregations in the western North Atlantic: (1) a northern nesting aggregation that occurs from North Carolina to northeast Florida, about 29°N; (2) a south Florida nesting aggregation, occurring from 29°N on the east coast to Sarasota on the west coast; (3) a Florida panhandle nesting aggregation, occurring at Eglin Air Force Base and the beaches near Panama City, Florida; (4) a Yucatán nesting aggregation, occurring on the eastern Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico; and (5) a Dry Tortugas nesting aggregation that occurs in the islands of the Dry Tortugas near Key West, Florida (NMFS 2001).

Loggerhead sea turtles from the northern nesting aggregation, which represents about 9% of the loggerhead nests in the western North Atlantic, comprise more between 25 and 59% of the loggerhead sea turtles captured in foraging areas from Georgia to waters of the northeastern United States (Bass *et al*. 1998, Norrgard 1995, Rankin-Baransky 1997, Sears 1994, Sears *et al.* 1995). About 10% of the loggerhead sea turtles in foraging areas off the Atlantic coast of central Florida will have originated from the northern nesting aggregation (Witzell 1999). Loggerhead sea turtles associated with the South Florida nesting aggregation, in contrast, occur in higher frequencies in the Gulf of Mexico (where they represent about 10% of the loggerhead sea turtles captured) and the Mediterranean Sea (where they represent about 45-47% of the loggerhead sea turtles captured).

Threats to the Species

NATURAL THREATS. The various habitat types loggerhead sea turtles occupy throughout their lives exposes these sea turtles to a wide variety of natural and anthropogenic threats. The beaches on which loggerhead sea turtles nest and the nests themselves are threatened by hurricanes and tropical storms as well as the storm surges, sand accretion, and rainfall that are associated with hurricanes. For example, in 1992, all of the eggs over a 90-mile length of coastal Florida were destroyed by storm surges on beaches that were closest to the eye of Hurricane Andrew (Milton *et al.* 1994). Hatchlings are hunted by predators like herons, gulls, dogfish, and sharks. Adult hawksbill sea turtles are also killed by sharks and other large, marine predators. Loggerhead sea turtles are also killed by cold stunning, exposure to biotoxins, sharks and other large, marine predators.

ANTHROPOGENIC THREATS. A wide variety of human activities adversely affect hatchlings and adult female turtles when they are on land, including beach erosion, beach armoring and nourishment; artificial lighting; beach cleaning; human presence on nesting beaches; beach driving; coastal construction and fishing piers that alter patterns of erosion and accretion on nesting beaches; exotic dune and beach vegetation; and poaching. As the size of the human population in coastal areas increases, that population brings with it secondary threats such as exotic fire ants, feral hogs, dogs, and the growth of populations native species that tolerate human presence (*e.g.*, raccoons, armadillos, and opossums) and which feed on turtle eggs.

When they are in coastal or marine waters, loggerhead turtles are affected by a completely different set of human activities that include discharges of toxic chemicals and other pollutants into the marine ecosystem; underwater explosions; hopper dredging, offshore artificial lighting; entrainment or impingement in power plants; entanglement in marine debris; ingestion of marine debris; boat collisions; poaching, and interactions with commercial fisheries. Of these, interactions with fisheries represents a primary threat because of number of individuals that are captured and killed in fishing gear each year.

Loggerhead sea turtles are also captured and killed in commercial fisheries. Shrimp trawl fisheries account for the highest number of loggerhead sea turtles that are captured and killed, but they are also captured and killed in trawls, traps and pots, longlines, and dredges. Along the Atlantic coast of the U.S., NMFS estimated that almost 163,000 loggerhead sea turtles are captured in shrimp trawl fisheries each year in the Gulf of Mexico, with 3,948 of those sea turtles dying as a result of their capture (see Table 3). Each year, several hundred loggerhead sea turtles are also captured in herring fisheries; mackerel, squid, and butterfish fisheries; monkfish fisheries; pound net fisheries, summer flounder and scup fisheries; Atlantic pelagic longline fisheries; and gillnet fisheries in Pamlico Sound. Although most of these turtles are released alive, these fisheries are combine to capture about 2,000 loggehead sea turtles each year, killing almost 700; the health effects of being captured on the sea turtles that survive remain unknown.

Table 3. Nesting populations of loggerhead sea turtles that have been identified using molecular genetics (after Hutchinson and Dutton 2007)

Ocean Basin	Population
Atlantic (eastern) (the Cape Verde rookeries appear to be genetically distinct, the other rookeries listed have not been evaluated)	
1	Cape Verde
2	Greece
3	Libya
4	Turkey
5	West African coast
Atlantic (western) and Caribbean	
6	Northern (U.S.) including rookeries from southern Virginia south to Florida
7	Florida peninsula which includes rookeries from the northeastern border of Florida south to southwestern Florida
8	Dry Tortugas, which includes the islands of Key West
9	Northern Gulf of Mexico, which extends from northwestern Florida into Texas
10	Cay Sal bank in thee western Bahamas
11	Quintana Roo, which includes all rookeries on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula
12	Brazil
13	Additional rookeries in Caribbean Central America, the Bahamian Archipelago, Cuba, Colombia, Venezuela, and the eastern Caribbean Islands have not been classified
Indian Ocean (none of these rookeries have been evaluated genetically)	
14	Oman
15	Yemen
16	Sri Lanka
17	Madagascar
18	South Africa and (possibly) Mozambique
Pacific Ocean	
19	Western Australia
20	Eastern Australia, which may include rookeries from New Caledonia
21	North Pacific or Japan, which includes all rookeries in the Japanese Archipelago
22	Solomon Islands

In the pelagic environment, loggerhead sea turtles are exposed to a series of longline fisheries that include the U.S. Atlantic tuna and swordfish longline fisheries, an Azorean longline fleet, a Spanish longline fleet, and various fleets in the Mediterranean Sea (Aguilar *et al*. 1995, Bolten *et al*. 1994, Crouse 1999). In the benthic environment in waters off the coastal U.S., loggerheads are exposed to a suite of fisheries in federal and state waters including trawl, purse seine, hook and line, gillnet, pound net, longline, dredge, and trap fisheries.

Like all of the other sea turtles we have discussed, loggerhead sea turtles are threatened by domestic or domesticated animals that prey on their nests; artificial lighting that disorients adult female and hatchling sea turtles, which can dramatically increase the mortality rates of hatchling sea turtles; beach replenishment; ingestion and entanglement in marine debris; and environmental contaminants.

Status

The most recent reviews show that only two loggerhead nesting beaches have greater than 10,000 females nesting per year: South Florida (U.S.) and Masirah Island (Oman). The status of the Oman nesting colony has not been evaluated recently so the current size of this population and its trend are unknown. Nesting colonies in the U.S. have been reported to produce 68,000 to 90,000 nests per year. Recent analyses of nesting data from southeast Florida nesting colonies, which are the largest nesting colonies in the western Atlantic Ocean, suggest that this nesting population is declining. Long-term nesting data suggest similar declines in loggerhead nesting in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

In the Eastern Atlantic, the Cape Verde Islands support an intermediately-sized loggerhead nesting colony. In 2000, researchers tagged over 1,000 nesting females on just 5 km (3.1 mi) of beach on Boavista Island (Ehrhart *et al*. 2003). In the Western Atlantic (excluding the U.S.), Brazil supports an intermediately-sized loggerhead nesting assemblage. Published and unpublished reports provide an estimate of about 4,000 nests per year in Brazil (Ehrhart *et al*. 2003). Loggerhead nesting throughout the Caribbean is sparse.

In the Mediterranean, loggerhead nesting is confined almost exclusively to the eastern portion of the Mediterranean Sea. The main nesting assemblages occur in Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey. However, small numbers of loggerhead nests have been recorded in Egypt, Israel, Italy, Libya, Syria, and Tunisia. Based on the recorded number of nests per year in Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Tunisia, and Turkey, loggerhead nesting in the Mediterranean ranges from about 3,300 to 7,000 nests per season (Margaritoulis *et al*. 2003). Loggerheads nest throughout the Indian Ocean and, with the exception of Oman, the number of nesting females is small. Most trends in loggerhead nesting populations in the Indian Ocean are unknown.

Loggerhead populations in Honduras, Mexico, Colombia, Israel, Turkey, Bahamas, Cuba, Greece, Japan, and Panama have been declining. Balazs and Wetherall (1991) speculated that 2,000 to 3,000 female loggerheads may nest annually in all of Japan; however, more recent data suggest that only approximately 1,000 female loggerhead turtles may nest there (Bolten *et al*. 1996; Sea Turtle Association of Japan 2002). Monitoring of nesting beaches at Gamoda (Tokushima Prefecture) has been ongoing since 1954. Surveys at this site showed a marked decline in the number of nests between 1960 and the mid-1970s. Since then, the number of nests has fluctuated, but has been downward since 1985 (Bolten *et al*. 1996; Sea Turtle Association of Japan 2002). Monitoring on several other nesting beaches, surveyed since the mid-1970s, revealed increased nesting during the 1980s before declining during the early 1990s. The number of nests at Gamoda remains very small, fluctuating between near zero (1999) to about 50 nests (1996 and 1998; Kamezaki *et al*. 2003).

Table 4. Number of different species of sea turtles that NMFS expected to be "taken" (generally captured and harassed, harmed, wounded, or killed) and the number that are expected to be killed in commercial fisheries managed by NMFS off the Atlantic Coast, based on numbers contained in incidental take statements in biological opinions on those fisheries. Numbers are generally annual estimates (after Griffin *et al*. 2006)

Fishery	**NMFS Region**	**Loggerhead**		**Leatherback**		**Green**		**Hawksbill**		**Total**	
		Total Take	**# Killed**	**Total Take**	**# Killed**	**Total Take**	**# Killed**	**Total Take**	**# Killed**	**Total Take**	**# Killed**
Bluefish	NER	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	3
Deep-sea red crab	NER	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2
Herring	NER	6	3	1	1	1	1	0	0	8	5
Jonah crab	NER	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	2
Lobster	NER	2	2	5	5	0	0	0	0	7	7
Mackerel, squid, butterfish	NER	6	3	1	1	2	2	0	0	9	6
Monkfish	NER	4	1	2	1	2	1	0	0	8	3
Multispecies	NER	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	3	3
Pound net (Virginia)	NER	507	2	2	2	3	2	0	0	512	6
Sea scallop	NER	754	484	2	2	2	2	0	0	760	490
Skate	NER	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	3	3
Spiny dogfish	NER	3	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	5	4
Summer flounder, scup, sea bass	NER	19	5	0	0	2	2	0	0	21	7
Tilefish	NER	6	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	7	4
Dolphin fish and wahoo	SER	12	2	12	1	2	1	2	1	28	5
Atlantic pelagic	SER	623	146	660	183	35	8	35	8	1353	345
Sargassum	SER	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Shark bottom longline and drift gillnet	SER	274	151	34	18	6	1	6	1	320	171
Pamlico Sound gillnet	SER	41	3	2	2	168	46	2	2	213	53
Shrimp trawling	SER	163160	3948	3090	80	18757	514	0	640	185007	5182
Totals		**165429**	**4756**	**3778**	**292**	**18931**	**573**	**45***	**652**	**188183**	**6273**

***** The biological opinion on shrimp trawl fisheries did not estimate the number of hawksbill sea turtles that might be captured in the fisheries, although it estimated the number that might be killed. Obviously, the fisheries would have to capture at least 640 hawksbill sea turtles to kill that many sea turtles

Scattered nesting has also been reported on Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Indonesia, and New Caledonia; however, population sizes on these islands have not been ascertained. Survey data are not available for other nesting assemblages in the south Pacific (NMFS and USFWS 1998). In addition, loggerheads are not commonly found in U.S. Pacific waters, and there have been no documented strandings of loggerheads off the Hawaiian Islands in nearly 20 years (1982-1999 stranding data, G. Balazs, NMFS, personal communication, 2000). There are very few records of loggerheads nesting on any of the many islands of the central Pacific, and the species is considered rare or vagrant on islands in this region (NMFS and USFWS 1998).

For several years, NMFS' biological opinions have established that most loggerhead sea turtles populations face high probabilities of extinction as a result of both environmental and demographic stochasticity. Demographic stochasticity, which is chance variation in the birth or death of an individual of the population, is facilitated by the increases in mortality rates of loggerhead populations resulting from the premature deaths of individual sea turtles associated with human activities (either removal of eggs or adult females that are killed on nesting beaches or that die as a result of being captured in fisheries) or incidental capture and mortality of individuals in various fisheries.

The information available suggests that loggerhead sea turtles have high probabilities of becoming extinct in the Pacific Ocean unless they are protected from the combined threats of entanglements in fishing gear, overharvests, and loss of their nesting habitat. The limited data available suggests that loggerhead sea turtles in the Pacific Ocean exist at population sizes small enough to be calssified as "small" populations (that is, populations that exhibit population dynamics that increase the extinction probabilities of the species or several of its populations) as evidenced by biases in the male to female ratios in the Pacific.

The status of loggerhead sea turtles in the Atlantic Ocean remains uncertain and controversial. For years, the south Florida nesting aggregation, which is the only major nesting aggregation in the western Atlantic Ocean, had been assumed to be stable or increasing. However, more recent data demonstrate that this nesting population is currently declining and probably has been declining for several years. Between 1998 and 2007, nest counts of loggerhead sea turtles in the State of Florida have declined by almost 50 percent to the lowest levels in the 19 years of Florida's monitoring program (Fish and Wildlife Research Institute 2007). Given that (1) the nesting aggregations that account for almost 90 percent of loggerhead nesting in the western Atlantic Ocean are declining, (2) the other nesting aggregations in the western Atlantic Ocean are substantially much smaller, and (3) large numbers of sea turtles from these smaller populations are captured or killed in commercial and other fisheries in the United States each year, we suspect that the extinction probabilities of loggerhead sea turtle populations in the Atlantic Ocean are only slightly lower than those of populations in the Pacific Ocean. The principle difference between the Atlantic and the Pacific may be this: loggerhead sea turtle populations in the Atlantic Ocean may currently be large enough to avoid the small population dynamics we have discussed previously, but the intensity of the anthropogenic pressure on their populations (in the form of numbers captured and killed in fisheries alone) appear to be large enough to accelerate the extinction probabilities of these populations.

Diving and Social Behavior

Studies of loggerhead diving behavior indicate varying mean depths and surface intervals, depending on whether they were located in shallow coastal areas (short surface intervals) or in deeper, offshore areas (longer surface intervals). The maximum recorded dive depth for a post-nesting female was 211-233 meters, while mean dive depths for both a post-nesting female and a subadult were 9-22 meters. Routine dive times for a post-nesting female were between 15 and 30 minutes, and for a subadult, between 19 and 30 minutes (Sakamoto *et al*. 1990 *cited in* Lutcavage and Lutz 1997). Two loggerheads tagged by Hawaii-based longline observers in the North Pacific and attached with satellite-linked dive recorders were tracked for about 5 months. Analysis of the dive data indicate that most of the dives were very shallow - 70% of the dives were no deeper than 5 meters. In addition, the loggerheads spent approximately 40% of their time in the top meter and nearly all of their time in waters shallower than 100 meters. On 5% of the days, the turtles dove deeper than 100 meters; the deepest daily dive recorded was 178 meters (Polovina *et al*. 2003).

Polovina *et al.* (2004) reported that tagged turtles spent 40 percent of their time at the surface and 90 percent of their time at depths shallower than 40 meters. On only five percent of recorded dive days loggerheads dove to depths greater than 100 meters at least once. In the areas that the loggerheads were diving, there was a shallow thermocline at 50 meters. There were also several strong surface temperature fronts the turtles were associated with, one of 20°C at 28°N latitude and another of 17°C at 32°N latitude.

Vocalizations and Hearing

The information on loggerhead turtle hearing is very limited. Bartol *et al*. (1999) studied the auditory evoked potential of loggerhead sea turtles that had been captured in pound nets in tributaries to the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland and Virginia and concluded that loggerhead sea turtles had most sensitive hearing between 250 and 1000 Hz, with rapid decline above 1000 Hz (Bartol *et al*. 1999). This is similar to the results produced by Ridgway *et al*. (1969) who studied the auditory evoked potentials of three green sea turtles (in air and through mechanical stimulation of the ear). They concluded that the maximum sensitivity of green sea turtles occurred from 300 to 400 Hz with rapid declines for tones at lower and higher frequencies. They reported an upper limit for cochlear potentials without injury of 2000 Hz and a practical limit of about 1000 Hz.

These hearing sensitivities are similar to the hearing sensitivities reported for two terrestrial species: pond turtles (*Pseudemys scripta*) and wood turtles (*Chrysemys inscuplta*). Pond turtles are reported to have best hearing responsiveness between 200 and 700 Hz, with slow declines below 100 Hz and rapid declines above 700 Hz and almost no sensitivity above 3000 Hz (Wever and Vernon 1956) the latter has sensitivities up to about 500 Hz, followed by a rapid decline above 1000 Hz and almost no responses beyond 3000 or 4000 Hz (Peterson 1966).

Environmental Baseline

By regulation, environmental baselines for biological opinions include the past and present impacts of all state, Federal or private actions and other human activities in the action area, the anticipated impacts of all proposed Federal projects in the action area that have already undergone formal or early section 7 consultation, and the impact of State or private actions which are contemporaneous with the consultation in process (50 CFR 402.02). The environmental baseline for this biological opinion includes the effects of several activities that affect the survival and recovery of endangered whales in the action area.

A number of human activities have contributed to the current status of populations of large whales in the action area. Some of those activities, most notably commercial whaling, occurred extensively in the past, ended, and no longer appear to affect these whale populations, although the effects of these reductions likely persist today. Other human activities are ongoing and appear to continue to affect whale populations. The following discussion summarizes the principal phenomena that are known to affect the likelihood that these endangered whales will survive and recover in the wild.

Natural Mortality

Natural mortality rates in cetaceans, especially large whale species, are largely unknown. Although factors contributing to natural mortality cannot be quantified at this time, there are a number of suspected causes, including parasites, predation, red tide toxins and ice entrapment. For example, the giant spirurid nematode (*Crassicauda boopis*) has been attributed to congestive kidney failure and death in some large whale species (Lambertson *et al*. 1986). A well-documented observation of killer whales attacking a blue whale off Baja, California demonstrates that blue whales are at least occasionally vulnerable to these predators (Tarpy 1979). Evidence of ice entrapment and predation by killer whales has been documented in almost every population of bowhead whales although the percentage of whales entrapped in ice is considered to be small in this strongly ice-associated species (Tomilin 1957, Mitchell and Reeves 1982, Nerini *et al*. 1984, Philo *et al*. 1993). Other stochastic events, such as fluctuations in weather and ocean temperature affecting prey availability, may also contribute to large whale natural mortality.

Commercial Fisheries

Several commercial fisheries operate in the Action Area for this consultation. The fisheries that have the most significant demographic effect on sea turtles are the shrimp trawl fisheries conducted off the southeast United States (from North Carolina to the Atlantic coast of Florida) and Gulf of Mexico (from the Gulf coast of Florida to Texas). Although participants in these fisheries are required to use Turtle Exclusion Devices, which are estimated to reduce the number of sea turtles trawlers capture by as much as 97 percent, each year these fisheries are expected to capture about 185,000 sea turtles each year and kill about 5,000 of the turtles captured. Loggerhead sea turtles account for most of this total: each these fisheries are expected to capture about 163,000 loggerhead sea turtles, killing almost 4,000 of them. These are followed by green sea turtles: about 18,700 green sea turtles are expected to be captured each year with more than 500 of them dying as a result of their capture (NMFS 2002).

Portions of the Atlantic pelagic fisheries for swordfish, tuna, shark, and billfish also operate in the Action Area and capture and kill the second highest numbers of sea turtles along the Atlantic coast. These fisheries, which operate off the coast of the southeast coast Sorth Carolina and Georgia (with the exception of waters off Florida and southernmost Georgia that are closed to the longline component of these fisheries) and the Gulf of Mexico, include purse seine fisheries for tuna, harpoon fisheries for tuna and swordfish, commercial and recreational rod and reel fisheries, gillnet fisheries for shark, driftnet fisheries, pelagic longline fisheries, and bottom longline fisheries.

Between 1986 and 1995, this fishery captured and killed 1 northern right whale, 2 humpback whales, and two sperm whales. Between 1992 ad 1998, the longline components of these fisheries are estimated to have captured more than 10,000 sea turtles (4,585 leatherback sea turtles and 5,280 loggerhead sea turtles), killing 168 of these sea turtles in the process (the latter estimate does not include sea turtles that might have died after being released; Johnson *et al.* 1999, Yeung 1999). Since then, all components of these fisheries are estimated to capture about 1,350 sea turtles each year, killing 345 sea turtles in the process.

Portions of the Atlantic sea scallop fisheries also operate in the Action Area (off North Carolina) and capture and kill the third highest numbers of sea turtles along the Atlantic coast. These fisheries are expected to capture about 750 loggerhead sea turtles each year, killing about 480 of them. Although these fisheries are only expected to capture 2 green, leatherback, and Kemp's ridley sea turtles each year, all of these turtles might die as a result of their capture.

In addition, sea turtles are captured and killed in several other Federal fisheries that operate along the Atlantic coast (see Table 4), although most of these fisheries capture and kill fewer sea turtles than the fisheries discussed in the preceding narratives. Of all the factors that influenced NMFS' decision to list sea turtles as threatened or endangered, the most significant sources of injury or mortality of juvenile, subadult, and adult sea turtles are those associated with commercial fishing.

The fisheries discussed in this section of this Opinion are expected to continue into the foreseeable future at levels of effort that are roughly equivalent to current levels. As a result, we expect the number of sea turtles that are captured and killed in these fisheries to continue for the foreseeable future. These estimates mean that, every five years, more than 800,000 loggerhead sea turtles would be captured in these fisheries, with more than 23,000 of them dying as a result; about 19,000 leatherback sea turtles would be captured, with about 1,500 of them dying as a result; about 95,000 green sea turtles would be captured, with about 2,900 of them dying; and about 3,200 hawksbill sea turtles being captured and killed.

Habitat Degradation

Chronic exposure to the neurotoxins associated with paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) via zooplankton prey has been shown to have detrimental effects on marine mammals. Estimated ingestion rates are sufficiently high to suggest that the PSP toxins are affecting marine mammals, possibly resulting in lower respiratory function, changes in feeding behavior and a lower reproduction fitness (Durbin *et al.* 2002).

Water Pollution. Coastal runoff and river discharges carry large volumes of petrochemical and other contaminants from agricultural activities, cities and industries into the Gulf of Mexico. The coastal waters of the Gulf of Mexico have more sites with high contaminant concentrations than other areas of the coastal United States, due to the large number of waste discharge point sources. Although these contaminant concentrations do not likely affect the more pelagic waters of the action area, the species of turtles analyzed in this biological opinion travel between nearshore and offshore habitats and may be exposed to and accumulate these contaminants during their life cycles.

An extensive review of environmental contaminants in turtles has been conducted by Meyers-Schöne and Walton (1994); however, most of this information relates to freshwater species. High concentrations of chlorobiphenyls and organochlorine pesticides in the eggs of the freshwater snapping turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*, have been correlated with population effects such as decreased hatching success, increased hatchling deformities and disorientation (Bishop *et al.* 1991 1994).

Very little is known about baseline levels and physiological effects of environmental contaminants on marine turtle populations (Witkowski and Frazier 1982, Bishop *et al.* 1991). There are a few isolated studies on organic contaminants and trace metal accumulation in green and leatherback sea turtles (Davenport and Wrench 1990, Aguirre *et al.* 1994). Mckenzie *et al.* (1999) measured concentrations of chlorobiphenyls and organochlorine pesticides in marine turtles tissues collected from the Mediterranean (Cyprus, Greece) and European Atlantic waters (Scotland) between 1994 and 1996. Omnivorous loggerhead turtles had the highest organochlorine contaminant concentrations in all the tissues sampled, including those from green and leatherback turtles. It is thought that dietary preferences were likely to be the main differentiating factor among species. Decreasing lipid contaminant burdens with turtle size were observed in green turtles, most likely attributable to a change in diet with age. Sakai *et al.* (1995) found the presence of metal residues occurring in loggerhead turtle organs and eggs. More recently, Storelli *et al.* (1998) analyzed tissues from twelve loggerhead sea turtles stranded along the Adriatic Sea (Italy) and found that characteristically, mercury accumulates in sea turtle livers while cadmium accumulates in their kidneys, as has been reported for other marine organisms like dolphins, seals and porpoises by Law *et al.* (1991). Research is needed on the short- and long-term health and fecundity effects of chlorobiphenyl, organochlorine, and heavy metal accumulation in sea turtles

The impacts from these activities are difficult to measure. However, some researchers have correlated contaminant exposure to possible adverse health effects in marine mammals. Studies of captive harbor seals have demonstrated a link between exposure to organochlorines (*e.g.*, DDT, PCBs, and polyaromatic hydrocarbons) and immunosuppression (Ross *et al.* 1995, Harder *et al.* 1992, De Swart *et al.* 1996). Organochlorines are chemicals that tend to bioaccumulate through the food chain, thereby increasing the potential of indirect exposure to a marine mammal via its food source. During pregnancy and nursing, some of these contaminants can be passed from the mother to developing offspring. Contaminants like organochlorines do not tend to accumulate in significant amounts in invertebrates, but do accumulate in fish and fish-eating animals. Thus, contaminant levels in planktivorous mysticetes have been reported to be one to two orders of magnitude lower compared to piscivorous odontocetes (Borell, 1993, O'Shea and Brownell 1994, O'Hara and Rice 1996, O'Hara *et al.* 1999).

Ship Traffic. As discussed in the Status of the Species narratives for several of the whales that are considered in this Opinion, ship strikes pose significant threats to whales along the Atlantic coast, particularly North Atlantic right whales Specifically, commercial and private vessels may affect humpback, fin, sperm and right whales. Small vessel traffic also kills or injures threatened and endangered sea turtles in the action area.

The port of Jacksonville support some of the country's strongest maritime economies. About 17 million tons of waterborne cargo pass through the Port of Jacksonville, Florida which receives about 1,600 vessels each year moving between the U.S. and South America, Europe, and the Caribbean Region.[1] This amount of traffic increases the probability of collisions between commercial ships, whales, and sea turtles.

Anthropogenic Noise. The marine mammals that occur in the action area are regularly exposed to several sources of natural and anthropogenic sounds. Anthropogenic noises that could affect ambient noise arise from the following general types of activities in and near the sea, any combination of which can contribute to the total noise at any one place and time. These noises include transportation, dredging, construction; oil, gas, and mineral exploration in offshore areas; geophysical (seismic) surveys; sonars; explosions; and ocean research activities (Richardson *et al*. 1995). Table 5 shows the source levels for selected sources of anthropogenic noise in the marine environment.

Noise in the marine environment has received a lot of attention in recent years and is likely to continue to receive attention in the foreseeable future. Several investigators have argued that anthropogenic sources of noise have increased ambient noise levels in the ocean over the last 50 years (Jasny *et al*. 2005; NRC 1994, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2005; Richardson *et al*. 1995). Much of this increase is due to increased shipping as ships become more numerous and of larger tonnage (NRC 2003). Commercial fishing vessels, cruise ships, transport boats, airplanes, helicopters and recreational boats all contribute sound into the ocean (NRC 2003). The military uses sound to test the construction of new vessels as well as for naval operations. In some areas where oil and gas production takes place, noise originates from the drilling and production platforms, tankers, vessel and aircraft support, seismic surveys, and the explosive removal of platforms (NRC 2003). Many researchers have described behavioral responses of marine mammals to the sounds produced by helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, boats and ships, as well as dredging, construction, geological explorations, etc. (Richardson *et al*. 1995). Most observations have been limited to short-term behavioral responses, which included cessation of feeding, resting, or social interactions. Several studies have demonstrated short-term effects of disturbance on humpback whale behavior (Baker *et al.* 1983; Bauer and Herman 1986; Hall 1982; Krieger and Wing 1984), but the long-term effects, if any, are unclear or not detectable. Carretta *et al.* (2001) and Jasny *et al*. (2005) identified the increasing levels of anthropogenic noise as a habitat concern for whales and other cetaceans because of its potential effect on their ability to communicate.

Surface shipping is the most widespread source of anthropogenic, low frequency (0 to 1,000 Hz) noise in the oceans (Simmonds and Hutchinson 1996). The Navy estimated that the 60,000 vessels of the world's merchant fleet annually emit low frequency sound into the world's oceans for the equivalent of 21.9 million days, assuming that 80 percent of the merchant ships at sea at any one time (U.S. Navy 2001). The radiated noise spectrum of merchant ships ranges from 20

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[1] These data were derived from the internet websites for each of the ports named

to 500 Hz and peaks at approximately 60 Hz. Ross (1976) has estimated that between 1950 and 1975 shipping had caused a rise in ambient ocean noise levels of 10 dB. He predicted that this would increase by another 5 dB by the beginning of the 21st century. A review by the National Research Council (1997) estimated that the background ocean noise level at 100 Hz has been increasing by about 1.5 dB per decade since the advent of propeller-driven ships.

Michel *et al.* (2001) suggested an association between long-term exposure to low frequency sounds from shipping and an increased incidence of marine mammal mortalities caused by collisions with shipping. At lower frequencies, the dominant source of this noise is the cumulative effect of ships that are too far away to be heard individually, but because of their great number, contribute substantially to the average noise background.

US Navy Activities. In the late 1990s, the U.S. Navy implemented several new mitigation measures that were designed to protect right whales. Because of these mitigation measures, NMFS concluded that current Navy operations out of Mayport, Florida were not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of endangered or threatened species under NMFS' jurisdiction (NMFS 1997).

Vessel operations and ordnance detonations adversely affect listed species of sea turtles and whales. U.S. Navy aerial bombing training in the ocean off the southeast U.S. coast involving drops of live ordnance (500 and 1,000-lb bombs) is estimated to have the potential to injure or kill 84 loggerheads, 12 leatherbacks, and 12 greens or Kemp's ridley, in combination (NMFS 1997). The Navy ship-shock trials for the USS WINSTON S CHURCHILL was conducted in the proposed Action Area, although the U.S. Navy employed a suite of measures that appeared to protect marine mammal and sea turtle from being exposed to shock waves produced by the underwater detonations associated with the trial (Clarke and Norman 2005).

From early July through early August 2007, the U.S. Navy conducted a Composite Training Unit-Joint Task Force Exercise within and seaward of the Cherry Point and Jacksonville-Charleston Operating Areas located off South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. These exercises included antisubmarine warfare training events that employed between 340 and 355 hours of mid-frequency active sonar and deployed 170 DICASS sonobuoys. The Navy reported that one group of dolphins had been observed during this exercise, resulting in a shut-down of active sonar usage. The actual number of marine animals that might have been exposed to mid-frequency active sonar during that exercise, and their responses to any exposure, remains unknown.

Entrainment in Power Plants. Sea turtles entering coastal or inshore areas have been affected by entrainment in the cooling-water systems of electrical generating plants. At the St. Lucie nuclear power plant at Hutchinson Island, Florida, large numbers of green and loggerhead turtles have been captured in the seawater intake canal in the past several years. Annual capture levels from 1994 - 1997 have ranged from almost 200 to almost 700 green turtles and from about 150 to over 350 loggerheads. Almost all of the turtles are caught and released alive; NMFS estimates the survival rate at 98.5% or greater (1997e). Other power plants in south Florida, west Florida, and North Carolina have also reported low levels of sea turtle entrainment. A biological opinion completed in January 2000 estimates that the operations at the Brunswick Steam Electric Plant in

Brunswick, North Carolina, may take 50 sea turtles in any combination annually, that are released alive. NMFS also estimated the total lethal take of turtles at this plant may reach 6 loggerhead, 2 Kemp's ridley or 3 green turtles annually. A biological opinion completed in June 1999 on the operations at the Crystal River Energy Complex in Crystal River, Florida, estimated the level of take of sea turtles in the plant's intake canal may reach 55 sea turtles with an estimated 50 being released alive every two years.

Deep Water Ambient Noise. Urick (1983) provided a discussion of the ambient noise spectrum expected in the deep ocean. Shipping, seismic activity, and weather are primary causes of deep-water ambient noise. Noise levels between 20 and 500 Hz appear to be dominated by distant shipping noise that usually exceeds wind-related noise. Above 300 Hz, the level of wind-related noise might exceed shipping noise. Wind, wave, and precipitation noise originating close to the point of measurement dominate frequencies from 500 to 50,000 Hz. The ambient noise frequency spectrum and level can be predicted fairly accurately for most deep-water areas based primarily on known shipping traffic density and wind state (wind speed, Beaufort wind force, or sea state) (Urick 1983). For frequencies between 100 and 500 Hz, Urick (1983) has estimated the average deep water ambient noise spectra to be 73 to 80 dB for areas of heavy shipping traffic and high sea states, and 46 to 58 dB for light shipping and calm seas.

Table 5. Summary and comparison of source levels for selected sources of anthropogenic low frequency underwater noise

Sound Source (Transient)		**Source Level in dB**
Seismic Survey - Air gun array (32 guns) (Impulsive - Peak)		259[1] Broadband
Explosions (Impulsive)		
0.5 kg (1.1 lb) TNT		267[1] Broadband
2 kg (4.4 lb) TNT	Peak	271[1] Broadband
20 kg (44 lb) TNT	Peak	279[1] Broadband
4,536 kg (10,000 lb) TNT	Peak	>294[2] Broadband
Ocean Acoustics Studies		
Heard Island Test		220[1] Spectrum Level
ATOC		195[1] Spectrum Level
Vessels Underway		
Tug and Barge (18 km/hour)		171[1] Broadband
Supply Ship (*Kigoriak*)		181[1] Broadband
Large Tanker		186[1] Broadband
Icebreaking		193[1] Broadband

Notes: All dB re 1 µPa at 1 m.
Sources: 1. Richardson *et al*. 1995b.
2. Urick 1983.

Shallow Water Ambient Noise. In contrast to deep water, ambient noise levels in shallow waters (i.e., coastal areas, bays, harbors, etc.) are subject to wide variations in level and frequency depending on time and location. The primary sources of noise include distant shipping and industrial activities, wind and waves, and marine animals (Urick 1983). At any given time and place, the ambient noise level is a mixture of these noise types. In addition, sound propagation is also affected by the variable shallow water conditions, including the depth, bottom slope, and type of bottom. Where the bottom is reflective, the sound levels tend to be higher than when the bottom is absorptive.

Although considered by many to be a non-consumptive use of marine mammals with economic, recreational, educational and scientific benefits, marine mammal watching is not without potential negative impacts. One concern is that animals may become more vulnerable to vessel strikes once they habituate to vessel traffic (Swingle *et al*. 1993, Wiley *et al*. 1995). Another concern is that preferred habitats may be abandoned if disturbance levels are too high. In the *Notice of Availability of Revised Whale Watch Guidelines for Vessel Operations in the Northeastern United States* (64 FR 29270; June 1, 1999), NMFS noted that whale watch vessel operators seek out areas where whales concentrate, which has led to numbers of vessels congregating around groups of whales, increasing the potential for harassment, injury or even the death of these animals.

Several investigators have studied the effects of whale watch vessels on marine mammals (Amaral and Carlson 2005, Au and Green 2000, Cockeron 1995, Erbe 2002, Félix 2001, Magalhães *et al*. 2002, Richter *et al*. 2003, Scheidat *et al*. 2004, Simmonds 2005, Watkins 1986, Williams *et al*. 2002). The whale's behavioral responses to whale watching vessels depended on the distance of the vessel from the whale, vessel speed, vessel direction, vessel noise, and the number of vessels. The whales' responses changed with these different variables and, in some circumstances, the whales did not respond to the vessels, but in other circumstances, whales changed their vocalizations, surface time, swimming speed, swimming angle or direction, respiration rates, dive times, feeding behavior, and social interactions.

Recovery Actions

Several agencies have engaged in variety of actions that are designed to reduce the effects of human activities on endangered and threatened species in the Action Area. In 1993, NMFS formed the Southeast Implementation Team for the Right Whale Recovery Plan to address the goals of the Right Whale Recovery Plan within NMFS' Southeast Region. The recovery plan has identified entanglement in fishing gear and ship collisions as the two major direct human impacts affecting both species. Habitat degradation through pollution or other major habitat alteration processes caused by either human sources (discharge or disposal in the marine environment) or resource management activities (fishery or minerals management) is also identified as a major indirect impact requiring attention.

An Early Warning System for right whales has been operational in areas of the southeastern U.S. for several years. This system identifies the known location of right whales within and adjacent to the winter calving area from Savannah, Georgia, to Sebastian Inlet, Florida, from 1 December through 31 May (when right whales are assumed to occur in these waters) and provides this information to mariners. This system has successfully diverted shipping to avoid right whales on several occasions, thus decreasing the threat of vessel collisions.

The Impact of the Baseline on Listed Resources

Although listed resources are exposed to a wide variety of past and present state, Federal or private actions and other human activities that have already occurred or continue to occur in the action area as well as Federal projects in the action area that have already undergone formal or early section 7 consultation, and State or private actions that are contemporaneous with this consultation, the impact of those activities on the status, trend, or the demographic processes of threatened and endangered species remains largely unknown.

Several of the activities described in this *Environmental Baseline* have had significant and adverse consequences for nesting aggregations of sea turtles whose individuals occur in the Action Area. In particular, the commercial fisheries that have been described have captured substantial numbers of green, hawksbill, leatherback, and loggerhead sea turtles each year. Although only small percentages of these sea turtles are estimated to have died as a result of their capture, the actual number of sea turtles that are estimated to have died in these fisheries each year for the past 5 to 10 years (or longer) still amounts to about 6,000 sea turtles each year. When we add the percentage of sea turtles that have suffered injuries or handling stress sufficient to have caused them to delay the age at which they reach maturity or the frequency at which they return to nesting beaches, the consequences of these fisheries on nesting aggregations of sea turtles would be greater than we have estimated.

These fisheries are expected to continue into the foreseeable future at levels of effort that are roughly equivalent to current levels. As a result, we expect the number of sea turtles that are captured and killed in these fisheries to continue for the foreseeable future. These estimates mean that, every five years, more than 800,000 loggerhead sea turtles would be captured in these fisheries, with more than 23,000 of them dying as a result of that capture; about 19,000 leatherback sea turtles would be captured, with about 1,500 of them dying; about 95,000 green sea turtles would be captured, with about 2,900 of them dying; and about 3,200 hawksbill sea turtles being captured and killed. Given that we are certain that nest counts of species like loggerhead sea turtles have been declining and are currently declining, these additional mortalities seem likely to increase the rate at which nesting aggregations of this species are declining. Even if these mortalities did not increase the rate at which these nesting aggregations are declining, merely continuing the rate at which they are currently declining would be sufficient to increase the probability of nest counts in these nesting aggregations to decline to zero. Because we know that populations of sea turtles cannot increase over time if the number of nest counts decline, the mortalities associated with these fisheries are likely to increase probability of these populations of sea turtles becoming extinct in the wild.

Historically, commercial whaling had occurred in the action area and had caused all of the large whales to decline to the point where the whales faced risks of extinction that were high enough to list them as endangered species. Since the end of commercial whaling, the primary threat to these species has been eliminated. However, all of the whale species have not recovered from those historic declines and scientists cannot determine if those initial declines continue to influence current populations of most large whale species. Species like Northern right whales have not begun to recover from the effects of commercial whaling on their populations and continue to face very high risks of extinction in the foreseeable future because of their small population sizes (on the order of 50 individuals) and low population growth rates. Blue, sei, and sperm whales may face similar problems because of the legacy of whaling on their populations in the Atlantic Ocean. Relationships between potential stressors in the marine environments and the responses of these species that may keep their populations depressed are unknown.

Recent attention has focused on the emergence of a wide number of anthropogenic sound sources in the action area and their role as an pollutant in the marine environment. Relationships between specific sound sources, or anthropogenic sound generally, and the responses of marine mammals to those sources are still subject to extensive scientific research and public inquiry but no clear patterns have emerged. As a result, the potential consequences of these activities on threatened and endangered marine mammals remains uncertain.

Gauthier and Sears (1999), Weinrich *et al.* (1991, 1992), Clapham and Mattila (1993), Clapham *et al.* (1993) concluded that close approaches for biopsy samples or tagging caused humpback whales to respond or caused them to exhibit "minimal" responses when approaches were "slow and careful." This caveat is important and is based on studies conducted by Clapham and Mattila (1993) of the reactions of humpback whales to biopsy sampling in breeding areas in the Caribbean Sea. These investigators concluded that the way a vessel approaches a group of whales had a major influence on the whale's response to the approach; particularly cow and calf pairs. Based on their experiments with different approach strategies, they concluded that experienced, trained personnel approaching humpback whales slowly would result in fewer whales exhibiting responses that might indicate stress.

At the same time, several lines of evidence suggest that these human activities might be greater consequences for individual whales (if not for whale populations). Several investigators reported behavioral responses to close approaches that suggest that individual whales might experience stress responses. Baker *et al*. (1983) described two responses of whales to vessels, including: (1) "horizontal avoidance" of vessels 2,000 to 4,000 meters away characterized by faster swimming and fewer long dives; and (2) "vertical avoidance" of vessels from 0 to 2,000 meters away during which whales swam more slowly, but spent more time submerged. Watkins *et al.* (1981) found that both fin and humpback whales appeared to react to vessel approach by increasing swim speed, exhibiting a startled reaction, and moving away from the vessel with strong fluke motions.

Bauer (1986) and Bauer and Herman (1986) studied the potential consequences of vessel disturbance on humpback whales wintering off Hawai'i. They noted changes in respiration, diving, swimming speed, social exchanges, and other behavior correlated with the number, speed, direction, and proximity of vessels. Results were different depending on the social status of the whales being observed (single males when compared with cows and calves), but humpback whales generally tried to avoid vessels when the vessels were 0.5 to 1.0 kilometer from the whale. Smaller pods of whales and pods with calves seemed more responsive to approaching vessels.

Baker *et al*. (1983) and Baker and Herman (1987) summarized the response of humpback whales to vessels in their summering areas and reached conclusions similar to those reached by Bauer and Herman (1986): these stimuli are probably stressful to the humpback whales in the action area, but the consequences of this stress on the individual whales remains unknown. Studies of other baleen whales, specifically bowhead and gray whales document similar patterns of short-term, behavioral disturbance in response to a variety of actual and simulated vessel activity and noise (Richardson et. al, 1985; Malme *et al*. 1983). For example, studies of bowhead whales revealed that these whales oriented themselves in relation to a vessel when the engine was on, and exhibited significant avoidance responses when the vessel's engine was turned on even at distance of approximately 900 m (3,000 ft). Weinrich *et al*. (1992) associated "moderate" and "strong" behavioral responses with alarm reactions and stress responses, respectively.

Jahoda *et al*. (2003) studied the response of 25 fin whales in feeding areas in the Ligurian Sea to close approaches by inflatable vessels and to biopsy samples. They concluded that close vessel approaches caused these whales to stop feeding and swim away from the approaching vessel. The whales also tended to reduce the time they spent at surface and increase their blow rates, suggesting an increase in metabolic rates that might indicate a stress response to the approach. In their study, whales that had been disturbed while feeding remained disturbed for hours after the exposure ended. They recommended keeping vessels more than 200 meters from whales and having approaching vessels move a low speeds to reduce visible reactions in these whales. Beale and Monaghan (2004) concluded that the significance of disturbance was a function of the distance of humans to the animals, the number of humans making the close approach, and the frequency of the approaches. These results would suggest that the cumulative effects of the various human activities in the action area would be greater than the effects of the individual activity. None of the existing studies examined the potential effects of numerous close approaches on whales or gathered information of levels of stress-related hormones in blood samples that are more definitive indicators of stress (or its absence) in animals.

Effects of the Proposed Action

The Endangered Species Act does not define harassment nor has NMFS defined this term, pursuant to the ESA, through regulation. However, the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended, defines harassment as any act of pursuit, torment, or annoyance which has the potential to injure a marine mammal or marine mammal stock in the wild or 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 [16 U.S.C. 1362(18)(A)]. For military readiness activities, this definition of harassment has been amended to mean "any act that disrupts or is likely to disturb a marine mammal or marine mammal stock by causing disruption of natural behavioral patterns including, but not limited to, migration, surfacing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering to a point where such behaviors are abandoned or significatly altered" (Public Law 106-136, 2004).

For this biological opinion, we define harassment similarly: an intentional or unintentional human act or omission that creates the probability of injury to an individual animal by disrupting one or more behavioral patterns that are essential to the animal's life history or its contribution to the population the animal represents. We are particularly concerned about behavioral disruptions that may result in animals that fail to feed or breed successfully or fail to complete their life history because these responses are likely to have population-level consequences.

Potential Stressors

During our assessment, we considered several potential stressors associated with the proposed action: potential ship strikes by vessels that might participate in the proposed Atlantic Fleet

Training Exercises, sounds generated by the vessels' engines, and acoustic energy introduced into the marine environment by the mid-frequency active sonar systems those vessels will employ. Based on our review of the data available, the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises are likely to cause two primary stressors: (1) the ship traffic and associated risks of ship strikes or collisions, (2) acoustic energy introduced into the marine environment by active sonar systems (active mid-frequency sonar systems AN/SQS-53C, AN/SQS-56, AN/BQQ-5/10, AN/SQS-22/13 dipping sonar and AN/SQS-62 sonar DICASS), and (3) parachutes that are released during the deployment of the sonobuoys. The narratives that follow describe these two stressors in greater detail, describe the probability of listed species being exposed to these stressors based on the best scientific and commercial evidence available, then describe the probable responses of listed species, given probable exposures, based on the evidence available.

The narratives that follow describe these stressors in greater detail, describe the probability of listed species being exposed to these stressors based on the best scientific and commercial evidence available, then describe the probable responses of listed species, given probable exposures, based on the evidence available.

Ship Traffic

The proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises will involve from one to five surface ships with one or more helicopters and a P-3 aircraft searching for one or more submarines. Given the speeds at which these vessels are likely to move, they pose potential hazards to marine mammals. In addition, the exercises will involve submarines that pose a potential hazard to whales when they are moving at the water surface.

The Navy's operational orders for ships (and aircraft) that are underway are designed to prevent collisions between surface vessels participating in the Proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises and endangered whales that might occur in the action area. These measures, which include observers on the bridge of ships, requirements for course and speed adjustments to maintain safe distances from whales, and having any ship that observes whales to alert other ships in the area, have historically been effective measures for avoiding collisions between surface vessels and whales. The mitigation measures the Navy proposes to employ during each of the proposed exercises are likely to insure that surface vessels and surfaces submarines have personnel on lookout when a vessel is moving through water or operating sonar, that Navy observers have been trained to identify whales, other marine mammals and their behavior, and the imposition of safety zones should reduce the likelihood of collisions between these vessels and endangered whales that might be in the area.

Although the probability of a collision seems fairly small given the measures that are in place, the close proximity of one to five additional surface vessels engaged in training maneuvers in the action area have some probability of disturbing whales that might occur in the area. Particularly when that traffic is placed in the context of animals that are likely to have had extensive prior experience with existing levels of vessel traffic associated with inter-island transportation, commercial ship traffic, whale-watching vessels, leisure cruises, and research vessels that were discussed in the *Environmental Baseline* of this Opinion.

We assume that fin, sei, and sperm whales that might be exposed to mid-frequency sonar associated with the anti-submarine elements of the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises might be close enough to the exercises to be aware of the vessel traffic and related activities associated with surface ship maneuvers (see Table 5 for estimates of the number of whales that might be affected by these maneuvers). We also assume that whales that are closer to exercises have a greater probability of responding behaviorally to vessels associated with the exercise.

We expect the variables that determine how fin, sei, and sperm whales are likely to respond to vessels associated with the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises to be similar to the variables that determine their responses to other vessels. As discussed in the *Environmental Baseline* section of this Opinion, the responses of individual whales are likely to depend on the distance between a whale and a vessel, vessel speeds, vessel direction, noise produced by the vessel, and the number of vessels involved in a particular maneuver. In some circumstances, a particular whale might not respond to a vessel, while in other circumstances, the same whale might change its vocalizations, surface time, swimming speed, swimming angle or direction, respiration rates, dive times, feeding behavior, and social interactions (Amaral and Carlson 2005; Au and Green 2000, Cockeron 1995, Erbe 2002, Félix 2001, Magalhães *et al*. 2002, Richter *et al*. 2003, Scheidat *et al*. 2004, Simmonds 2005, Watkins 1986, Williams *et al*. 2002).

Mid-Frequency Active Sonar

The Navy assumed that vessels involved in each of the Expeditionary Strike Group and Carrier Strike Group Composite Training Unit training events would produce about 253 hours of mid-frequency active sonar transmissions, that submarines would produce 172 pings of mid-frequency active sonar, and the about 112 active sonobuoys and 100 passive sonobuoys would be deployed. During Carrier Strike Group Joint Task Force training events, the Navy assumed that vessels would produce about 151 hours of mid-frequency active sonar transmissions, submarine would produce 45 pings of mid-frequency active sonar, and about 36 active sonobuoys and 69 passive sonobuoys would be deployed. During Combined Carrier Strike Group Composite Training Unit-Joint Task Force Training exercises, the Navy assumed that vessels would produce about 404 hours of mid-frequency active sonar transmissions, submarines would produce 217 pings of mid-frequency active sonar, and about 148 active sonobuoys and 169 passive sonobuoys would be deployed.

Naval sonars operate on the same basic principle as fish-finders (which are also a kind of sonar): brief pulses of sound, or "pings," are projected into the ocean and an accompanying hydrophone system in the sonar device listens for echoes from targets such as ships, mines or submarines. Several sonar systems are likely to be employed during the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises, but two systems in particular pose potential risks to listed resources.

The AN/SQS-53 is a large active-passive bow-mounted sonar that has been operational since 1975. AN/SQS-53 is the U.S. Navy's most powerful surface ship sonar and is installed on Ticonderoga (27 units) and Arleigh Burke I/II/IIIa class vessels in the U.S. Navy (Polmar 2001, D`Spain *et al*. 2006). This sonar transmits at center frequencies of 2.6 kHz and 3.3 kHz at sources levels up to 235 dB_{RMS} re: 1 μPa at 1 meter. The sonar has pulse durations between 1 and 2 seconds, with about 24-second intervals between pulses. AN/SQS-53 operates at depths of about 8 meters.

The AN/SQS-56 is a lighter active-passive bow-mounted sonar that has been operational since 1977. AN/SQS -56 is installed on FFG-7 (33 units) class guided missile frigates in the U.S. Navy (Polmar 2001, D`Spain *et al*. 2006). This sonar transmits at center frequencies of 6.8 kHz, 7.5 kHz, and 8.2 kHz. at 223 dB_{RMS} re: 1 μPa at 1 meter source level. This sonar also has pulse durations between 1 and 2 seconds, with about 24-second intervals between pulses. AN/SQS-56 operates at depths of about 6 meters. The proposed exercises include submarine sonar (AN/BQQ-5/10 sonar), helicopter dipping sonar (AN/SQS-22/13 sonar) and sonobuoys (AN/SQS-62 sonar DICASS).

The duration, rise times, and wave form of sonar transmissions that would be used during the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises are classified; however, the characteristics of the transmissions that were used during the Bahamas exercises might help illustrate attributes of the transmissions from these two sonar sources. During the Bahamas exercises, these two sonars transmitted 1 – 2 second pulses once every 24 seconds (D'Spain *et al*. 2006). Pulse had rise times of 0.1 – 0.4 seconds and typically consisted of three waveforms with nominal bandwidths up to 100 Hz (D'Spain *et al*. 2006). Both sonar create acoustic fields that are omnidirectional in azimuth, although AN/SQS-53C also can create beams covering 120° azimuthal sectors that can be swept from side to side during transits (D'Spain *et al*. 2006). Waveforms of both sonar systems are frequency modulated with continuous waves (D'Spain *et al*. 2006).

Sound Propagation

Near an ocean's surface (roughly the uppermost 150 feet), the sound field will be normally dominated by sound generated by wave action, rain, and other surface activity; that would mask most anthropogenic sounds. Below the surface area of this mixed layer, depth (pressure) dominates the sound speed profile and the sound's speed *increases* with depth. Below the mixed layer, sea temperatures drop rapidly in an area referred to as the thermocline. In this region, temperature dominates the sound speed profile and speed decreases with depth. Finally, beneath the thermocline, the temperature becomes fairly uniform and increasing pressure causes the sound speed profile to increase with depth.

ACOUSTIC WAVEGUIDES, which include surface ducts as well as the SOFAR (sonar fixing and ranging) channel and deep sound channel of deep waters, focus sound from sources within the waveguide to long ranges. Surface ducts are acoustic waveguides that occur in the uppermost part of the water column when water near the surface are mixed by convection by surface wave activity generated by atmospheric winds. This mixing forms a surface layer with nearly constant temperatures so that sound speeds in the layer increase with depth. If sufficient energy is subsequently reflected downward from the surface, the sound can become "trapped" by a series of repeated upward refractions and downward reflections to create surface ducts or "surface channels." Surface ducts commonly form in the winter because the surface is cooled relative to deeper water; as a result, surface ducts are predictable for certain locations at specific times of the year.

Sound trapped in a surface duct can travel for relatively long distances with its maximum range of propagation dependent on the specifics of the sound speed profile, the frequency of the sound, and the reflective characteristics of the surface. As a general rule, surface duct propagation will increase as the temperature becomes more uniform and depth of the layer increases. For example, a sound's transmission is improved when windy conditions create a well-mixed surface layer or in high-latitude mid-winter conditions where the mixed layer extends to several hundred feet deep.

Exposure Analysis

As discussed in the *Approach to the Assessment* section of this Opinion, exposure analyses are designed to identify the listed resources that are likely to co-occur with these effects in space and time and the nature of that co-occurrence. In this step of our analyses, we try to identify the number, age (or life stage), and gender of the individuals that are likely to be exposed to an Action's effects and the populations or subpopulations those individuals represent.

The empirical information available does not allow us to estimate the number of individuals of the different species of endangered whales that might be exposed to mid-frequency sonar transmissions from one or more Navy vessel. More importantly for this consultation, the empirical information available does not allow us to estimate the probability of any individuals of any whale species being exposed to mid-frequency sonar transmissions. Information on the distribution and patterns of movement of individual whales or groups of whales throughout the action area at the spatial and temporal scales we would need to reliably estimate probable exposure is not available for the action area.

Absent empirical information that might be used to estimate exposure, the U.S. Navy developed and conducted computer simulations to estimate the number of marine mammals that might be exposed to different received levels of mid-frequency sonar (U.S. Navy 2006b; see Appendix B of that document for a more detailed presentation of the Navy's modeling procedures).

Those models made the following assumptions about the different sonar systems that would be involved in the exercises:

1. The AN/SQS-53 sonar would operate in a search mode for 70 percent of the time and track mode for 30 percent of the time. Transmissions from this sonar system would have center frequencies of 2.6 kHz and 3.3 kHz at sources levels up to 235 dB_{RMS} re: 1 μPa at 1 meter.

   This sonar has pulse durations between 1 and 2 seconds, with about 24-second intervals between pulses. AN/SQS-53 operates at depths of about 8 meters.

2. The AN/SQS-56 would also operate in a search mode for 70 percent of the time and track mode for 30 percent of the time. Transmissions from this sonar system would have center frequencies of 6.8 kHz, 7.5 kHz, and 8.2 kHz. at 225 dB_{RMS} re: 1 μPa at 1 meter source level. This sonar also has pulse durations between 1 and 2 seconds, with about 24-second intervals between pulses. AN/SQS-56 operates at depths of about 6 meters.

3. Helicopter dipping sonar (AN/SQS-22/13 sonar) transmissions would consist of ten pings at the dip point of about 3,000 meters (9.840 feet) and 15 minutes between dips. These

dipping sonor systems produce sounds centered on three different frequencies between 9 and about 11 kHz with source levels of about 113 or 217 dB, depending on the model.

4. Sonobuoys (AN/SSQ-62 sonar DICASS) can transmit on one of four selectable frequencies: 6.5, 7.5, 8.5, and 9.5 kHz at depths ranging from 15 to 460 meters (50 to 1,500 feet). Although these sonobuoys have an operating life of at least 60 minutes (Sonobuoy Tech Systems no date), they are assumed to ping for 30 minutes after being deployed.

As discussed previously, the Navy assumed that vessels involved in each of the Expeditionary Strike Group and Carrier Strike Group Composite Training Unit training events would produce about 253 hours of mid-frequency active sonar transmissions, that submarines would produce 172 pings of mid-frequency active sonar, and the about 112 active sonobuoys and 100 passive sonobuoys would be deployed. During Carrier Strike Group Joint Task Force training events, the Navy assumed that vessels would produce about 151 hours of mid-frequency active sonar transmissions, submarine would produce 45 pings of mid-frequency active sonar, and about 36 active sonobuoys and 69 passive sonobuoys would be deployed. During Combined Carrier Strike Group Composite Training Unit-Joint Task Force Training exercises, the Navy assumed that vessels would produce about 404 hours of mid-frequency active sonar transmissions, submarines would produce 217 pings of mid-frequency active sonar, and about 148 active sonobuoys and 169 passive sonobuoys would be deployed.

The assumptions described in the previous paragraph may or may not reflect the number of hours these different sonar systems would actually be used during any of the four proposed training events. That is, the assumptions the Navy used in its exposure models may both under- and overestimate actual usage in any exercise. For example, a COMPTUEX-JTFEX that involved the USS TRUMAN that was held in the summer of 2007 involved 340 – 355 hours of mid-frequency active sonar from hull-mounted sonar systems, 50 – 65 hours of dipping sonar, and 170 DICASS sonobuoys. A Joint Task Force Exercise held in the summer of 2006, in contrast, that involved the USS EISENHOWER used less than 110 hours of the 200 – 225 hours of hull-mounted mid-frequency active sonar (both 53C and 56 sonar systems) they had planned to use and deployed 15 of the 50 DISCASS sonobuoys they had planned to deploy during the exercise.

The Navy also made assumptions about the density of marine mammals that might occur in an operation area and speeds of 10 knots for all exercises except those taking place in Area 4 where speeds were modeled at 20 knots. The Navy models made several other assumptions related to potential exposure of marine mammals to this acoustic source:

1. acoustic energy would be constant throughout the vertical water column at a given horizontal range from the source;

2. marine mammal hearing is omni-directional;

3. marine mammals were static (not moving) at the maximum acoustic energy depth at any range.

The Navy's model included several other considerations or assumptions about marine mammals. First, the model considered the density and hearing of marine mammals (it did not consider their distribution or diving behavior). However, the Navy's model does not incorporate an animal's

Table 6. Navy estimates of the number of times different species of whales might accumulate energy equivalent to between 173-195, 195 - 215 dB, and greater than 215 dB rms^2 for 1 second during four anti-submarine warfare exercises in the Charleston, Cherry Point, and Jacksonville Training Ranges (from U.S. Navy 2007a)

Species	Estimated No. of Exposure Events		
	173 - 195 dB	195 - 215 dB	> 215 dB
Fin whale	0	0	0
Humpback whale	481	1	0
North Atlantic right whale	1	0	0
Sperm whale	280	1	0

behavioral responses to sound in the water or their location relative to the point where a sonar source begins to transmit. For example, the models do not assume that a marine mammal that was exposed once to a sonar ping is likely to avoid additional exposures by leaving an area after the first exposure, assuming that the animal did not have a compelling reason to remain in a specific area (for example to forage in an upwelling area or to remain with her calf). Second, the model assumed that mammals were exposed to the maximum received levels calculated for the horizontal distance to the source at any water depth for that distance although direct path sound transmission were not always likely.

For this consultation, we relied on the Navy's model runs for our exposure estimates. Several of the assumptions included in the model suggest that the model would probably overestimate the number of whales that would actually be exposed to mid-frequency sonar (the assumption that acoustic energy would be constant throughout the water column, that marine mammal hearing in omni-directional, and that marine mammals would not leave an area) or would overestimate the intensity of any exposure (the assumption that marine mammals would not move). However, if marine mammals occurred in the action area in higher densities than those the model assumed, the model might underestimate the actual exposure. On balance, the model seems to make the best use of the empirical information that is available.

Fin whales. In its Final Supplement to its Final Overseas Environmental Assessment for these training exercises, the U.S. Navy concluded that fin whales are scarce offshore of the continental slope and east of the Gulf Stream and, therefore, would not be exposed to sonar transmissions associated with the four proposed traning exercises (see Table 6). As a result, the Navy's Environmental Assessment concluded that the proposed exercises may affect, but were not likely to adversely affect fin whales.

Although NMFS' June 2007 biological opinion on anti-submarine warfare exercises in the Action Area that involved the U.S.S. TRUMAN agreed with the Navy's conclusion, both conclusions were based more on our inability to specify fin whale densities in the Action Area rather than on evidence that suggests fin whales are not likely to occur in the Action Area when the proposed exercises are scheduled to occur. Fin whales may have small probabilities of occurring in the Action Area during on any particular day, week, or month; nevertheless, the scientific and commercial data available establishes that fin whales have been observed in the Action Area in the same seasons as the proposed exercises.

Fin whales have stranded along the Atlantic coast of North America from the Gulf of Maine south to Florida, in every month of the year except March (Hain *et al*. 1992, Schmidly 1981, Smithsonian Natural History Museum catalogue). The areas with the highest frequency of stranding events have been Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, with slightly lower frequencies on Long Island, New York. Studies the U.S. Bureau of Land Management funded in the 1980s as part of its Cetacean and Turtle Assessment Program concluded that there were few areas where fin whales were not observed and those few areas included the central Gulf of Maine, shoal areas over the center of the Georges Bank, and nearshore areas off New Jersey, the Delmarva Peninsula, and North Carolina (CeTap 1982, Hain *et al*. 1992). Although fin whales were less common seaward of the 2,000 meter isobath, they were not absent in these depths. Mullin and Fulling (2003) observed a fin whale in the Action Area during the summer of 1998 and estimated there may be have been as many as 41 fin whales in the area they surveyed during that summer. More recently, surveys for marine mammals off the southeast coast of the United States reported 8 groups of fin whales in the Virginia Capes Region between February and April 2002 (Garrison *et al*. 2003). As a result of these surveys, these investigators estimated that between 84 and 231 fin whales occurred in the Virginia Capes Region. We assume, therefore, that fin whales are likely to occur in the Action Area during the same time interval as one or more of the proposed exercises.

More importantly, the information available leads us to conclude that fin whales are likely to be exposed to sound fields produced by active sonar systems during one or more of the proposed training exercises. Several lines of reasoning lead us to this conclusion. First, the spatial area ensonified by ‘pings’ from mid-frequency active sonar are relatively large (they remain above ambient sound levels for tens of kilometers). Second, because ships transmitting mid-frequency active sonar are in motion, successive pings do not ensonify the same volume of water. Third, to produce 253 hours of active sonar, Navy vessels would have to produce a substantial number of ‘pings’: it would take more than about 29,000 1-second ‘pings’ to produce 253 hours of active sonar during a training event (assuming an average of 2 ping per minute with 30-second time intervals between pings). If at least one group of fin whale had at least 1 chance in 10,000 of occurring in waters that had been ensonified by at least one ping during one of the proposed exercises, the fin whale would have about an 96 percent probability of being exposed to a sound field produced by mid-frequency active sonar during one of the proposed exercises[2].

The assumptions that underlie this analysis clearly oversimplify the circumstances that determine whether fin whales are likely to be exposed to an area ensonified by active sonar. However, even substantial changes to these assumptions would not reduce the probability of at least one exposure event to levels we would consider discountable. For example, if fin whales had only a 1 chance in 100,000 of occurring in an ensonified area during an exercise, this probability drops to

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[2] The probabilities in this paragraph and the following paragraph were derived using the equation probability = 1 – (1-f)n, which is a general formula for estimating the probability of encountering “rare” species (speices with low or very low population densities) in a single random sample (in this case, a group of fin whales), where f is the probability of fin whales appearing in a single, random sample (a sound field) and n is the number of samples (the number of times a sound field would be generated during an exercise). See McArdle (1990) for further discussion.

slightly less than 74 percent. If we assume that some pings would occur concurrently and reduce the number of pings to one quarter of our initial assumption, the probability of exposing fin whales to at least one ensonified area during at least one of the four exercises remains about 96 percent. As a result, we believe it is reasonable to assume that fin whales are likely to occur in an area ensonified by mid-frequency active sonar and be exposed to that sonar as a result.

We may not be able to estimate the number of fin whales that might be exposed, specify their probability of being exposed, or specify the received levels associated with any exposure, but we would expect at least one group of fin whales to occur in the Action Area during at least one of the four proposed exercises. Based on the groups sizes of fin whales reported from the CeTAP studies, a "group" of fin whales is most likely to consist of 1 to 2 individual whales (CeTAP 1982, Hain 1992). Because we cannot estimate where fin whales might occur in a sound field produced by mid-frequency active sonar, we cannot specify the received levels that might be associated with any of an exposure event. We assume that fin whales of any age or gender might be exposed to a sound field.

Humpback whales. During the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises, the Navy estimated that there might be 481 instances in which humpback whales would accumulate energy equivalent to between 173 and 195 dB duriug the proposed exercises. Of this total, 368 of these exposures would occur during the spring Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise and the remaining 113 exposures would occur during the winter Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise. All of these exposures assume that the proposed mitigation is not likely to be effective.

If we assume that some of these exposures might involve the same whale, then 328 of the 481 exposures might represent a single humpback whale that accumulates energy equivalent to 173 to 195 dB once, 131 of the 481 exposures might represent a single humpback whale that accumulates that energy equivalent twice, 21 of the 481 exposures might represent a single humpback whale that accumulates that energy equivalent three times, and 1 humpback whale might accumulate that energy equivalent four times. One humpback whale might accumulate energy equivalent to between 195 and 215 dB once during the spring Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise.

Because of the annual migratory pattern of humpback whales, we assume that any humpback whales are more likely to be exposed during the winter months and during their northward spring migration. We assume that any age or gender might be exposed to these received levels.

North Atlantic Right Whales. During a combined Composite Training Unit Exercise – Joint Task Force Exercise involving a carrier strike group in the spring season (between 1 December and 28 February), the Navy's models identified 1 instance in which North Atlantic right whales would accumulate energy equivalent to between 173 and 195 dB in the Jacksonville Operating Area. This exposure assumes that the protective measures the Navy proposed are not likely to prevent a right whale from being exposed to sonar transmissions.

Because this exposure is likely to occur in the Jacksonville Operating Area, where right whales reproduce and calve, and the exposure is likely to occur during the season in which calving occurs, this single exposure might involve a single right whale, a female right whale in the company of her calf, or a small group of right whales.

Sei Whales. In its Final Supplement to its Final Overseas EA for these training exercises, the U.S. Navy concluded that sei whales may occur seaward of the 2,000 meter isobath in the Cherry Point training area during the winter, but are not expected to occur in that area during the summer or in the Jacksonville-Charleston training areas at any time during the year.

Although the Navy might be justified in concluding that sei whales have small probabilities of occurring in the Action Area during on any particular day, week, or month, we cannot conclude that sei whales are not likely to occur in the Action Area based on the data available. Sei whales occur in lower densities along the coast of the United States and generally migrate to higher latitudes to feed. Outside of their foraging areas, we do not know where they might occur, when they might occur there, or how many of them are likely to occur. Nevertheless, the sei whale that stranded on the Outer Banks of North Carolina in the summer of 1974 suggests that some sei whales may swim south of their foraging areas. We can say with certainty that their probability of occurring in the Action Area during one or more of the proposed exercises is low, but we do not have enough information to say that their occurrence is ‘discountable’ (so low that it is not likely to occur; see discussion under fin whales). Like fin whales, we cannot estimate the number of sei whales that might be exposed, specify their probability of being exposed, or specify the received levels associated with any exposure, but we would expect at least one group of sei whales to occur in an area ensonified by mid-frequency active sonar during one or more of the proposed exercises.

Sperm Whales. During the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises, the Navy estimated that there might be 280 instances in which sperm whales would accumulate energy equivalent to between 173 and 195 dB and 1 instance in which a sperm whale might accumulate energy equivalent to between 195 and 215 dB duriug the proposed exercises. Of this total, 121 of these exposures would occur during the spring Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise, 71 would occur during the summer Expenditionary Strike Group COMPTUEX exercise, 38 would occur during the summer Carrier Strike Group JTFEX exercise, and the remaining 50 exposures would occur during the winter Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise. All of these exposures assume that the proposed mitigation is not likely to be effective.

If we assume that some of these exposures might involve the same whale, then 191 of the 280 exposures might represent a single sperm whale that accumulates energy equivalent to 173 to 195 dB once, 76 of the 280 exposures might represent a single sperm whale that accumulates that energy equivalent twice, and the remaining 12 of the 481 exposures might represent a single sperm whale that accumulates that energy equivalent three times, and 1 sperm whale might accumulate that energy equivalent four times. One sperm whale might accumulate energy equivalent to between 195 and 215 dB once during the winter Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise.

Sea Turtles. Sea turtles are regularly found along the coasts of the mid-Atlantic and southeastern United States. Information on sea turtle sightings decreases with increasing distance from the coast. However, aerial and ship-board surveys, observer records and logbooks from commercial fisheries, and satellite tracking studies suggest that sea turtles are likely to occur in the Action Area (e.g., James *et al*. 2005, Witzell 1999). Hatchling and juvenile age classes of sea turtles are found in the Gulf Stream and in the Sargasso Sea, in association with Sargassum habitats (for example, see Carr 1987, Coston-Clements *et al*. 1991, Spotila 2004, Witherington 2002). As a result, despite the Navy's efforts to site these exercises to the east of the western wall of the Gulf Stream, we assume that sea turtles are still likely to occur in the Action Area albeit at lower densities. In particular, hatchling sea turtles are more likely to occur in higher densities in waters east of the eastern wall of the Gulf Stream while sea turtles in older age-classes appear to have equal probabilities of occurring in waters to the east and west of the Gulf Stream.

Analyses of Probable Exposure of Sea Turtles to Sonobuoys

When AN/SQS-62 DICASS sonobuoys impact the water surface after being deployed from aircraft, their parachute assemblies of sonobuoys deployed by aircraft are jettisoned and sink away from the sonobuoy, while a float containing an antenna is inflated. The parachutes are made of nylon and are about 8 feet in diameter. At maximum inflation, the canopies are between 0.15 to 0.35 square meters (1.6 to 3.8 squared feet). The shroud lines range from 0.30 to 0.53 meters (12 to 21 inches) in length and are made of either cotton polyester with a 13.6 kilogram (30 pound) breaking strength or nylon with a 45.4 kilogram (100 pound) breaking strength. All parachustes are weighted with a 0.06 kilogram (2 ounce) steel material weight, which would cause the parachute to sink from the surface within about 15 minutes, although actual sinking rates depend on ocean conditions and the shape of the parachute.

The subsurface assembly descends to a selected depth, and the sonobuoy case falls away and sea anchors deploy to stabilize the hydrophone (underwater microphone). The operating life of the seawater battery is eight hours, after which the sonobuoy scuttles itself and sinks to the ocean bottom. For the sonobouys, concentrations of metals released from batteries were calculated to be 0.0011 mg/L lead, 0.000015mg/L copper, and 0.0000001mg/L silver.

Sea turtles that occur in the Action Area might encounter one or more of the parachutes after they have been jettisoned from these sonobuoys and could become entangled as a result. Whales also might encounter one or more of these parachutes and become entangled as it sinks to the bottom or once it is on the seafloor. We cannot, however, determine whether such interactions are probable, given the relatively small number of sonobuoys that would be employed in each of the exercises, the relatively large geographic area involved, and the relatively low densities of sea turtles and whales that are likely to occur in the Action Area.

Analyses of the Probable Responses to Active Sonar Exposures

As discussed in the approach to the assessment section of this biological opinion, response analyses determine how listed resources are likely to respond after being exposed to an Action's effects on the environment or directly on listed species themselves. For the purposes of consultations on activities involving active sonar, our assessments try to detect the probability of lethal responses, sensory impairment (permanent and temporary threshold shifts and acoustic masking), physiological responses (particular stress responses), behavioral responses, and social responses that might result in reducing the fitness of listed individuals. Ideally, our response analyses consider and weigh evidence of adverse consequences, beneficial consequences, or the absence of such consequences.

It is important to begin these analyses by stating that, to the best of our knowledge, no data or other information are available from actual exposures of endangered or threatened marine mammals to mid-frequency active sonar in either captive or natural settings. We are aware of the studies of the behavioral responses of small cetaceans given exposed to mid-frequency active sonar that are being conducted at the U.S. Navy's instrumented training range in the Bahamas (the AUTEC range); however, those studies are still in the infancy and no data from them are available at the time of this writing. Without empirical information on the actual responses of endangered and threatened species to mid-frequency active sonar, we reviewed the best scientific and commercial data available to assess the probable responses of endangered and threatened species to mid-frequency active sonar. In the narratives that follow this introduction, we summarize the best scientific and commercial data on the responses of marine animals to mid-frequency active sonar. Then we use that information to make inferences about the probable responses of the endangered and threatened we are considering in this Opinion.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model we use to assess the potential responses of marine animals when they are exposed to active sonar. The narratives that follow are generally organized around the items listed in the column titled "Proximate Responses by Category" in that Figure. These analyses examine the evidence available to determine if exposing endangered and threatened species to mid-frequency active sonar is likely to cause responses that might reduce the fitness of individuals that might be exposed.

Injury

For the purposes of this assessment, "injuries" represents physical trauma or damage that is a direct result of an acoustic exposure, regardless of the potential consequences of those injuries to an animal (we distinguish between injuries that result from an acoustic exposure and injuries that result from an animal's behavioral reaction to an acoustic exposure, which is discussed later in this section of the Opinion). Based on the literature available, mid-frequency active sonar might injure marine animals through two mechanisms (see "Box P" in Figure 1): acoustic resonance and noise-induced loss of hearing sensitivity (more commonly-called "threshold shift").

ACOUSTIC RESONANCE. Acoustic resonance results from hydraulic damage in tissues that are filled with gas or air that resonates when exposed to acoustic signals (Box P1 of Figure 1 illustrates the potential consequences of acoustic resonance; see Rommel *et al*. 2007). Based on studies of lesions in beaked whales that stranded in the Canary Islands and Bahamas associated with exposure to naval exercises that involved sonar, investigators have identified two physiological mechanisms that might explain some of those stranding events: tissue damage resulting from resonance effects (Ketten 2004, Cudahy and Ellison 2001) and tissue damage resulting from "gas and fat embolic syndrome" (Fernandez *et al*. 2005, Jepson *et al*. 2003, 2005). Fat and gas embolisms are believed to occur when tissues are supersaturated with dissolved nitrogen gas and diffusion facilitated by bubble-growth is stimulated within those tissues (the bubble growth results in embolisms analogous to the "bends" in human divers).

Cudahy and Ellison (2001) analyzed the potential for resonance from low frequency sonar signals to cause injury and concluded that the expected threshold for *in vivo* (in the living body) tissue damage for underwater sound is on the order of 180 to 190 dB. There is limited direct empirical evidence (beyond Schlundt *et al*. 2000) to support a conclusion that 180 dB is "safe" for marine mammals; however, evidence from marine mammal vocalizations suggests that 180 dB is not likely to injure marine mammals. For example, Frankel (1994) estimated the source level for singing humpback whales to be between 170 and 175 dB; McDonald *et al*. (2001) calculated the average source level for blue whale calls as 186 dB, Watkins *et al*. (1987) found source levels for fin whales up to 186 dB, and Møhl *et al*. (2000) recorded source levels for sperm whale clicks up to 223 dB_{rms}. Because whales are not likely to communicate at source levels that would damage the tissues of other members of their species, this evidence suggests that these source levels are not likely to damage the tissues of the endangered and threatened species being considered in this consultation.

Crum and Mao (1996) hypothesized that received levels would have to exceed 190 dB in order for there to be the possibility of significant bubble growth due to supersaturation of gases in the blood. Jepson *et al*. (2003, 2005) and Fernández *et al*. (2004, 2005) concluded that *in vivo* bubble formation, which may be exacerbated by deep, long-duration, repetitive dives may explain why beaked whales appear to be particularly vulnerable to sonar exposures.

Based on the information available, the endangered or threatened marine mammals and sea turtles that we are considering in this Opinion are not likely to experience acoustic resonance. All of the evidence available suggests that this phenomenon poses potential risks to smaller cetaceans like beaked whales rather than the larger cetaceans that have been listed as endangered. Thus far, this phenomenon has not been reported for or associated with sea turtles, perhaps because they do not engage in dive patterns that are similar to those of beaked whales.

NOISE-INDUCED LOSS OF HEARING SENSITIVITY. Noise-induced loss of hearing sensitivity[3] or "threshold shift" refers to an ear's reduced sensitivity to sound following exposure to loud noises; when an ear's sensitivity to sound has been reduced, sounds must be louder for an animal to detect and recognize it. Noise-induced loss of hearing sensitivity is usually represented by the increase in intensity (in decibels) sounds must have to be detected. Although noise-induced losses in hearing sensitivity rarely affect the entire frequency range an ear might be capable of detecting, only a few investigators have reported the frequency range affected by a hearing loss.

An animal can experience temporary threshold shift (TTS) or permanent threshold shift (PTS). TTS can last from minutes or hours to days. When PTS occurs, there is physical damage to the sound receptors in the ear. This can result in total or partial deafness, or an animal's hearing can be impaired in specific frequency ranges (Box P2 of Figure 1 illustrates the potential consequences of noise-induced loss in hearing sensitivity).

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[3] Animals can experience losses in hearing sensitivity through other mechanisms. The processes of aging and several diseases cause some humans to experience permanent losses in their hearing sensitivity. Body burdens of toxic chemicals can also cause animals, including humans, to experience permanent and temporary losses in their hearing sensitiviy (for example, see Mills and Going 1982 and Fechter and Pouyanos 2005).

Although the published body of science literature contains numerous theoretical studies and discussion papers on hearing impairments that can occur with exposure to a strong sound, only a few studies provide empirical information on noise-induced loss in hearing sensitivity in non-human animals. Most of the few studies available have reported the responses of captive animals exposed to sounds in controlled experiments. Schlundt *et al.* (2000; see also Finneran *et al.* 2001, 2003) provided a detailed summary of the behavioral responses of trained marine mammals during TTS tests conducted at the Navy's SPAWAR Systems Center with 1-second tones. Schlundt *et al.* (2000) reported on eight individual TTS experiments that were conducted in San Diego Bay. Fatiguing stimuli durations were 1 second. Because of the variable ambient noise in the bay, low-level broadband masking noise was used to keep hearing thresholds consistent despite fluctuations in the ambient noise.

Finneran *et al.* (2001, 2003) conducted TTS experiments using 1-second duration tones at 3 kHz. The test method was similar to that of Schlundt *et al.* except the tests were conducted in a pool with a very low ambient noise level (below 50 dB re 1 $\mu Pa^2/Hz$), and no masking noise was used. The signal was a sinusoidal amplitude modulated tone with a carrier frequency of 12 kHz, modulating frequency of 7 Hz, and SPL of approximately 100 dB re 1 µPa. Two separate experiments were conducted. In the first, fatiguing sound levels were increased from 160 to 201 dB SPL. In the second experiment, fatiguing sound levels between 180 and 200 dB re 1 µPa were randomly presented.

Richardson *et al*. (1995) hypothesized that marine mammals within less than 100 meters of a sonar dome might be exposed to mid-frequency active sonar transmissions at received levels greater than 205 dB re 1 µPa which might cause TTS. There is no empirical evidence that exposure to active sonar transmissions with this kind of intensity can cause PTS in any marine mammals; instead the probability of PTS has been inferred from studies of TTS (see Richardson *et al* 1995).

Based on the information available, the endangered or threatened marine mammals and sea turtles that we are considering in this Opinion are not likely to experience noise-induced hearing loss after being exposed to mid-frequency active sonar. Given the speeds at which Navy vessels operate during these exercises and the protective measures the Navy would employ during an exercise, we think it is highly unlikely that large whales are likely to be close enough to an active sonar transmission to be exposed to received levels high enough to cause noise-induced loss of hearing sensitivity. At the ship speeds involved, collisions would present a greater risk than noise-induced hearing loss; as we have discussed previously, the Navy's protective measures, which are designed to detect large whales (and other objects) in their path to protect the ships from being damaged during a collision, are also likely to prevent large whales from being exposed to received levels sufficient to cause hearing losses.

Acoustic Masking

Marine mammals use acoustic signals for a variety of purposes, which differ among species, but include communication between individuals, navigation, foraging, reproduction, and learning about their environment (Erbe and Farmer 2000, Tyack 2000). Masking, or *auditory interference*, generally occurs when sounds in the environment are louder than and of a similar frequency to, auditory signals an animal is trying to receive. Masking, therefore, is a phenomenon that affects animals that are trying to receive acoustic information about their environment, including sounds from other members of their species, predators, prey, and sounds that allow them to orient in their environment. Masking these acoustic signals can disturb the behavior of individual animals, groups of animals, or entire populations (Box M of Figure 1 illustrates the potential consequences of acoustic masking).

Richardson *et al*. (1995b) argued that the maximum radius of influence of an industrial noise (including broadband low frequency sound transmission) on a marine mammal is the distance from the source to the point at which the noise can barely be heard. This range is determined by either the hearing sensitivity of the animal or the background noise level present. Industrial masking is most likely to affect some species' ability to detect communication calls and natural sounds (i.e., surf noise, prey noise, etc.; Richardson *et al*. 1995).

Sperm whales have been observed to frequently stop echolocating in the presence of underwater pulses produced by echosounders and submarine sonar (Watkins and Schevill 1975; Watkins *et al.* 1985). They also stop vocalizing for brief periods when codas are being produced by other individuals, perhaps because they can hear better when not vocalizing themselves (Goold and Jones 1995). Sperm whales have moved out of areas after the start of air gun seismic testing (Davis *et al.* 1995). Seismic air guns produce loud, broadband, impulsive noise (source levels are son the order of 250 dB) with "shots" every 15 seconds, 240 shots per hour, 24 hours per day during active tests. Because they spend large amounts of time at depth and use low frequency sound sperm whales are likely to be susceptible to low frequency sound in the ocean (Croll *et al* 1999). Furthermore, because of their apparent role as important predators of mesopelagic squid and fish, changes in their abundance could affect the distribution and abundance of other marine species.

The echolocation calls of toothed whales are subject to masking by high frequency sound. Human data indicate low frequency sound can mask high frequency sounds (i.e., upward masking). Studies on captive odontocetes by Au *et al*. (1974, 1985, 1993) indicate that some species may use various processes to reduce masking effects (e.g., adjustments in echolocation call intensity or frequency as a function of background noise conditions). There is also evidence that the directional hearing abilities of odontocetes are useful in reducing masking at the high frequencies these cetaceans use to echolocate, but not at the low-to-moderate frequencies they use to communication (Zaitseva *et al*. 1980).

Based on the evidence available, the endangered baleen whales that are considered in this Opinion, particularly, fin, North Atlantic right, and sei whales are not likely to experience acoustic masking because they are low-frequency hearing specialists who attend to environmental cues at frequencies that are much lower than mid-frequency active sonar. Similarly, the endangered and threatened sea turtles that are considered in this Opinion are low frequency hearing specialists and, as a result, are not likely to experience acoustic masking by mid-frequency active sonar.

Field investigations of humpback whale songs suggest that humpback whales have an upper frequency limit reaching as high as 24 kHz (Au *et al*. 2006). Based on this information, it is reasonable to assume that the active mid-frequency sonar the U.S. Navy would employ during the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises is within the hearing and vocalization range of humpback whales. As a result, we assume that some of the humpback whales that are exposed to mid-frequency active sonar during one or more of the proposed exercies might experience acoustic masking as a result of their exposure.

The evidence available leads us to the opposite conclusion for sperm whales: based on their hearing sensitivities, which overlap the frequency range of mid-frequency active sonar, sonar transmissions might mask environmental cues at the lower range of sperm whale hearing. Although there is no published audiogram for sperm whales, sperm whales would be expected to have good, high frequency hearing because their inner ear resembles that of most dolphins, and appears tailored for ultrasonic (>20 kHz) reception (Ketten 1994). The only data on the hearing range of sperm whales are evoked potentials from a stranded neonate, which suggest that neonatal sperm whales respond to sounds from 2.5 to 60 kHz.

Impaired Communication

Masking is a phenomenon that is usually associated with animals that are trying to receive acoustic cues in their environment; those cues will commonly include vocalizations from other members of an animal's species or social group. In addition to making it more difficult for animals to perceive acoustic cues in their environment, anthropogenic noise presents separate challenges for animals that are vocalizing. When they vocalize, animals are aware of environmental conditions that affect the "active space" of their vocalizations, which is the maximum area within which their vocalizations can be detected before it drops to the level of ambient noise (Brenowitz 2004, Brumm *et al*. 2004, Lohr *et al*. 2003). Animals are also aware of environment conditions that affect whether listeners can discriminate and recognize their vocalizations from other sounds, which are more important than detecting a vocalization (Brenowitz 1982, Brumm *et al*. 2004, Dooling 2004, Marten and Marler 1977, Patricelli *et al*. 2006).

Most animals that vocalize have evolved with an ability to make vocal adjustments to their vocalizations to increase the signal-to-noise ratio, active space, and recognizability of their vocalizations in the face of temporary changes in background noise (Brumm *et al*. 2004, Patricelli *et al*. 2006). Vocalizing animals will make one or more of the following adjustments to their vocalizations:

1. Adjust the frequency structure (Box C1.2 of Figure 1). Animals commonly adjust the frequency structure of their calls and songs by increasing the minimum frequency of the vocalizations while leaving maximum frequencies the same. This reduces the frequency range of their vocalizations and reduces the amount of overlap between their vocalizations and background noise.

Dahlheim *et al*. (1984) concluded that gray whales in the San Ignacio Lagoon, Baja, California shifted the frequencies of their vocalizations away from the predominant ambient noise producers in the lagoon to overcome masking effects

2. Adjust the amplitude (Box C1.1 of Figure 1). Animals increase the amplitude or pitch of their calls and songs (commonly known as the "Lombard effect" or "Lombard reflex") by

placing more energy into the entire vocalization or, more commonly, shifting the energy into specific portions of the call or song.

For example, Holt *et al*. (2007) reported that endangered southern resident killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in Haro Strait off the San Juan Islands in Puget Sound, Washington, increased the amplitude of their social calls in the face of increase sounds levels of background noise.

3. Adjust temporal structure (Box C1.2 of Figure 1). Animals adjust the temporal structure of their vocalizations by changing the timing of modulations, notes, and syllables within vocalizations or increasing the duration of their calls or songs.

For example, Miller *et al*. (2000) recorded the vocal behavior of singing humpback whales continuously for several hours using a towed, calibrated hydrophone array. They recorded at least two songs the whales were exposed to low-frequency active sonar transmissions (42 second signals at 6 minute intervals) broadcast so that none of the singing whales were exposed at received levels greater than 150 dB (reference 1μPa). They followed sixteen singing humpback whales during 18 playbacks. In nine follows, whales sang continuously throughout the playback; in four follows, the whale stopped singing when he joined other whales (a normal social interaction); and in five follows, the singer stopped singing, presumably in response to the playback. Of the six whales whose songs they analyzed in detail, songs were 29% longer, on average, during the playbacks. Song duration returned to normal after exposure, suggesting that the whale's response to the playback was temporary.

Foote *et al*. (2004) compared recordings of endangered southern resident killer whales that were made in the presence or absence of boat noise in Puget Sound during three time periods between 1977 and 2003. They concluded that the duration of primary calls in the presence of boats increased by about 15% during the last of the three time periods (2001 to 2003). They suggested that the amount of boat noise may have reached a threshold above which the killer whales needs to increase the duration of their vocalization to avoid masking by the boat noise.

4. Adjust temporal delivery (Boxes C1.3 – C1.5 of Figure 1). Animals adopt this strategy by changing when they vocalize or changing the rate at which they repeat calls or songs.

For example, tawny owls (*Strix aluco*) reduce the rate at which they call during rainy conditions (Lengagne and Slater 2002). Brenowitz (1982) concluded that red-winged blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) had the largest active space, or broadcast area, for their calls at dawn because of relatively low turbulence and background noise when compared with other times of the day. Brown and Handford (2003) concluded that swamp and white-throated sparrows (*Melospiza georgiana* and *Zonotrichia albicollis*, respectively) tended to sing at dawn, as opposed to other times of the day, because they encountered the fewest impediments to acoustic transmissions during that time of the day.

Many animals will combine several of these strategies to compensate for high levels of background noise. For example, Brumm et al. (1004) reported that common marmosets (*Callithrix jacchus*) increased the median amplitude of the twitter calls as well as the duration of the calls in response to increased background noise. King penguins (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*) increase the number of syllables in a call series and the rate at which they repeat their calls to compensate for high background noise from other penguins in a colony or high winds (Lengagne *et al*. 1999).

California ground squirrels (*Spermophilus beecheyi*) shifted the frequencies of their alarm calls in the face of high ambient noise from highway traffic (Rabin *et al*. 2003). However, they only shifted the frequency of the second and third harmonic of these alarm calls, without changing the amount of energy in the first harmonic. By emphasizing the higher harmonics, the ground squirrels placed the peak energy of their alarm calls above the frequency range of the masking noise from the highway. Wood and Yezerinac (2006) reported that song sparrows (*Melospiza melodus*) increased the frequency of the lowest notes in their songs and reduced the amplitude of the low frequency range of their songs. Fernandez-Juricic *et al*. (2005) reported that house finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) adopted the same strategy to compensate for background noise.

Park and Tyack (2007) reported that surface active groups of North Atlantic right whales would adopt this strategy as the level of ambient noise increased. As noise levels increased from low to high, the minimum frequency of right whale "scream calls" would increase from 381.4 Hz (± 16.50) at low levels of ambient noise, to 390.3 Hz (± 15.14) at medium noise levels, to 422.4 Hz (± 15.55) at high noise levels. Surface active groups of North Atlantic right whales would also increase the duration and the intercall interval of their vocalizations as the level of ambient noise increased. As noise levels increased from low to high, the duration of right whale "scream calls" would increase from 1.18 seconds (± 0.08) at low levels of ambient noise to 1.22 seconds (± 0.08) at high noise levels (durations decreased to 1.11 seconds ± 0.07 at medium noise levels). The intercall intervals of these vocalizations would increase from 17.9 seconds (± 5.06) at low levels of ambient noise, to 18.5 seconds (± 4.55) at medium noise levels, to 28.1 seconds (± 4.63) at high noise levels.

Anthropogenic sounds that either reduce the signal-to-noise ratio of animal vocalizations, increase the masked auditory thresholds of animals listening for such vocalizations, or reduce the active space of an animal's vocalizations impair communication between animals (Box C of Figure 1 illustrates the potential consequences of impairing an animal's communication). Most animals that vocalize have evolved strategies to compensate for the effects of short-term or temporary increases in background or ambient noise on their songs or calls. Although the fitness consequences of these vocal adjustments remain unknown, like most other trade-offs animals must make, some of these strategies probably come at a cost (Patricelli *et al*. 2006). For example, vocalizing more loudly in noisy environments may have energetic costs that decrease the net benefits of vocal adjustment and alter the bird's energy budget (Brumm 2004, Wood and Yezerinac 2006). Shifting songs and calls to higher frequencies may also impose energetic costs (Lambrechts 1996).

In addition, Petricelli *et al*. (2006) argued that females of many species use the songs and calls of males to determine whether a male is an appropriate potential mate (that is, the must recognize the singer as a member of their species); if males must adjust the frequency or temporal features of their vocalizations to avoid masking by noise, they may no longer be recognized by conspecific females (Slabbekoorn and Peet 2003, Wood and Yezerinac 2006). Although this line of reasoning was developed for bird species, the same line of reasoning should apply to marine mammals, particularly for species like fin and sei whales whose song structures appear to be very similar.

Based on the evidence available, the endangered baleen whales that are considered in this Opinion, particularly, fin, North Atlantic right, and sei whales are not likely to experience impaired communication because they vocalize at frequencies that are much lower than mid-frequency active sonar. Because the endangered and threatened sea turtles that are considered in this Opinion do not appear to vocalize, they are not likely to experience impaired communication by mid-frequency active sonar.

Field investigations of humpback whale songs suggest that humpback whales have an upper frequency limit reaching as high as 24 kHz (Au *et al*. 2006). Based on this information, it is reasonable to assume that the active mid-frequency sonar the U.S. Navy would employ during the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises is within the vocalization range of humpback whales. As a result, we assume that some of the humpback whales that are exposed to mid-frequency active sonar during one or more of the proposed exercies might experience impaired communication as a result of that exposure. Because the dominant energy in humpback whale songs and calls are in frequency ranges that are substantially lower than that of mid-frequency active sonar, however, we believe humpback whales are likely to protect the saliency of their songs and calls without making the vocal adjustments that have been reported for North Atlantic right whales confronted with increases in continuous, low-frequency sound sources.

The evidence available leads us to the opposite conclusion for sperm whales: based on their hearing sensitivities, which overlap the frequency range of mid-frequency active sonar, sonar transmissions might temporarily reduce the active space of sperm whale vocalizations. Most of the energy of sperm whales clicks is concentrated at 2 to 4 kHz and 10 to 16 kHz, which overlaps with the mid-frequency sonar. Other studies indicate sperm whales' wide-band clicks contain energy between 0.1 and 20 kHz (Weilgart and Whitehead 1993, Goold and Jones 1995). Ridgway and Carder (2001) measured low-frequency, high amplitude clicks with peak frequencies at 500 Hz to 3 kHz from a neonate sperm whale.

As a result, we assume that some of the sperm whales that are exposed to mid-frequency active sonar during one or more of the proposed exercises might experience impaired communication as a result of that exposure. Because the dominant energy in sperm whale songs and calls overlaps with the frequency range of mid-frequency active sonar, sperm whales may have to make one or more of the vocal adjustments discussed in this subsection to preserve the saliency of their vocalizations. Because any reductions in the active space of sperm whales caused by active sonar transmissions associated with the proposed exercises would be temporary and episodic, any these vocal adjustments sperm whales would have to make would also be temporary.

Allostasis

Classic stress responses begin when an animal's central nervous system perceives a potential threat to its homeostasis. That perception triggers stress responses regardless of whether a stimulus actually threatens the animal; the mere perception of a threat is sufficient to trigger a stress response (Moberg 2000, Sapolsky *et al*. 2005, Seyle 1950). Once an animal's central nervous system perceives a threat, it mounts a biological response or defense that consists of a combination of the four general biological defense responses: behavioral responses, autonomic nervous system responses, neuroendocrine responses, or immune response.

In the case of many stressors, an animal's first and most economical (in terms of biotic costs) response is behavioral avoidance of the potential stressor or avoidance of continued exposure to a stressor (Box B1 of Figure 1). An animal's second line of defense to stressors involves the autonomic nervous system and the classical "fight or flight" response which includes the cardiovascular system, the gastrointestinal system, the exocrine glands, and the adrenal medulla to produce changes changes in heart rate, blood pressure, and gastrointestinal activity that humans commonly associate with "stress." These responses have a relatively short duration and may or may not have significant long-term effect on an animal's welfare.

An animal's third line of defense to stressors involves its neuroendocrine or sympathetic nervous systems; the system that has received the most study has been the hypothalmus-pituitary-adrenal system (also known as the HPA axis in mammals or the hypothalamus-pituitary-interrenal axis in fish and some reptiles). Unlike stress responses associated with the autonomic nervous system, virtually all neuroendocrine functions that are affected by stress – including immune competence, reproduction, metabolism, and behavior – are regulated by pituitary hormones. Stress-induced changes in the secretion of pituitary hormones have been implicated in failed reproduction (Moberg 1987, Rivier 1995, Box S1.1 of Figure 1) and altered metabolism (Elasser *et al*. 2000), reduced immune competence (Blecha 2000) and behavioral disturbance. Increases in the circulation of glucocorticosteroids (cortisol, corticosterone, and aldosterone in marine mammals; see Romano *et al*. 2004) have been equated with stress for many years.

The primary distinction between *stress* (which is adaptive and does not normally place an animal at risk) and *distress* is the biotic cost of the response. During a stress response, an animal uses glycogen stores that can be quickly replenished once the stress is alleviated. In such circumstances, the cost of the stress response would not pose a risk to the animal's welfare (the sequence of boxes beginning with Box S2 in Figure 1). However, when an animal does not have sufficient energy reserves to satisfy the energetic costs of a stress response, energy resources must be diverted from other biotic functions which impairs those functions that experience the diversion. For example, when mounting a stress response diverts energy away from growth in young animals, those animals may experience stunted growth. When mounting a stress response diversts energy from a fetus, an animal's reproductive success and its fitness will suffer. In these cases, the animals will have entered a pre-pathological or pathological state which is called "distress" (*sensu* Seyle 1950) or "allostatic loading" (*sensu* McEwen and Wingfield 2003). This pathological state will last until the animal replenishes its biotic reserves sufficient to restore normal function (the sequence of boxes beginning with Box S2 in Figure 1 illustrate the potential consequences of these stress responses for the fitness of individual animals).

Relationships between these physiological mechanisms, animal behavior, and the costs of stress responses have also been documented fairly well through controlled experiment; because this physiology exists in every vertebrate that has been studied, it is not surprising that stress responses and their costs have been documented in both laboratory and free-living animals (for examples see, Holberton *et al*. 1996, Hood *et al*. 1998, Jessop *et al*. 2003, Krausman *et al*. 2004, Lankford *et al*. 2005, Reneerkens *et al*. 2002, Thompson and Hamer 2000). Although no information has been collected on the physiological responses of marine mammals upon exposure to anthropogenic sounds, studies of other marine animals and terrestrial animals would lead us to expect some marine mammals to experience physiological stress responses and, perhaps, physiological responses that would be classified as “distress” upon exposure to mid-frequency and low-frequency sounds.

For example, Jansen (1998) reported on the relationship between acoustic exposures and physiological responses that are indicative of stress responses in humans (for example, elevated respireation and increased heart rates). Jones (1998) reported on reductions in human performance when faced with acute, repetitive exposures to acoustic disturbance. Trimper *et al*. (1998) reported on the physiological stress responses of osprey to low-level aircraft noise while Krausman *et al*. (2004) reported on the auditory and physiology stress responses of endangered Sonoran pronghorn to military overflights. Smith *et al*. (2004a, 2004b) identified noise-induced physiological stress responses in hearing-specialist fish that accompanied short- (TTS) and long-term (PTS) hearing losses. Welch and Welch (1970), reported physiological and behavioral stress responses that accompanied damage to the inner ears of fish and several mammals.

Hearing is one of the primary senses cetaceans use to gather information about their environment and to communicate with conspecifics. Although empirical information on the relationship between sensory impairment (TTS, PTS, and acoustic masking) on cetaceans remains limited, it seems reasonable to assume that reducing an animal’s ability to gather information about its environment and to communicate with other members of its species would be stressful for animals that use hearing as their primary sensory mechanism. Therefore, we assume that acoustic exposures sufficient to trigger onset PTS or TTS would be accompanied by physiological stress responses because terrestrial animals exhibit those responses under similar conditions (NRC 2003). More importantly, marine mammals might experience stress responses at received levels lower than those necessary to trigger onset TTS. Based on empirical studies of the time required to recover from stress responses (Moberg 2000), we also assume that stress responses are likely to persist beyond the time interval required for animals to recover from TTS and might result in pathological and pre-pathological states that would be as significant as behavioral responses to TTS.

Behavioral Responses

When an animal encounters humans or human activities, ranging from low-flying helicopter to the quiet wildlife photographer, an animal’s response appears to follow the same economic principles used by prey when they encounter predators (Beale and Monaghan 2004, Berger *et al*. 1983, Frid 2003, Frid and Dill 2002, Gill *et al*. 2000, 2001; Gill and Sutherland 2000, 2001; Harrington and Veitch 1992, Lima 1998, Madsen 1994, Romero 2004). The level of perceived risk may result from a combination of factors that characterize disturbance stimuli, along with factors related to natural predation risk (e.g., Frid 2001, Papouchis *et al*. 2001). In response to that perceived threat, animals can experience physiological changes that prepare them for flight or fight responses or they can experience physiological changes with chronic exposure to stressors that have more serious consequences such as interruptions of essential behavioral or physiological events, alteration of an animal’s time budget, or some combinations of these responses (Frid and Dill 2002, Romero 2004, Sapolsky *et al*. 2000, Walker *et al*. 2005).

The behavioral response of animals to human disturbance have been documented to cause animals to abandon nesting and foraging sites (Sutherland and Crockford 1993), cause animals to increase their activity levels and suffer premature deaths or reduced reproductive success when their energy expenditures exceed their energy budgets (Daan *et al*. 1996, Feare 1976, Giese 1996, Mullner *et al*. 2004, Waunters *et al*. 1997), or cause animals to experience higher predation rates when they adopt risk-prone foraging or migratory strategies (Frid and Dill 2002).

Based on the evidence available from empirical studies of animal responses to human disturbance, marine animals are likely to exhibit one of several behavioral responses upon being exposed to sonar transmissions: (1) they may exhibit behaviors associated with “allostasis” or physiological stress responses (see the preceding discussion under Allostasis and Boxes B4 and S of Figure 1, which illustrates the potential consequences of behavioral responses to stress); (2) they may try to avoid exposure or continued exposure to a sound that is painful, noxious, or that they perceive as threatening (Box B1 of Figure 1); (3) they may respond to an acoustic exposure by abandoning an area, assuming that they are not in an area for more compelling reasons (for example, it is a critical foraging or reproductive area, Box B2 of Figure 1); (4) the sound might command an animal’s attention and reduce the animal’s ability to perform other behavioral tasks (Box B3 of Figure 1); (5) they may continue their pre-disturbance behavior and cope with the behavioral consequences of continued exposure, and (6) they may habituate to a sound or series of sounds or they might not perceive a potential sound as threatening (Box N of Figure 1). Marine animals might experience one of these behavioral responses, they might experience a sequence of several of these behaviors (for example, an animal might continue its pre-disturbance behavior for a period of time, then abandon an area after it experiences the consequences of physiological stress) or one of these behaviors might accompany responses such as permanent or temporary loss in hearing sensitivity. The narratives that follow summarize the information available on these behavioral responses.

BEHAVIORAL AVOIDANCE OF EXPOSURE OR CONTINUED EXPOSURE. There are few empirical studies of avoidance responses of free-living cetaceans to mid-frequency sonars. Much more information is available on the avoidance responses of free-living cetaceans to other acoustic sources, like seismic airguns and low frequency sonar, than mid-frequency active sonar. Richardson *et al*. (1995) noted that avoidance reactions are the most obvious manifestations of disturbance in marine mammals.

Captive bottlenose dolphins and a white whale exhibited changes in behavior when exposed to 1 second pulsed sounds at frequencies similar to those emitted by the multi-beam sonar that is used by geophysical surveys (Ridgway *et al.* 1997, Schlundt *et al.* 2000), and to shorter broadband pulsed signals (Finneran *et al.* 2000, 2002). Behavioral changes typically involved what appeared to be deliberate attempts to avoid a sound exposure or to avoid the location of the exposure site during subsequent tests (Schlundt *et al.* 2000, Finneran *et al.* 2002). Dolphins exposed to 1-sec intense tones exhibited short-term changes in behavior above received sound levels of 178 to 193 dB re 1 μPa rms and belugas did so at received levels of 180 to 196 dB and above. Received levels necessary to elicit such responses to shorter pulses were higher (Finneran *et al.* 2000, 2002). Test animals sometimes vocalized after exposure to pulsed, mid-frequency sound from a watergun (Finneran *et al.* 2002). In some instances, animals exhibited aggressive behavior toward the test apparatus (Ridgway *et al.* 1997, Schlundt *et al.* 2000). It is not clear whether or to what degree the responses of captive animals might be representative of the responses of marine animals in the wild. For example, wild cetaceans sometimes avoid sound sources well before they are exposed to received levels such as those used in these experiments. Further, the responses of marine animals in the wild may be more subtle than those described by Ridgway *et al.* (1997) and Schlundt *et al.* (2000).

Maybaum (1993) conducted sound playback experiments to assess the effects of mid-frequency active sonar on humpback whales in Hawaiian waters. Specifically, he exposed focal pods to sounds of a 3.3-kHz sonar pulse, a sonar frequency sweep from 3.1 to 3.6 kHz, and a control (blank) tape while monitoring the behavior, movement, and underwater vocalizations. The two types of sonar signals differed in their effects on the humpback whales, the whales exhibited avoidance behavior when exposed to both sounds. The whales responded to the pulse by increasing their distance from the sound source and responded to the frequency sweep by increasing their swimming speeds and track linearity.

Richardson *et al*. (1995a) and Richardson (1997, 1998) used controlled playback experiments to study the response of bowhead whales in Arctic Alaska. In their studies, bowhead whales tended to avoid drill ship noise at estimated received levels of 110 to 115 dB and seismic sources at estimated received levels of 110 to 132 dB. Richardson *et al*. (1995) concluded that some marine mammals would tolerate continuous sound at received levels above 120 dB re 1 μPa for a few hours. These authors concluded that most marine mammals would avoid exposures to received levels of continuous underwater noise greater than 140 dB when source frequencies were in the animal's most sensitive hearing range.

Several authors noted that migrating whales are likely to avoid stationary sound sources by deflecting their course slightly as they approached a source (LGL and Greenridge 1987 in Richardson *et al*. 1995). Malme et al. (1983, 1984) studied the behavioral responses of gray whales (*Eschrictius robustus*) that were migrating along the California coast to various sound sources located in their migration corridor. The whales they studied showed statistically significant responses to four different underwater playbacks of continuous sound at received levels of approximately 120 dB. The sources of the playbacks were typical of a drillship, semisubmersible, drilling platform, and production platform.

Morton *et al*. (2004) exposed killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) to sounds produced by acoustic harassment devices (devices that were designed to harass harbor seals, source levels were 194 dB at 10 kHz re 1μPa at 1 meter). They concluded that observations of killer whales declined dramatically in the experimental area (Broughton Archipelago) during the time interval the harassment devices had been used (but not before or after the use). Other investigators have concluded that gray whales and humpback whales abandoned some of their coastal habitat in California and Hawai'i, respectively, because of underwater noise associated with extensive vessel traffic (Gard 1974, Reeves 1977, Salden 1988).

In the Caribbean, sperm whales avoided exposure to mid-frequency submarine sonar pulses, in the range 1000 Hz to 10,000 Hz (IWC 2005). Blue and fin whales have occasionally been reported in areas ensonified by airgun pulses; however, there have been no systematic analyses of their behavioral reactions to airguns. Sightings by observers on seismic vessels off the United

Kingdom suggest that, at times of good sightability, the number of blue, fin, sei, and humpback whales seen when airguns are shooting are similar to the numbers seen when the airguns are not shooting (Stone 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001). However, fin and sei whale sighting rates were higher when airguns were shooting, which may result from their tendency to remain at or near the surface at times of airgun operation (Stone 2003). The analysis of the combined data from all years indicated that baleen whales stayed farther from airguns during periods of shooting (Stone 2003). Baleen whales also altered course more often during periods of shooting and more were headed away from the vessel at these times, indicating some level of localized avoidance of seismic activity (Stone 2003).

Sperm whales responded to military sonar, apparently from a submarine, by dispersing from social aggregations, moving away from the sound source, remaining relatively silent and becoming difficult to approach (Watkins *et al.* 1985). Brownell (2004) reported the behavioral responses of western gray whales off the northeast coast of Sakhalin Island to sounds produced by seismic activities in that region. In 1997, the gray whales responded to seismic activities by changing their swimming speed and orientation, respiration rates, and distribution in waters around the seismic surveys. In 2001, seismic activities were conducted in a known feeding area of these whales and the whales left the feeding area and moved to areas farther south in the Sea of Okhotsk. They only returned to the feeding are several days after the seismic activities stopped. The potential fitness consequences of displacing these whales, especially mother-calf pairs and “skinny whales,” outside of their the normal feeding area is not known; however, because gray whales, like other large whales, must gain enough energy during the summer foraging season to last them the entire year. Sounds or other stimuli that cause them to abandon a foraging area for several days seems almost certain to disrupt their energetics and force them to make trade-offs like delaying their migration south, delaying reproduction, reducing growth, or migrating with reduced energy reserves.

Nowacek *et al*. (2004) conducted controlled exposure experiments on North Atlantic right whales using ship noise, social sounds of con-specifics, and an alerting stimulus (frequency modulated tonal signals between 500 Hz and 4.5 kHz). Animals were tagged with acoustic sensors (D-tags) that simultaneously measured movement in three dimensions. Whales reacted strongly to alert signals at received levels of 133-148 dB SPL, mildly to conspecific signals, and not at all to ship sounds or actual vessels. The alert stimulus caused whales to immediately cease foraging behavior and swim rapidly to the surface.

Although causal relationships between beaked whale stranding events and active sonar remain unknown, several authors have hypothesized that stranding events involving these species in the Bahama and Canary Islands may have been triggered when the whales changed their dive behavior to avoid exposure to active sonar (Cox et al. 2006, Rommel *et al*. 2006). These authors proposed two mechanisms by which the behavioral responses of beaked whales upon being exposed to active sonar might result in a stranding event. First, beaked whales that occur in deep waters that are in close proximity to shallow waters (for example, the “canyon areas” that are cited in the Bahamas stranding event; see D’Spain and D’Amico 2006), may respond to active sonar by swimming into shallow waters to avoid further exposures and strand if they were not able to swim back to deeper waters.

Second, beaked whales exposed to active sonar might alter their dive behavior (see Box B1.2.1 of Figure 1). Changes in their dive behavior might cause them to remain at the surface or at depth for extended periods of time which could lead to hypoxia directly by increasing their oxygen demands or indirectly by increasing their energy expenditures (to remain at depth) and increase their oxygen demands as a result. If beaked whales are at depth when they detect a ping from an active sonar transmission and change their dive profile leading to formation of significant gas bubbles, which damage multiple organs or interfere with normal physiological function (Cox *et al*. 2006, Rommel *et al*. 2006, Zimmer and Tyack 2007).

Because many species of marine mammals make repetitive and prolonged dives to great depths, it has long been assumed that marine mammals have evolved physiological mechanisms to protect against the effects of rapid and repeated decompressions. Although several investigators have identified physiological adaptations that may protection marine mammals against nitrogen gas supersaturation (alveolar collapse and elective circulation; Kooyman *et al*. 1972; Ridgway and Howard 1979), Ridgway and Howard (1979) reported that bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) that were trained to dive repeatedly had muscle tissues that were substantially supersaturated with nitrogen gas. Houser *et al.* (2001) used these data to model the accumulation of nitrogen gas within the muscle tissue of other marine mammal species and concluded that cetaceans that dive deep and have slow ascent or descent speeds would have tissues that are more supersaturated with nitrogen gas than other marine mammals.

Based on these data, Cox *et al*. (2006) hypothesized that a critical dive sequence might make beaked whales more prone to stranding in response to acoustic exposures. The sequence began with (1) very deep (to depths as deep as 2 kilometers) and long (as long as 90 minutes) foraging dives with (2) relatively slow, controlled ascents, followed by (3) a series of "bounce" dives between 100 and 400 meters in depth (also see Zimmer and Tyack 2007). They concluded that acoustic exposures that disrupted any part of this dive sequence (for example, causing beaked whales to spend more time at surface without the bounce dives that are necessary to recover from the deep dive) could produce excessive levels of nitrogen supersaturation in their tissues, leading to gas bubble and emoli formation that produces pathologies similar to decompression sickness.

If marine mammals respond to a Navy vessel that is transmitting active sonar in the same way that they might respond to a predator, their probability of flight responses should increase when they perceive that Navy vessels are approaching them directly, because a direct approach may convey detection and intent to capture (Burger and Gochfeld 1981, 1990, Cooper 1997, 1998). The probability of flight responses should also increase as received levels of active sonar increase (and the ship is, therefore, closer) and as ship speeds increase (that is, as approach speeds increase). For example, the probability of flight responses in Dall's sheep *Ovis dalli dalli* (Frid 2001*a, b*), ringed seals *Phoca hispida* (Born et al. 1999), Pacific brant (*Branta bernicl nigricans*) and Canada geese (*B. Canadensis*) increased as a helicopter or fixed-wing aircraft approached groups of these animals more directly (Ward *et al*. 1999). Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) perched on trees alongside a river were also more likely to flee from a paddle raft when their perches were closer to the river or were closer to the ground (Steidl and Anthony 1996).

Based on the evidence available, we believe the endangered whales that are being considered in this Opinion are likely to avoid being exposed to the exercises or, if they are exposed, are likely to avoid continued exposure to the exercises. Fin, humpback, sei, and sperm whales will probably be alerted to the start of an exercise by the low-frequency sounds produced by Navy surface vessels entering an area to begin an exercise. Because the Action Area is not an important feeding area or calving area, these whales seem likely to avoid an area in which surface vessels area moving at speed accompanied by active sonar transmissions, low-frequency sounds produced by aircraft and helicopters, sonobuoys, and submarines. The evidence available suggests that North Atlantic right whales are less likely to be alerted by and avoid these stimuli.

ATTENTIONAL CAPTURE. Attention is the cognitive process of selectively concentrating on one aspect of an animal's environment while ignoring other things (Posner 1994). Because animals (including humans) have limited cognitive resources, there is a limit to how much sensory information they can process at any time. The phenomenon called "attentional capture" occurs when a stimulus (usually a stimulus that an animal is not concentrating on or attending to) "captures" an animal's attention. This shift in attention can occur consciously or unconsciously (for example, when an animal hears sounds that it associates with the approach of a predator) and the shift in attention can be sudden (Dukas 2002, van Rij 2007). Once a stimulus has captured an animal's attention, the animal can respond by ignoring the stimulus, assuming a "watch and wait" posture, or treat the stimulus as a disturbance and respond accordingly, which includes scanning for the source of the stimulus or "vigilance" (Cowlishaw *et al*. 2004).

Vigilance is normally an adaptive behavior that helps animals determine the presence or absence of predators, assess their distance from conspecifics, or to attend cues from prey (Bednekoff and Lima 1998, Treves 2000). Despite those benefits, however, vigilance has a cost of time: when animals focus their attention on specific environmental cues, it is not attending to other activities such a foraging. These costs have been documented best in foraging animals, where vigilance has been shown to substantially reduce feeding rates (Saino 1994, Beauchamp and Livoreil 1997, Fritz *et al*. 2002).

Animals will spend more time being vigilant, which translates to less time foraging or resting, when disturbance stimuli approach them more directly, remain at closer distances, have a greater group size (for example, multiple surface vessels), or when they co-occur with times that an animal perceives increased risk (for example, when they are giving birth or accompanied by a calf). Most of the published literature, however, suggests that direct approaches will increase the amount of time animals will dedicate to being vigilant. For example, bighorn sheep and Dall's sheep dedicated more time being vigilant, and less time resting or foraging, when aircraft made direct approaches over them (Frid 2001, Stockwell *et al*. 1991*)*.

Several authors have established that long-term and intense disturbance stimuli can cause population declines by reducing the body condition of individuals that have been disturbed, followed by reduced reproductive success, reduced survival, or both (Daan et al. 1996, Madsen 1994, White 1983). For example, Madsen (1994) reported that pink-footed geese (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) in undisturbed habitat gained body mass and had about a 46% reproductive success compared with geese in disturbed habitat (being consistently scared off the fields on which they were foraging) which did not gain mass and has a 17% reproductive success. Similar reductions in reproductive success have been reported for mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) disturbed by all-terrain vehicles (Yarmoloy *et al*. 1988), caribou disturbed by seismic exploration blasts (Bradshaw et al. 1998), caribou disturbed by low-elevation military jet-fights (Luick et al. 1996), and caribou disturbed by low-elevation jet flights (Harrington and Veitch 1992). Similarly, a study of elk (*Cervus elaphus*) that were disturbed experimentally by pedestrians concluded that the ratio of young to mothers was inversely related to disturbance rate (Phillips and Alldredge 2000).

The primary mechanism by which increased vigilance and disturbance appear to affect the fitness of individual animals is by disrupting an animal's time budget and, as a result, reducing the time they might spend foraging and resting (which increases an animal's activity rate and energy demand). For example, a study of grizzly bears (*Ursus horribilis*) reported that bears disturbed by hikers reduced their energy intake by an average of 12 kcal/min (50.2 x 10_3kJ/min), and spent energy fleeing or acting aggressively toward hikers (White *et al*. 1999).

CONTINUED PRE-DISTURBANCE BEHAVIOR, HABITUATION, OR NO RESPONSE. Under some circumstances, some of individuals that are exposed to active sonar transmissions will continue their normal behavioral activities; in other circumstances, individual animals will become aware of the sonar transmissions at lower received levels and move to avoid additional exposure or exposures at higher received levels (Richardson *et al*. 1995).

It is difficult to distinguish between animals that continue their pre-disturbance behavior without stress responses, animals that continue their behavior but experience stress responses (that is, animals that cope with disturbance), animals that habituate to disturbance (that is, they may have experienced low-level stress responses initially, but those responses abated over time), and animals that do not respond to the potential disturbance.

Watkins (1986) reviewed data on the behavioral reactions of fin, humpback, right and minke whales that were exposed to continuous, broadband low-frequency shipping and industrial noise in Cape Cod Bay is informative. He concluded that underwater sound was the primary cause of behavioral reactions in these species of whales and that the whales responded behaviorally to acoustic stimuli within their respective hearing ranges. Watkins also noted that whales showed the strongest behavioral reactions to sounds in the 15 Hz to 28 kHz range, although negative reactions (avoidance, interruptions in vocalizations, etc.) were generally associated with sounds that were either unexpected, too loud, suddenly louder or different, or perceived as being associated with a potential threat (such as an approaching ship on a collision course). In particular, whales seemed to react negatively when they were within 100 m of the source or when received levels increased suddenly in excess of 12 dB relative to ambient sounds. At other times, the whales ignored the source of the signal and all four species habituated to these sounds.

Nevertheless, Watkins concluded that whales ignored most sounds in the background of ambient noise, including the sounds from distant human activities even though these sounds may have had considerable energies at frequencies well within the whale's range of hearing. Further, he noted that fin whales were initially the most sensitive of the four species of whales, followed by humpback whales; right whales were the least likely to be disturbed and generally did not react to low-amplitude engine noise. By the end of his period of study, Watkins (1986) concluded that fin and humpback whales have generally habituated to the continuous, broad-band, noise of Cape Cod Bay while right whales did not appear to change their response.

Aicken *et al*. (2005) monitored the behavioral responses of marine mammals to a new low-frequency active sonar system that was being developed for use by the British Navy. During these trials, fin whales, sperm whales, Sowerby's beaked whales, long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*), Atlantic white-sided dolphins, and common bottlenose dolphins were observed and their vocalizations were recorded. These monitoring studies detected no evidence of behavioral responses that the investigators could attribute to exposure to the low-frequency active sonar during these trials (some of the responses the investigators observed may have been to the vessels used for the monitoring).

Stranding Events

In what follows, we directly address the evidence bearing on assertions from several NGOs and scientific investigator that low-frequency active sonar causes marine mammals to "strand." Some authors seemed to have contradicted themselves by first publishing articles that initially identified low frequency active sonar as the "cause" of marine mammal stranding events in the Canary Islands and the Mediterranean Sea, then later publishing articles that identify mid-frequency active sonar as the "cause" of those stranding events after the Bahamas stranding report became available. These causal claims are incoherent: the beaked whale stranding events had a causal association with either low frequency active sonar, mid-frequency active sonar, a combination of the two, or neither of the two. The earlier claims (for example, Frantis 1998) asserting low-frequency active sonar as causal are not compatible with the revised claims of a causal relationship between the stranding events and mid-frequency active sonar. As of the date of this Opinion, none of these authors have published retractions, corrections, or clarifications of their published arguments on whether they believe exposure to low-frequency active sonar, mid-frequency active sonar, or both, caused the stranding events or was a contributing cause of those events.

Despite the small number of instances in which marine mammal stranding events have been associated with mid-frequency active sonar usage and despite the fact that none of these stranding events involved endangered or threatened species, the amount of controversy that surrounds this issue requires us to address it. For these analyses, we defined a "stranded marine mammal" as "any dead marine mammal on a beach or floating nearshore; any live cetacean on a beach or in water so shallow that it is unable to free itself and resume normal activity; any live pinniped which is unable or unwilling to leave the shore because of injury or poor health" (Gulland *et al*. 2001, Wilkinson 1991).

Marine mammals are known to strand for a variety of reasons, although the cause or causes of most stranding are unknown (Geraci *et al*. 1976, Eaton 1979, Odell *et al*. 1980, Best 1982). Klinowska (1985, 1986) correlated marine mammal stranding events and geomagnetism and geomagnetic disturbance. Numerous other studies suggest that the physiology, behavior, habitat relationships, age, or condition of cetaceans may cause them to strand or might pre-dispose them the strand when exposed to another phenomenon. For example, several studies of stranded marine mammals suggest a linkage between unusual mortality events and body burdens of toxic chemicals in the stranded animals (Kajiwara *et al*. 2002, Kuehl and Haebler 1995, Mignucci-

Giannoni *et al*. 2000). These suggestions are consistent with the conclusions of numerous other studies that have demonstrated that combinations of dissimilar stressors commonly combine to kill an animal or dramatically reduce its fitness, even though one exposure without the other does not produce the same result (Chroussos 2000, Creel 2005, DeVries *et al*. 2003, Fair and Becker 2000, Foley *et al*. 2001, Moberg 2000, Relyea 2005a, 2005b, Romero 2004, Sih *et al*. 2004).

Those studies suggest that, in many animal species, disease, reproductive state, age, experience, stress loading, energy reserves, and genetics combine with other stressors like body burdens of toxic chemicals to create fitness consequences in individual animals that would not occur without these risk factors. The contribution of these potential risk factors to stranding events (or causal relationships between these risk factors and stranding events) is still unknown, but the extensive number of published reports in the literature suggests that an experiment investigation into a causal relationship is warranted

Over the past three decades, several “mass stranding” events — stranding events that involve two or more individuals of the same species (excluding a single cow-calf pair) — that have occurred over the past two decades have been associated with naval operations, seismic surveys, and other anthropogenic activities that introduce sound into the marine environment.

Although only one of these events involved threatened or endangered species, we analyzed the information available on stranding events to determine if listed cetaceans are likely to strand following an exposure to mid-frequency active sonar. To conduct these analyses, we searched for and collected any reports of mass stranding events of marine mammals and identified any causal agents that were associated with those stranding events.

Global Stranding Patterns

Several sources have published lists of mass stranding events of cetaceans during attempts to identify relationships between those stranding events and military sonar (Hildebrand 2004, IWC 2005, Taylor *et al*. 2004). For example, based on a review of stranding records between 1960 and 1995, the International Whaling Commission (2005) identified ten mass stranding events of Cuvier’s beaked whales had been reported and one mass stranding of four Baird’s beaked whale (*Berardius bairdii*). The IWC concluded that, out of eight stranding events reported from the mid-1980s to the summer of 2003, seven had been associated with the use of mid-frequency sonar, one of those seven had been associated with the use of low-frequency sonar, and the remaining stranding event had been associated with the use of seismic airguns.

Taxonomic Patterns

Most of the stranding events reviewed by the International Whaling Commission involved beaked whales. A mass stranding of Cuvier’s beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*) in the eastern Mediterranean Sea occurred in 1996 (Franzis 1998) and mass stranding events involving Gervais’ beaked whales (*Mesoplodon europaeus*), de Blainville’s dense-beaked whales (*M. densirostris*), and Cuvier’s beaked whales occurred off the coast of the Canary Islands in the late 1980s (Simmonds and Lopez-Jurado 1991). Other stranding events of beaked whales have also occurred in the Bahamas and Canary Islands (which included Gervais’ beaked whales, *Mesoplodon europaeus*, de Blainville’s dense-beaked whales, *M. densirostris*, and Cuvier’s beaked whales; Simmonds and Lopez-Jurado 1991). The stranding events that occurred in the

Canary Islands and Kyparissiakos Gulf in the late 1990s and the Bahamas in 2000 have been the most intensively-studied mass stranding events and have been associated with naval maneuvers that were using sonar. These investigations did not evaluate information associated with the stranding of Cuvier's beaked whales, *Ziphius cavirostris*, around Japan (IWC Scientific Committee 2005).

Between 1960 and 2006, 48 (68%) involved beaked whales, 3 (4%) involved dolphins, and 14 (20%) involved whale species. Cuvier's beaked whales were involved in the greatest number of these events (48 or 68%), followed by sperm whales (7 or 10%), and Blainville and Gervais' beaked whales (4 each or 6%). Naval activities that might have involved active sonar are reported to have coincided with 9 (13%) or 10 (14%) of those stranding events. Between the mid-1980s and 2003 (the period reported by the International Whaling Commission), we identified reports of 44 mass cetacean stranding events of which at least 7 have been correlated with naval exercises that were using mid-frequency sonar.

Stranding events involving baleen whales (blue, bowhead, Bryde's, fin, gray, humpback, minke, right, and sei whales) and stranding events involving sperm whales have very different patterns than those of beaked whales and other smaller cetaceans. First, mass stranding events of baleen whales are very rare. Fourteen humpback whales stranded on the beaches of Cape Cod, Massachusetts between November 1987 and January 1988 (Geraci *et al*. 1989); however, that stranding event has been accepted as being caused by neurotoxins in the food of the whales. In 1993, three humpback whales stranded on the east coast of Sao Vincente Island in the Cape Verde Archipelago, but they were in an advanced state of decay when they stranded so their cause of death remains unknown (Reiner *et al*. 1996). Finally, two minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutirostra*) stranded during the mass stranding event in the Bahamas in 2000 (see further discussion of this stranding event below) and is noteworthy because it the only mass stranding of baleen whales that has coincided with the Navy's use of mid-frequency active sonar and because there are so few mass stranding events involving baleen whales.

Sperm whales, however, commonly strand and commonly strand in groups. Our earliest record of a mass stranding of sperm whales is for six sperm whales that stranded in Belgium in 1403 or 1404 (De Smet 1997). Since then, we have identified 85 mass stranding events involving sperm whales have been reported. Of those 85 mass stranding events, 29 represent stranding events that occurred before 1958; 25 of those 29 (about 34%) stranding events occurred before 1945 (which would pre-date the use of this mid-frequency active sonar). Ten of these stranding events involved sperm whales and long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*). These mass stranding events have been reported in Australia, Europe, North America, Oceania, and South America.

Major Mass Stranding Events

In 1998, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic Center Undersea Research Centre that conducted the sonar tests convened panels to review the data associated with the maneuvers in 1996 and beaked whale stranding events in the Mediterranean Sea. The report of these panels presented more detailed acoustic data than were available for beaked whales stranded in the Canary Islands (SACLANTCEN 1998). The NATO sonar transmitted two simultaneous signals lasting four seconds and repeating once every minute.

The simultaneous signals were broadcast at source levels of just under 230 dB re 1 μPa at 1 m. One of the signals covered a frequency range from 450-700 Hz and the other one covered 2.8-3.3 kHz. The *Ziphius* stranding events in the Kyparissiakos Gulf occurred during the first two sonar runs on each day of 12 and 13 May 1996. The close timing between the onset of sonar transmissions and the first stranding events suggests closer synchrony between the onset of the transmissions and the stranding events than was presented in Frantzis (1998). However, the Bioacoustics Panel convened by NATO concluded that the evidence available did not allow them to accept or reject sonar exposures as a causal agent in these stranding events. Their official finding was "An acoustic link can neither be clearly established nor eliminated as a direct or indirect cause for the May 1996 strandings."

KYPARISSIAKOS GULF, GREECE (1996). Frantzis (1998) reported an 'atypical' mass stranding of 12 Cuvier's beaked whales on the coast of Greece that was associated with acoustic trials by vessels from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). He was the first to hypothesize that these stranding events were related to exposure to low-frequency military sonar. However, the sonar in question produced both low- and mid-frequency signals (600Hz, 228 dB SPL re: 1μPa at 1m rms and 3kHz, 226 dB SPL, D'Amico and Verboom, 1998). Frantzis' hypothesis prompted an in-depth analysis of the acoustic activity during the naval exercises, the nature of the stranding events and the possibility that the acoustic source was related to the stranding events (D'Amico and Verboom, 1998). Since full necropsies had not been conducted and no gross or histological abnormalities were noted, the cause of the stranding events could not be determined unequivocally (D'Amico and Verboom, 1998). The analyses thus provided some support but no clear evidence for the hypothesized cause-and-effect relationship of sonar operations and stranding events.

BAHAMAS (2000). Concern about potential causal relationships between low-frequency sonar and marine mammal stranding resurfaced after a beaked whale stranding in the Bahamas in 2000. Fox *et al*. (2001) ruled out natural sound sources as a possible cause of the stranding, which pointed to an anthropogenic source. In 2001, the Joint Interim Report, Bahamas Marine Mammal Stranding Event of 14-16 March 2000 (U.S. Department of Commerce and Secretary of the Navy 2001) exonerated the low-frequency sonar but concluded that "tactical mid-range frequency sonar onboard U.S. Navy ships that were in use during the sonar exercise in question were the most plausible source of this acoustic or impulse trauma." The report also went on to conclude, "the cause of this stranding event was the confluence of Navy tactical mid-range frequency sonar and the contributory factors acting together." The contributory factors identified included "a complex acoustic environment that included the presence of a strong surface duct, unusual underwater bathymetry, intensive use of multiple sonar over an extended period of time, a constricted channel with limited access, and the presence of beaked whales that appear to be sensitive to the frequencies produced by these sonars."

MADEIRA, SPAIN (2000). The stranding in the Bahamas was soon followed by another atypical mass stranding of Cuvier's beaked whales in the Madeira Islands. Between 10 and 14 May 2000, three Cuvier's beaked whales stranded on two islands in the Madeira archipelago. NATO naval exercises involving multiple ships occurred concurrently with these stranding events, although NATO has thus far been unwilling to provide information on the sonar activity during their exercises. Only one of the stranded animals was marginally fresh enough for a full necropsy (24 hours post-stranding). The necropsy revealed evidence of haemorrhage and congestion in the right lung and both kidneys (Freitas, 2004), as well as evidence of intracochlear and intracranial haemorrhage similar to that observed in the Bahamas beaked whales (D. Ketten, unpublished data).

CANARY ISLANDS (2002). In September 2002, a beaked whale stranding event occurred in the Canary Islands. On 24 September, 14 beaked whales (7 Cuvier's beaked whales, 3 Blainville's beaked whales, 1 Gervais' beaked whale, M. europeaus, and 3 unidentified beaked whales) stranded on the beaches of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote Islands, close to the site of an international naval exercise (called Neo-Tapon 2002) held that same day. The first animals are reported to have stranded about four hours after the onset of the use of mid-frequency sonar activity (3- 10kHz, D'Spain *et al*., 2006; Jepson *et al*., 2003). Seven whales (1 female Blainville's beaked whale, 1 female Gervais' beaked whale and 5 male Cuvier's beaked whales) are known to have died that day (Fernández *et al*., 2005). The remaining seven live whales were returned to deeper waters. Over the next three days, three male and one female Cuvier's beaked whales were found dead and a carcass of an unidentified beaked whale was seen floating offshore.

A total of nine Cuvier's beaked whales, one Blainville's beaked whale and one Gervais' beaked whale were examined post mortem and studied histopathologically (one Cuvier's beaked whale carcass was lost to the tide). No inflammatory or neoplastic processes were noted grossly or histologically and no pathogens (e.g. protozoa, bacteria and viruses, including morbillivirus) were identified. Stomach contents were examined in seven animals and six of them had recently eaten, possibly indicating that the event(s) leading to their deaths had had a relatively sudden onset (Fernández *et al*., 2005). Macroscopic examination revealed that the whales had severe, diffuse congestion and haemorrhages, especially in the fat in the jaw, around the ears, in the brain (e.g. multifocal subarachnoid haemorrhages) and in the kidneys (Fernandez, 2004; Fernandez *et al*., 2004). Gas bubble-associated lesions were observed in the vessels and parenchyma (white matter) of the brain, lungs, subcapsular kidney veins and liver; fat emboli were observed in epidural veins, liver sinusoids, lymph nodes and lungs (Jepson *et al*., 2003; Fernandez, 2004; Fernandez *et al*., 2004; 2005). After the event, researchers from the Canary Islands examined past stranding records and found reports of eight other stranding events of beaked whales in the Canaries since 1985, at least five of which coincided with naval activities offshore (Martín *et al*., 2004).

GULF OF CALIFORNIA (2002). In September 2002, marine mammal researchers vacationing in the Gulf of California, Mexico discovered two recently deceased Cuvier's beaked whales on an uninhabited island. They were not equipped to conduct necropsies and in an attempt to contact local researchers, found that a research vessel had been conducting seismic surveys approximately 22km offshore at the time that the stranding events occurred (Taylor *et al*., 2004). The survey vessel was using three acoustic sources: (1) seismic air guns (5-500Hz, 259dB re: 1mPa Peak to Peak (p-p); Federal Register, 2003); (2) sub-bottom profiler (3.5kHz, 200dB SPL; Federal Register, 2004); and (3) multi-beam sonar (15.5kHz, 237dB SPL; Federal Register, 2003). Whether or not this survey caused the beaked whales to strand has been a matter of debate because of the small number of animals involved and a lack of knowledge regarding the temporal and spatial correlation between the animals and the sound source. This stranding underlines the uncertainty regarding which sound sources or combinations of sound sources may cause beaked whales to strand. Although some of these stranding events have been reviewed in government reports or conference proceedings (e.g. Anonymous 2001, Evans and Miller 2004), many questions remain. Specifically, the mechanisms by which beaked whales are affected by sound remain unknown. A better understanding of these mechanisms will facilitate management and mitigation of sound effects on beaked whales.

As a result, in April 2004, the United States' Marine Mammal Commission convened a workshop of thirty-one scientists from a diverse range of relevant disciplines (e.g. human diving physiology and medicine, marine mammal ecology, marine mammal anatomy and physiology, veterinary medicine and acoustics) to explore issues related to the vulnerability of beaked whales to anthropogenic sound. The purpose of the workshop was to (1) assess the current knowledge of beaked whale biology and ecology and recent beaked whale mass stranding events; (2) identify and characterize factors that may have caused the stranding events; (3) identify ways to more adequately investigate possible cause and effect relationships; and (4) review the efficacy of existing monitoring and mitigation methods. This paper arose out of the discussions at that workshop.

HANALEI BAY, KAUA'I, HAWAI'I (2004). On 3 – 4 July 2004, between 150 and 200 melon-headed whales (*Peponocephala electra*) occupied the shallow waters of Hanalei Bay, Kaua'i, Hawai'i for over 28 hours. These whales, which are usually pelagic, milled in the shallow confined bay and were returned to deeper water with human assistance. The whales are reported to have entered the Bay in a single wave formation on July 3, 2004, and were observed moving back into shore from the mouth of the Bay shortly thereafter. On the next morning, the whales were herded out of the Bay with the help of members of the community, the Hanalei Canoe Club, local and Federal employees, and staff and volunteers with the Hawai'ian Islands Stranding Response Group and were out of visual sight later that morning.

One whale, a calf, had been observed alive and alone in Hanalei Bay on the afternoon of 4 July 2004 and was found dead in the Bay the morning of 5 July 2004. A full necropsy performed on the calf could not determine the cause of its death, although the investigators concluded that maternal separation, poor nutritional condition, and dehydration probably contributed. Environmental factors, abiotic and biotic, were analyzed for any anomalous occurrences that would have contributed to the animals entering and remaining in Hanalei Bay. The bathymetry in the bay is similar to many other sites in the Hawai'ian Island chain and dissimilar to that which has been associated with mass stranding events in other parts of the U.S. The weather conditions appeared to be normal for the time of year with no fronts or other significant features noted. There was no evidence for unusual distribution or occurrence of predator or prey species or unusual harmful algal blooms. Weather patterns and bathymetry that have been associated with mass stranding events elsewhere were not found to occur in this instance.

This stranding event was spatially and temporally correlated with 2004 Rim of the Pacific exercises. Official sonar training and tracking exercises in the Pacific Missile Range Facility warning area did not commence until about 0800 hrs (local time) on 3 July and were ruled out as a possible trigger for the initial movement into Hanalei Bay. However, the six naval surface vessels transiting to the operational area on 2 July had been intermittently transmitting active mid-frequency sonar [for ~9 hours total] as they approached from the south. After ruling out other phenomena that might have caused this stranding, NMFS concluded that the active sonar transmissions associated with the 2004 Rim of the Pacific exercise were a plausible contributing causal factor in what may have been a confluence of events. Other factors that may have contributed to the stranding event include the presence of nearby deep water, multiple vessels transiting in a directed manner while transmitting active sonar over a sustained period, the presence of surface sound ducting conditions, or intermittent and random human interactions while the animals were in the Bay.

OTHER MASS STRANDING EVENTS. Several unusual stranding events have also occurred in Chinese waters in 2004 during a period when large-scale naval exercises were taking place in nearby waters south of Taiwan (IWC 2005). Between 24 February and 10 March 2004, 9-10 short-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), one ginkgo-toothed beaked whale (*Mesoplodon ginkgodens*), one striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*), seven short-finned pilot whales, and one short-finned pilot whale were reported to have stranded. The stranding events were unusual (with respect to the species involved) compared to previous stranding records since 1994 for the region. Gross examination of the only available carcass, a ginkgo-toothed beaked whale, revealed many unusual injuries to structures that are associated with, or related to acoustics or diving. The injuries, the freshness of the carcass, its discovery location and the coincidence of the event with a military exercise suggest that this beaked whale died from acoustic or blast trauma that may have been caused by exposure to naval activities south of Taiwan. Taiwanese newspapers reported that live ammunition was used during these exercises. At the same time, natural phenomena that might cause whales to strand – such as earthquakes and underwater volcanoes – have not been ruled out in these cases.

Association Between Mass Stranding Events and Exposure to Active Sonar

Several authors have noted similarities between some of these stranding incidents: they occurred in islands or archipelagoes with deep water nearby, several appeared to have been associated with acoustic waveguides like surface ducting, and the sound fields created by ships transmitting mid-frequency sonar (Cox *et al*. 2006, D'Spain *et al*. 2006). Although Cuvier's beaked whales have been the most common species involved in these stranding events (81% of the total number of stranded animals and see Figure 3), other beaked whales (including *Mesoplodon europeaus*, *M. densirostris*, and *Hyperoodon ampullatus*) comprise 14% of the total. Other species (*Stenella coeruleoalba*, *Kogia breviceps* and *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) have stranded, but in much lower numbers and less consistently than beaked whales.

Based on the evidence available, however, we cannot determine whether (a) *Ziphius cavirostris* is more prone to injury from high-intensity sound than other species, (b) their behavioral responses to sound makes them more likely to strand, or (c) they are more likely to be exposed to mid-frequency active sonar that other cetaceans (for reasons that remain unknown). Because the association between active sonar exposures and marine mammals mass stranding events is not consistent — some marine mammals strand without being exposed to sonar and some sonar transmissions are not associated with marine mammal stranding events despite their co-occurrence — other risk factors or a groupings of risk factors probably contribute to these stranding events.

STRANDING PATTERNS ASSOCIATED WITH RIM-OF-THE-PACIFIC EXERCISES IN HAWAI'I. Nitta (1991) reported that between 1936 and 1988, 8 humpback whales, 1 fin whale, and 5 sperm whales stranded in the Hawai'ian Archipelago. In a partial update of that earlier report, Maldini *et al.* (2005) identified 202 toothed cetaceans that had stranded between 1950 and 2002. Sperm whales represented 10 percent of that total. Until recently, however, there has been no correlation between the number of known stranding events and the Navy's anti-submarine training exercises in Hawai'i. The number of stranding events have increased over time, but the number of stranding events in the main Hawai'ian Islands recorded between 1937 and 2002 is low compared with other geographic areas (although this may be an result of having large areas of coastline where no people or few people can report a stranding). Known stranding events also occurred in all months with no significant temporal trend (Maldini *et al.* 2005).

The Navy has conducted Rim of the Pacific exercises every second year since 1968 and anti-submarine warfare activities have occurred in each of the 19 exercises that have occurred thus far. This observation supports several different inferences. One line of reasoning is: if the mid-frequency sonar employed during those exercises killed or injured whales whenever the whales encountered the sonar, mass stranding events are likely to have occurred at least once or twice over the 38-year period since 1968. With one exception, there is little evidence of a pattern in the record of stranding events reported for the main Hawai'ian Islands.

A second line of reasoning leads to a very different conclusion: the absence of reports of stranding events may result from the small number of people searching for stranded animals relative to the coastline of Hawai'i —although stranding events have been reported in the Hawai'ian Islands since 1937, no toothed whales were reported until 1950 — or it may be because only a fraction of the whales that are killed or injured in Hawai'ian waters strand (as opposed to sinking, being transported to the open ocean by the strong currents that flow across the northern shore of the islands, or being eaten by predators like sharks). Faerber and Baird (2007) presented evidence that supports this inference. They compared patterns of beaked whale stranding events in the Canary Islands and the main Hawai'ian Islands (they compared water depths immediately adjacent to shore, accessibility of shorelines, and population densities relative to land area and amount of shoreline) and concluded that beaked whales were less likely to strand in the main Hawai'ian Islands and were not likely to be detected if they did strand.

Finally, the apparent absence of stranding events coincident with the 38 years of antisubmarine warfare training exercises in waters off the main Hawai'ian islands could also suggest that mid-frequency sonar transmissions pose a hazard to cetaceans in some circumstances, but not others.

Probable Responses of Endangered Whales to Mid-Frequency Sonar

Based on the evidence available, the mid-frequency sonars associated with the ASW exercises that are proposed for the the proposed Atlantic Fleet training exercises are not likely to kill or injure threatened or endangered marine mammals. However, little is known about the effect of short-term disruptions of a marine mammal's normal behavior (Richardson *et al.* 1995). Most of the evidence available suggests that most sources of disturbance do not directly kill or injure marine mammals. The evidence available also does not lead us to expect threatened or endangered cetaceans to strand or suffer resonance effects from the mid-frequency sonars associated with the ASW exercises that will be included in the proposed Atlantic Fleet training exercises.

Probable Response of Fin whales. The information available leads us to conclude that fin whales are likely to be exposed to sound fields produced by active sonar systems during one or more of the proposed training exercises. Several lines of reasoning lead us to this conclusion. Our analyses led us to conclude that at least one group of fin whales to occur in the Action Area during at least one of the four proposed exercises. Based on the groups sizes of fin whales reported from the CeTAP studies, a “group” of fin whales is most likely to consist of 1 to 2 individual whales (CeTAP 1982, Hain 1992).

As discussed in the *Status of the Species* section of this opinion, fin whales produce a variety of low-frequency sounds in the 10-200 Hz band (Watkins 1981; Watkins *et al.* 1987a; Edds 1988; Thompson *et al.* 1992). The most typical signals are long, patterned sequences of short duration (0.5-2s) infrasonic pulses in the 18-35 Hz range (Patterson and Hamilton 1964). Estimated source levels are as high as 190 dB (Patterson and Hamilton 1964; Watkins *et al.* 1987a; Thompson *et al.* 1992; McDonald *et al.* 1995). In temperate waters intense bouts of long patterned sounds are very common from fall through spring, but also occur to a lesser extent during the summer in high latitude feeding areas (Clark and Charif 1998). Short sequences of rapid pulses in the 20-70 Hz band are associated with animals in social groups (McDonald *et al.* 1995). Each pulse lasts on the order of one second and contains twenty cycles (Tyack 1999). This information would lead us to conclude that fin whales exposed to these received levels of active mid-frequency sonar are not likely to respond if they are exposed to mid-frequency sound (sounds in the 1 kHz–10 kHz range).

Probable Response of Humpback Whales. During the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises, the Navy estimated that there might be 481 instances in which humpback whales would accumulate energy equivalent to between 173 and 195 dB duriug the proposed exercises. Of this total, 368 of these exposures would occur during the spring Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise and the remaining 113 exposures would occur during the winter Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise. All of these exposures assume that the proposed mitigation is not likely to be effective.

If we assume that some of these exposures might involve the same whale, then 328 of the 481 exposures might represent a single humpback whale that accumulates energy equivalent to 173 to 195 dB once, 131 of the 481 exposures might represent a single humpback whale that accumulates that energy equivalent twice, 21 of the 481 exposures might represent a single humpback whales that accumulates that energy equivalent three times, and 1 humpback whale might accumulate that energy equivalent four times. One humpback whale might accumulate energy equivalent to between 195 and 215 dB once during the spring Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise.

Because of the annual migratory pattern of humpback whales, we assume that any humpback whales are more likely to be exposed during the winter months and during their northward spring migration. We assume that any age or gender might be exposed to these received levels.

Humpback whales produce a wide variety of sounds. During the breeding season males sing long, complex songs, with frequencies in the 25-5000 Hz range and intensities as high as 181 dB (Payne 1970; Winn *et al.* 1970a; Thompson *et al.* 1986). Source levels average 155 dB and range from 144 to 174 dB (Thompson *et al.* 1979). The songs appear to have an effective range of approximately 10 to 20 km. Animals in mating groups produce a variety of sounds (Tyack 1981; Tyack and Whitehead 1983, Silber 1986).

Humpback whales produce sounds less frequently in their summer feeding areas. Feeding groups produce distinctive sounds ranging from 20 Hz to 2 kHz, with median durations of 0.2-0.8 sec and source levels of 175-192 dB (Thompson *et al.*, 1986). These sounds are attractive and appear to rally animals to the feeding activity (D'Vincent *et al.* 1985; Sharpe and Dill 1997). In summary, humpback whales produce at least three kinds of sounds:

1. Complex songs with components ranging from at least 20Hz – 4 kHz with estimated source levels from 144 – 174 dB; these are mostly sung by males on the breeding grounds (Payne 1970; Winn *et al.* 1970a; Richardson *et al.* 1995)

2. Social sounds in the breeding areas that extend from 50Hz – more than 10 kHz with most energy below 3kHz (Tyack and Whitehead 1983, Richardson *et al.* 1995); and

3 Feeding area vocalizations that are less frequent, but tend to be 20Hz – 2 kHz with estimated sources levels in excess of 175 dB re 1 uPa-m (Thompson *et al.* 1986; Richardson *et al.* 1995). Sounds often associated with possible aggressive behavior by males (Tyack 1983; Silber 1986) are quite different from songs, extending from 50 Hz to 10 kHz (or higher), with most energy in components below 3 kHz. These sounds appear to have an effective range of up to 9 km (Tyack and Whitehead 1983).

More recently, Au *et al.* (2006) conducted field investigations of humpback whale songs led these investigators to conclude that humpback whales have an upper frequency limit reaching as high as 24 kHz. Based on this information, it is reasonable to assume that the active mid-frequency sonar the U.S. Navy would employ during the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises are within the hearing and vocalization ranges of humpback whales. There is limited information on how humpback whales are likely to respond upon being exposed to mid-frequency active sonar (most of the information available addresses their probable responses to low-frequency active sonar or impulsive sound sources). Humpback whales responded to sonar in the 3.1 – 3.6 kHz by swimming away from the sound source or by increasing their velocity (Maybaum 1990, 1993). The frequency or duration of their dives or the rate of underwater vocalizations, however, did not change.

Humpback whales have been known to react to low frequency industrial noises at estimated received levels of 115 - 124 dB (Malme *et al.* 1985), and to conspecific calls at received levels as low as 102dB (Frankel *et al.* 1995). Malme *et al.* (1985) found no clear response to playbacks of drill ship and oil production platform noises at received levels up to 116 dB re 1 μPa. Studies of reactions to airgun noises were inconclusive (Malme *et al.* 1985). Humpback whales on the breeding grounds did not stop singing in response to underwater explosions (Payne and McVay 1971). Humpback whales on feeding grounds did not alter short-term behavior or distribution in response to explosions with received levels of about 150dB re 1 μPa/Hz at 350Hz (Lien *et al.* 1993; Todd *et al.* 1996). However, at least two individuals were probably killed by the high-intensity, impulsed blasts and had extensive mechanical injuries in their ears (Ketten *et al.* 1993; Todd *et al.* 1996). The explosions may also have increased the number of humpback whales entangled in fishing nets (Todd *et al.* 1996). Frankel and Clark (1998) showed that breeding humpbacks showed only a slight statistical reaction to playbacks of 60 - 90 Hz sounds with a received level of up to 190 dB. Although these studies have demonstrated that humpback whales will exhibit short-term behavioral reactions to boat traffic and playbacks of industrial noise, the long-term effects of these disturbances on the individuals exposed to them are not known.

Because their hearing range appears to overlap with the frequency range of mid-frequency active, we assume that some of the humpback whales that are exposed to mid-frequency active sonar during one or more of the proposed exercies might experience acoustic masking, impairment of acoustic communication, behavioral disturbance, and physiological stress responses as a result of their exposure.

Probable Responses of North Atlantic Right Whales. During a combined Composite Training Unit Exercise – Joint Task Force Exercise involving a carrier strike group in the spring season (between 1 December and 28 February), the Navy's models identified 1 instance in which North Atlantic right whales would accumulate energy equivalent to between 173 and 195 dB in the Jacksonville Operating Area. This exposure assumes that the protective measures the Navy proposed are not likely to prevent a right whale from being exposed to sonar transmissions.

Because this exposure is likely to occur in the Jacksonville Operating Area, where right whales reproduce and calve, and the exposure is likely to occur during the season in which calving occurs, this single exposure might involve a single right whale, a female right whale in the company of her calf, or a small group of right whales.

The information available on right whales vocalizations suggests that right whales produce moans less than 400 Hz in frequency (Watkins and Schevill 1972; Thompson *et al.* 1979; Spero 1981). Because mid-frequency active sonar transmits at frequencies that are substantially higher than the frequencies of these vocalizations (1 kHz–10 kHz versus 400 kHz), the sound fields produced by mid-frequency active sonar do not seem likely to inferere with right whales that are calling and do not seem likely to mask right whales listening for vocalizations.

In the event right whales are exposed to mid-frequency active sonar, right whales do not seem likely to respond or those responses do not seem likely to reduce the fitness of the whale. Nowacek *et al*. (2004) conducted controlled exposure experiments on North Atlantic right whales using ship noise, social sounds of con-specifics, and an alerting stimulus (frequency modulated tonal signals between 500 Hz and 4.5 kHz). Animals were tagged with acoustic sensors (D-tags) that simultaneously measured movement in three dimensions. Whales reacted strongly to alert signals at received levels of 133-148 dB SPL, mildly to conspecific signals, and not at all to ship sounds or actual vessels. The alert stimulus caused whales to immediately cease foraging behavior and swim rapidly to the surface. Because right whales off the southeastern United States do not appear to forage, we assume that any right whales that are alerted to the presence of Navy vessels engaged in an exercise are most likely to swim rapidly to the surface.

Probable Responses of Sei Whales. The information available leads us to conclude that sei whales, like fin whales, are likely to be exposed to sound fields produced by active sonar systems during one or more of the proposed training exercises. Our analyses led us to conclude that at least one group of fin whales to occur in the Action Area during at least one of the four proposed exercises.

As discussed in the *Status of the Species* section of this opinion, we have no specific information on the sounds produced by sei whales or their sensitivity to sounds in their environment. Based on their anatomical and physiological similarities to both blue and fin whales, we assume that the hearing thresholds of sei whales will be similar as well and will be centered on low-frequencies in the 10-200 Hz. This information would lead us to conclude that, like blue and fin whales, sei whales exposed to these received levels of active mid-frequency sonar are not likely to respond if they are exposed to mid-frequency (1 kHz–10 kHz) sounds.

Probable Responses of Sperm Whales. During the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises, the Navy estimated that there might be 280 instances in which sperm whales would accumulate energy equivalent to between 173 and 195 dB and 1 instance in which a sperm whale might accumulate energy equivalent to between 195 and 215 dB duriug the proposed exercises. Of this total, 121 of these exposures would occur during the spring Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise, 71 would occur during the summer Expenditionary Strike Group COMPTUEX exercise, 38 would occur during the summer Carrier Strike Group JTFEX exercise, and the remaining 50 exposures would occur during the winter Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise. All of these exposures assume that the proposed mitigation is not likely to be effective.

If we assume that some of these exposures might involve the same whale, then 191 of the 280 exposures might represent a single sperm whale that accumulates energy equivalent to 173 to 195 dB once, 76 of the 280 exposures might represent a single sperm whale that accumulates that energy equivalent twice, and the remaining 12 of the 481 exposures might represent a single sperm whale that accumulates that energy equivalent three times, and 1 sperm whale might accumulate that energy equivalent four times. One sperm whale might accumulate energy equivalent to between 195 and 215 dB once during the winter Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise.

Based on their hearing sensitivities, which overlap the frequency range of mid-frequency active sonar, sonar transmissions might mask environmental cues at the lower range of sperm whale hearing. Although there is no published audiogram for sperm whales, sperm whales would be expected to have good, high frequency hearing because their inner ear resembles that of most dolphins, and appears tailored for ultrasonic (>20 kHz) reception (Ketten 1994). The only data on the hearing range of sperm whales are evoked potentials from a stranded neonate, which suggest that neonatal sperm whales respond to sounds from 2.5 to 60 kHz.

Based on the frequencies of their vocalizations, which overlap the frequency range of mid-frequency active sonar, sonar transmissions might temporarily reduce the active space of sperm whale vocalizations. Most of the energy of sperm whales clicks is concentrated at 2 to 4 kHz and 10 to 16 kHz, which overlaps with the mid-frequency sonar. Other studies indicate sperm whales' wide-band clicks contain energy between 0.1 and 20 kHz (Weilgart and Whitehead 1993, Goold and Jones 1995). Ridgway and Carder (2001) measured low-frequency, high amplitude clicks with peak frequencies at 500 Hz to 3 kHz from a neonate sperm whale.

There is some evidence of disruptions of clicking and behavior from sonars (Goold 1999, Watkins and Scheville1975, Watkins *et al*. 1985), pingers (Watkins and Scheville 1975), the Heard Island Feasability Test (Bowles *et al*. 1994), and the Acoustic Thermometry of Ocean Climate (Costa *et al*.1998). Sperm whales have been observed to frequently stop echolocating in the presence of underwater pulses made by echosounders (Watkins and Scheville 1975). Goold (1999) reported six sperm whales that were driven through a narrow channel using ship noise, echosounder, and fishfinder emissions from a flotilla of 10 vessels. Watkins and Scheville (1975) showed that sperm whales interrupted click production in response to pinger (6 to 13 kHz) sounds. They also stopped vocalizing for brief periods when codas were being produced by other individuals, perhaps because they can hear better when not vocalizing themselves (Goold and Jones 1995).

As discussed previously, sperm whales have been reported to have reacted to military sonar, apparently produced by a submarine, by dispersing from social aggregations, moving away from the sound source, remaining relatively silent and becoming difficult to approach (Watkins *et al.* 1985). Captive bottlenose dolphins and a white whale exhibited changes in behavior when exposed to 1 sec pulsed sounds at frequencies similar to those emitted by multi-beam sonar that is used in geophysical surveys (Ridgway *et al.* 1997, Schlundt *et al.* 2000), and to shorter broadband pulsed signals (Finneran *et al.* 2000, 2002). Behavioral changes typically involved what appeared to be deliberate attempts to avoid the sound exposure or to avoid the location of the exposure site during subsequent tests (Schlundt *et al.* 2000, Finneran *et al.* 2002). Dolphins exposed to 1-sec intense tones exhibited short-term changes in behavior above received sound levels of 178 to 193 dB re 1 μPa rms and belugas did so at received levels of 180 to 196 dB and above. Received levels necessary to elicit such reactions to shorter pulses were higher (Finneran *et al.* 2000, 2002). Test animals sometimes vocalized after exposure to pulsed, mid-frequency sound from a watergun (Finneran *et al.* 2002). In some instances, animals exhibited aggressive behavior toward the test apparatus (Ridgway *et al.* 1997, Schlundt *et al.* 2000). The relevance of these data to free-ranging odontocetes is uncertain. In the wild, cetaceans some-times avoid sound sources well before they are exposed to the levels listed above, and reactions in the wild may be more subtle than those described by Ridgway *et al.* (1997) and Schlundt *et al.* (2000).

Other studies identify instances in which sperm whales did not respond to anthropogenic sounds. Sperm whales did not alter their vocal activity when exposed to levels of 173 dB re 1 μPa from impulsive sounds produced by 1 g TNT detonators (Madsen and Mohl 2000). Richardson *et al.*

(1995) citing a personal communication with J. Gordon suggested that sperm whales in the Mediterranean Sea continued calling when exposed to frequent and strong military sonar signals. When Andre *et al*. (1997) exposed sperm whales to a variety of sounds to determine what sounds may be used to scare whales out of the path of vessels, sperm whales were observed to have startle reactions to 10 kHz pulses (180 db re 1 μPa at the source), but not to the other sources played to them.

Published reports identify instances in which sperm whales may have responded to an acoustic source and other instances in which they did not appear to respond behaviorally when exposed to seismic surveys. Mate *et al*. (1994) reported an opportunistic observation of the number of sperm whales to have decreased in an area after the start of airgun seismic testing. However, Davis *et al*. (2000) noted that sighting frequency did not differ significantly among the different acoustic levels examined in the northern Gulf of Mexico, contrary to what Mate *et al*. (1994) reported. In one DTAG deployment in the northern Gulf of Mexico on July 28, 2001, researchers documented that the tagged whale moved away from an operating seismic vessel once the seismic pulses were received at the tag at roughly 137 dB re 1 μPa (Johnson and Miller 2002). Sperm whales may also have responded to seismic airgun sounds by ceasing to call during some (but not all) times when seismic pulses were received from an airgun array >300 km away (Bowles *et al*. 1994).

A recent study offshore of northern Norway indicated that sperm whales continued to call when exposed to pulses from a distant seismic vessel. Received levels of the seismic pulses were up to 146 dB re 1 μPa peak-to-peak (Madsen *et al*. 2002). Similarly, a study conducted off Nova Scotia that analyzed recordings of sperm whale sounds at various distances from an active seismic program did not detect any obvious changes in the distribution or behavior of sperm whales (McCall Howard 1999). Recent data from vessel-based monitoring programs in United Kingdom waters suggest that sperm whales in that area may have exhibited some changes in behavior in the presence of operating seismic vessels (Stone 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2003). However, the compilation and analysis of the data led the author to conclude that seismic surveys did not result in observable effects to sperm whales (Stone 2003). The results from these waters seem to show that some sperm whales tolerate seismic surveys.

Preliminary data from an experimental study of sperm whale reactions to seismic surveys in the Gulf of Mexico and a study of the movements of sperm whales with satellite-linked tags in relation to seismic surveys show that during two controlled exposure experiments in which sperm whales were exposed to seismic pulses at received levels up to 148 dB re 1 μPa over octave band with most energy, the whales did not avoid the vessel or change their feeding efficiency (National Science Foundation 2003). Although the sample size is small (4 whales in 2 experiments), the results are consistent with those off northern Norway.

These studies suggest that the behavioral responses of sperm whales to anthropogenic sounds are highly variable, but do not appear to result in the death or injury of individual whales or result in reductions in the fitness of individuals involved. Responses of sperm whales to anthropogenic sounds probably depend on the age and sex of animals being exposed, as well as other factors.

There is evidence that many individuals respond to certain sound sources, provided the received level is high enough to evoke a response, while other individuals do not.

Sea Turtles. The information on the hearing capabilities of sea turtles is also limited, but the information available suggests that the auditory capabilities of sea turtles are centered in the low-frequency range (<1 kHz) (Ridgway *et al.* 1969; Lenhardt *et al.* 1983; Bartol *et al.* 1999, Lenhardt 1994, O'Hara and Wilcox 1990). Ridgway *et al*. (1969) studied the auditory evoked potentials of three green sea turtles (in air and through mechanical stimulation of the ear) and concluded that their maximum sensitivity occurred from 300 to 400 Hz with rapid declines for tones at lower and higher frequencies. They reported an upper limit for cochlear potentials without injury of 2000 Hz and a practical limit of about 1000 Hz. This is similar to estimates for loggerhead sea turtles, which had most sensitive hearing between 250 and 1000 Hz, with rapid decline above 1000 Hz (Bartol *et al*. 1999). These hearing sensitivities are similar to the hearing sensitivities reported for two terrestrial species: pond turtles (*Pseudemys scripta*) and wood turtles (*Chrysemys inscuplta*). Pond turtles are reported to have best hearing responsiveness between 200 and 700 Hz, with slow declines below 100 Hz and rapid declines above 700 Hz and almost no sensitivity above 3000 Hz (Wever and Vernon 1956) the latter has sensitivities up to about 500 Hz, followed by a rapid decline above 1000 Hz and almost no responses beyond 3000 or 4000 Hz (Peterson 1966). We assume that these sensitivities to sound apply to all four of the hardshell turtles (i.e., the green, hawksbill, and loggerhead sea turtles). No audiometric data are available for leatherback sea turtles, but we assume that they have hearing ranges similar to those of other sea turtles (or at least, their hearing is more likely to be similar to other sea turtles than marine mammals). Based on this information sea turtles exposed to received levels of active mid-frequency sonar are not likely to hear mid-frequency sounds (sounds between 1 kHz and 10 kHz); therefore, they are not likely to respond physiologically or behaviorally to those received levels.

A recent study on the effects of airguns on sea turtle behavior also suggests that sea turtles are most likely to respond to low-frequency sounds. McCauley *et al*. (2000) reported that green and loggerhead sea turtles will avoid air-gun arrays at 2 km and at 1 km with received levels of 166 dB re 1 μPa and 175 db re 1 μPa, respectively. The sea turtles responded consistently: above a level of approximately 166 dB re 1 μPa $_{\text{rms}}$ the turtles noticeably increased their swimming activity compared to non-airgun operation periods. Above 175 dB re 1 μPa mean squared pressure their behavior became more erratic possibly indicating the turtles were in an agitated state. Because the sonar that would be used during the proposed exercises transmits at frequencies above hearing thresholds for sea turtles, sea turtles that are exposed to those transmissions are not likely to respond to that exposure. As a result, mid-frequency active sonar associated with the proposed exercises "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" green, hawksbill, leatherback, or loggerhead sea turtles.

Analyses of the Probable Responses to Sonobuoys

As discussed in the approach to the assessment section of this biological opinion, response analyses determine how listed resources are likely to respond after being exposed to an Action's effects on the environment or directly on listed species themselves. For the purposes of consultations on activities involving sonar, our assessments try to detect the probability of lethal responses, sensory impairment (permanent and temporary threshold shifts and acoustic masking), physiological responses (particular stress responses), behavioral responses, and social responses that might result in reducing the fitness of listed individuals. Ideally, our response analyses consider and weigh evidence of adverse consequences, beneficial consequences, or the absence of such consequences.

Interactive Effects of the Proposed Action

Several organizations have argued that several of our previous biological opinions on the U.S. Navy's use of active sonar failed to consider the "cumulative impact" (in the NEPA sense of the term) of active sonar on the ocean environment and its organisms, particularly endangered and threatened species and critical habitat that has been designated for them (for example, see NRDC 2007 and Ocean Mammal Institute 2007). In each instance, we have explained how biological opinions consider "cumulative impacts" (in the NEPA sense of the term; see Approach to the Assessment for a complete treatment of this issue). There is a nuance to the idea of "cumulative impacts," however, that we have chosen to address separately and explicitly in this Opinion: potential interactions between stressors associated with the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet training exercises and other physical, chemical, and biotic stressors that pre-exist in the environment.

Exposing living organisms to individual stressors or a suite of stressors that are associated with a specific action may be insignificant or minor when considered in isolation, but may have significant adverse consequences when they are added to other stressors, operate synergistically in combination with other stressors, or magnify or multiply the effects of other stressors. Further, the effects of life events, natural phenomena, and anthropogenic phenomena on an individual's performance will depend on the individual's phenotypic state when the individual is exposed to these phenomena. Disease, dietary stress, body burden of toxic chemicals, energetic stress, percentage body fat, age, reproductive state, and social position, among many other phenomena can "accumulate" to have substantial influence on an organism's response to subsequent exposure to a stressor. That is, exposing animals to individual stressors associated with a specific action can interact with the animal's prior condition (can have "accumulate" and have additive, synergistic, magnifying, and multiplicative effect) and produce significant, adverse consequences that would not occur if the animal's prior condition had been different.

An illustrative example of how a combination of stressors interact was provided by Relyea (2001, 2003, 2005) who demonstrated that exposing several different amphibians to a combination of pesticides and chemical cues of natural predators, which induced stress, increased the mortality rates of the amphibians (see also Sih *et al*. 2004). For some species, exposing the amphibians to the combination of stressors produced mortality rates that were twice as high as the mortality rates associated with each individual stressor. This section considers the evidence available to determine if interactions associated with mid-frequency active sonar are likely to produce responses we have not considered already or if interactions are likely to increase the severity — and, therefore, the potential consequences — of the responses we have already considered.

The proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training exercises will add several hundred hours of mid-frequency active sonar to ambient oceanic noise levels, which, in turn, could have cumulative impacts on the ocean environment, including listed species. The sound field associated with each sonar "ping" will increase levels of mid-frequency sound in the Action Area while the sonar is being used. The behavioral resp*f*onses of any endangered whales that occur in those sound fields are likely to result from their response to mid-frequency active sonar, per se, as well as their perception of their distance from the sound source and their perception of whether the sources of those sounds are approaching them, moving parallel to them, or moving away from them.

During the spring or summer of 2008 — the same time interval as the proposed Composite Training Unit Exercise – Joint Task Force Exercise in the Cherry Point and Charleston Operating Areas — the U.S. Navy is also proposing to conduct a ship shock trial on the MESA VERDE which would consist of up to four underwater detonations of 4,536 kilogram (10,000 pound) charges in the Jacksonville Operating Area. Each detonation associated with the proposed ship shock trial would introduce pressure waves as well as sound fields; some of the whales exposed to those sound fields (if any) might also be exposed to sound fields produced by the proposed training exercises if they migrate north or they might have already been exposed to such sound fields if they migrate from the north into the area of the proposed Ship Shock Trial.

Any individual endangered whales or listed sea turtles that occur in the Action Area will have been exposed to a large number of natural and anthropogenic stressors, with the possible exception of hatchling sea turtles or the new-born calves of whales that occur in the Action Area. Whales that have migrated into the area are almost certain to have been exposed to ship traffic entering and leaving ports like Boston, New York, Baltimore, Virginia Beach, and Jacksonville (if they arrive from the north) or Port Everglades and Fort Lauderdale (if they arrive from the south). As we discussed in the *Environmental Baseline* section of this Opinion, these whales will also have been exposed to the continuous, low-frequency sounds produced by commercial vessels, may have interacted with commercial fishing gear, and may have prior experience with mid-frequency active sonar from surface vessels, sonobuoys, or submarines in other geographic areas or during previous exercises within the Action Area. Any individual humpback or sperm whales that have high body burdens of some antibiotics (for example, aminoglycoside antibiotics; see Mills and Going 1982) and other prescription drugs (which are introduced to marine environments in sewage discharges and freshwater run-off), organic solvents, metals, and chemical asphyxiants may be more susceptible to noise-induced loss of hearing sensitivity (Fechter *et al*. 2000). Nevertheless, none of the information available suggests that the responses of whales to these stressors or their prior experience with these stressors is likely to produce consequences other than those we have already considered in this Opinion, although it is important to note that this statement probably results from the limits in the information available more than the absence of interactive effects.

Similarly, sea turtles that occur in the Action Area are almost certain to have been exposed to ship traffic entering and leaving ports like Boston, New York, Baltimore, Virginia Beach, and Jacksonville (if they arrive from the north) or Port Everglades and Fort Lauderdale (if they arrive from the south). As we discussed in the *Environmental Baseline* section of this Opinion, these sea turtles will also have been exposed to the continuous, low-frequency sounds produced by commercial vessels, are likely to have been captured at least once in commercial fishing gear (given that almost twice the estimated population of loggerhead sea turtles has been estimated to be captured in shrimp trawls each year for the past five years, every loggerhead sea turtle in the western Atlantic has had some probability of being captured in these fisheries), and may have prior experience with mid-frequency active sonar from surface vessels, sonobuoys, or submarines in other geographic areas or during previous exercises within the Action Area. Nevertheless, none of the information available suggests that the responses of whales to these stressors or their prior experience with these stressors is likely to produce consequences other than those we have already considered in this Opinion, although it is important to note that this statement probably results from the limits in the information available more than the absence of interactive effects.

Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects include the effects of future State, tribal, local, or private actions that are reasonably certain to occur in the action area considered in this biological opinion. Future Federal actions that are unrelated to the proposed action are not considered in this section because they require separate consultation pursuant to section 7 of the ESA.

During this consultation, NMFS searched for information on future State, tribal, local, or private actions that were reasonably certain to occur in the action area. Most of the action area includes federal military reserves or is outside of territorial waters of the United States of America, which would preclude the possibility of future state, tribal, or local action that would not require some form of federal funding or authorization. NMFS conducted electronic searches of business journals, trade journals, and newspapers using *First Search*, Google, and other electronic search engines. Those searches produced no evidence of future private action in the action area that would not require federal authorization or funding and is reasonably certain to occur. As a result, NMFS is not aware of any actions of this kind that are likely to occur in the action area during the foreseeable future.

Integration and Synthesis of Effects

In the *Assessment Approach* section of this opinion, we stated that we measure risks to listed individuals using changes in the individuals' "fitness" or the individual's growth, survival, annual reproductive success, and lifetime reproductive success. When we do not expect listed plants or animals exposed to an action's effects to experience reductions in fitness, we would not expect the action to have adverse consequences on the viability of the populations those individuals represent or the species those populations comprise (Anderson 2000, Mills and Beatty 1979, Brandon 1978, Stearns 1977, 1992). As a result, if we conclude that listed plants or animals are *not* likely to experience reductions in their fitness, we would conclude our assessment.

The following discussions summarize the probable risks associated with the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises pose to threatened and endangered species that are likely to be exposed to those exercises. These summaries integrate the exposure profiles presented previously with the results of the response analyses that were also presented previously.

Fin whales. The information available leads us to conclude that fin whales are likely to be exposed to sound fields produced by active sonar systems during one or more of the proposed training exercises. Several lines of reasoning lead us to this conclusion. Our analyses led us to conclude that at least one group of fin whales to occur in the Action Area during at least one of the four proposed exercises. Based on the groups sizes of fin whales reported from the CeTAP studies, a "group" of fin whales is most likely to consist of 1 to 2 individual whales (CeTAP 1982, Hain 1992).

As discussed in the *Status of the Species* section of this opinion, fin whales produce a variety of low-frequency sounds in the 10-200 Hz band (Watkins 1981; Watkins *et al.* 1987a; Edds 1988; Thompson *et al.* 1992). The most typical signals are long, patterned sequences of short duration (0.5-2s) infrasonic pulses in the 18-35 Hz range (Patterson and Hamilton 1964). Estimated source levels are as high as 190 dB (Patterson and Hamilton 1964; Watkins *et al.* 1987a; Thompson *et al.* 1992; McDonald *et al.* 1995). In temperate waters intense bouts of long patterned sounds are very common from fall through spring, but also occur to a lesser extent during the summer in high latitude feeding areas (Clark and Charif 1998). Short sequences of rapid pulses in the 20-70 Hz band are associated with animals in social groups (McDonald *et al.* 1995). Each pulse lasts on the order of one second and contains twenty cycles (Tyack 1999). This information would lead us to conclude that fin whales exposed to these received levels of active mid-frequency sonar are not likely to respond if they are exposed to mid-frequency sound (sounds in the 1 kHz–10 kHz range).

Fin whales in the action area are likely to respond to ship traffic associated with the maneuvers in ways that approximate their responses to whale watch vessels. As discussed in the *Environmental Baseline* section of this Opinion, those responses are likely to depend on the distance of a whale from a vessel, vessel speed, vessel direction, vessel noise, and the number of vessels involved in a particular maneuver. The closer fin whales are to these maneuvers and the greater the number of times they are exposed (using the Navy's estimates of the cumulative exposures to sounds equivalents > 173 dB as an index of potential exposures), the greater their likelihood of be exposed and responding to that exposure. Particular whales might not respond to the vessels, while in other circumstances, fin whales are likely to change their vocalizations, surface time, swimming speed, swimming angle or direction, respiration rates, dive times, feeding behavior, and social interactions (Amaral and Carlson 2005; Au and Green 2000, Cockeron 1995, Erbe 2002, Félix 2001, Magalhães *et al*. 2002, Richter *et al*. 2003, Scheidat *et al*. 2004, Simmonds 2005, Watkins 1986, Williams *et al*. 2002).

Based on the evidence available, some of these whales might experience physiological stress (but not "distress") responses if they attempt to avoid one ship and encounter a second ship during that attempt. However, because of the relatively short duration of the exercise, we do not expect these responses to continue long-enough to have fitness consequences for individual fin whales because these whales are likely to have energy reserves sufficient to meet the demands of their normal behavioral patterns and the additional energy required for stress responses.

As a result, we conclude that the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises are not likely to adversely affect the population dynamics, behavioral ecology, and social dynamics of individual fin whales in ways or to a degree that would reduce their fitness. As we discussed in the *Approach to the Assessment* section of this opinion, an action that is not likely to reduce the fitness of individual whales would not be likely to reduce the viability of the populations those individual whales represent (that is, we would not expect reductions in the reproduction, numbers, or distribution of those populations). As a result, the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training

Exercises would not be expected to appreciably reduce the fin whales' likelihood of surviving and recovering in the wild.

Humpback Whales. During the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises, the Navy estimated that there might be 481 instances in which humpback whales would accumulate energy equivalent to between 173 and 195 dB duriug the proposed exercises. Of this total, 368 of these exposures would occur during the spring Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise and the remaining 113 exposures would occur during the winter Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise. All of these exposures assume that the proposed mitigation is not likely to be effective.

If we assume that some of these exposures might involve the same whale, then 328 of the 481 exposures might represent a single humpback whale that accumulates energy equivalent to 173 to 195 dB once, 131 of the 481 exposures might represent a single humpback whale that accumulates that energy equivalent twice, 21 of the 481 exposures might represent a single humpback whale that accumulates that energy equivalent three times, and 1 humpback whale might accumulate that energy equivalent four times. One humpback whale might accumulate energy equivalent to between 195 and 215 dB once during the spring Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise.

Because of the annual migratory pattern of humpback whales, we assume that any humpback whales are more likely to be exposed during the winter months and during their northward spring migration. We assume that any age or gender might be exposed to these received levels.

As discussed in the *Status of the Species* section of this Opinion, humpback whales produce a wide variety of sounds. During the breeding season males sing long, complex songs, with frequencies in the 25-5000 Hz range and intensities as high as 181 dB (Payne 1970; Winn *et al.* 1970a; Thompson *et al.* 1986). Source levels average 155 dB and range from 144 to 174 dB (Thompson *et al.* 1979). The songs appear to have an effective range of approximately 10 to 20 km. Animals in mating groups produce a variety of sounds (Tyack 1981; Tyack and Whitehead 1983, Silber 1986).

Humpback whales have been known to react to low frequency industrial noises at estimated received levels of 115 - 124 dB (Malme *et al.* 1985), and to conspecific calls at received levels as low as 102dB (Frankel *et al.* 1995). Malme *et al.* (1985) found no clear response to playbacks of drill ship and oil production platform noises at received levels up to 116 dB re 1 µPa. Studies of reactions to airgun noises were inconclusive (Malme *et al.* 1985). Humpback whales on the breeding grounds did not stop singing in response to underwater explosions (Payne and McVay 1971). Humpback whales on feeding grounds did not alter short-term behavior or distribution in response to explosions with received levels of about 150dB re 1 µPa/Hz at 350Hz (Lien *et al.* 1993; Todd *et al.* 1996). However, at least two individuals were probably killed by the high-intensity, impulsed blasts and had extensive mechanical injuries in their ears (Ketten *et al.* 1993; Todd *et al.* 1996). The explosions may also have increased the number of humpback whales entangled in fishing nets (Todd *et al.* 1996). Frankel and Clark (1998) showed that breeding humpbacks showed only a slight statistical reaction to playbacks of 60 - 90 Hz sounds with a received level of up to 190 dB. Although these studies have demonstrated that humpback whales will exhibit short-term behavioral reactions to boat traffic and playbacks of industrial noise, the long-term effects of these disturbances on the individuals exposed to them are not known.

Based on the evidence available, some of these humpback whales might experience physiological stress (but not "distress") responses if they attempt to avoid one ship and encounter a second ship during that attempt. However, because of the relatively short duration of the exercise, we do not expect these responses to continue long-enough to have fitness consequences for individual humpback whales because these whales are likely to have energy reserves sufficient to meet the demands of their normal behavioral patterns and the additional energy required for stress responses.

As a result, we conclude that the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises are not likely to adversely affect the population dynamics, behavioral ecology, and social dynamics of individual humpback whales in ways or to a degree that would reduce their fitness. As we discussed in the *Approach to the Assessment* section of this opinion, an action that is not likely to reduce the fitness of individual whales would not be likely to reduce the viability of the populations those individual whales represent (that is, we would not expect reductions in the reproduction, numbers, or distribution of those populations). As a result, the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises would not be expected to appreciably reduce the humpback whales' likelihood of surviving and recovering in the wild.

North Atlantic Right Whales. During a combined Composite Training Unit Exercise – Joint Task Force Exercise involving a carrier strike group in the spring season (between 1 December and 28 February), the Navy's models identified 1 instance in which North Atlantic right whales would accumulate energy equivalent to between 173 and 195 dB in the Jacksonville Operating Area. This exposure assumes that the protective measures the Navy proposed are not likely to prevent a right whale from being exposed to sonar transmissions.

Because this exposure is likely to occur in the Jacksonville Operating Area, where right whales reproduce and calve, and the exposure is likely to occur during the season in which calving occurs, this single exposure might involve a single right whale, a female right whale in the company of her calf, or a small group of right whales.

The information available on right whales vocalizations suggests that right whales produce moans less than 400 Hz in frequency (Watkins and Schevill 1972; Thompson *et al.* 1979; Spero 1981). Because mid-frequency active sonar transmits at frequencies that are substantially higher than the frequencies of these vocalizations (1 kHz–10 kHz versus 400 kHz), the sound fields produced by mid-frequency active sonar do not seem likely to inferere with right whales that are calling and do not seem likely to mask right whales listening for vocalizations.

In the event right whales are exposed to mid-frequency active sonar, right whales do not seem likely to respond or those responses do not seem likely to reduce the fitness of the whale. Nowacek *et al*. (2004) conducted controlled exposure experiments on North Atlantic right whales using ship noise, social sounds of con-specifics, and an alerting stimulus (frequency modulated tonal signals between 500 Hz and 4.5 kHz). Animals were tagged with acoustic sensors (D-tags) that simultaneously measured movement in three dimensions. Whales reacted strongly to alert signals at received levels of 133-148 dB SPL, mildly to conspecific signals, and not at all to ship sounds or actual vessels. The alert stimulus caused whales to immediately cease foraging behavior and swim rapidly to the surface. Because right whales off the southeastern United States do not appear to forage, we assume that any right whales that are alerted to the presence of Navy vessels engaged in an exercise are most likely to swim rapidly to the surface.

Based on the evidence available, we conclude that the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises are not likely to adversely affect the population dynamics, behavioral ecology, and social dynamics of individual North Atlantic right whales in ways or to a degree that would reduce their fitness. As we discussed in the *Approach to the Assessment* section of this opinion, an action that is not likely to reduce the fitness of individual whales would not be likely to reduce the viability of the populations those individual whales represent (that is, we would not expect reductions in the reproduction, numbers, or distribution of those populations). As a result, the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises would not be expected to appreciably reduce the North Atlantic right whales' likelihood of surviving and recovering in the wild.

Sei Whales. In its Final Supplement to its Final Overseas EA for these training exercises, the U.S. Navy concluded that sei whales may occur seaward of the 2,000 meter isobath in the Cherry Point training area during the winter, but are not expected to occur in that area during the summer or in the Jacksonville-Charleston training areas at any time during the year.

Although the Navy might be justified in concluding that sei whales have small probabilities of occurring in the Action Area during on any particular day, week, or month, we cannot conclude that sei whales are not likely to occur in the Action Area based on the data available. Sei whales occur in lower densities along the coast of the United States and generally migrate to higher latitudes to feed. Outside of their foraging areas, we do not know where they might occur, when they might occur there, or how many of them are likely to occur. Nevertheless, the sei whale that stranded on the Outer Banks of North Carolina in the summer of 1974 suggests that some sei whales may swim south of their foraging areas. We can say with certainty that their probability of occurring in the Action Area during one or more of the proposed exercises is low, but we do not have enough information to say that their occurrence is 'discountable' (so low that it is not likely to occur; see discussion under fin whales). Like fin whales, we cannot estimate the number of sei whales that might be exposed, specify their probability of being exposed, or specify the received levels associated with any exposure, but we would expect at least one group of sei whales to occur in an area ensonified by mid-frequency active sonar during one or more of the proposed exercises.

Based on the evidence available, some sei whales might experience physiological stress (but not "distress") responses if they attempt to avoid one ship and encounter a second ship during that attempt. However, because of the relatively short duration of the exercise, we do not expect these responses to continue long-enough to have fitness consequences for individual sei whales because these whales are likely to have energy reserves sufficient to meet the demands of their normal behavioral patterns and the additional energy required for stress responses.

As a result, we conclude that the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises are not likely to adversely affect the population dynamics, behavioral ecology, and social dynamics of individual sei whales in ways or to a degree that would reduce their fitness. As we discussed in the *Approach to the Assessment* section of this opinion, an action that is not likely to reduce the fitness of individual whales would not be likely to reduce the viability of the populations those individual whales represent (that is, we would not expect reductions in the reproduction, numbers, or distribution of those populations). As a result, the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises would not be expected to appreciably reduce the sei whales' likelihood of surviving and recovering in the wild.

Sperm Whales. During the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises, the Navy estimated that there might be 280 instances in which sperm whales would accumulate energy equivalent to between 173 and 195 dB and 1 instance in which a sperm whale might accumulate energy equivalent to between 195 and 215 dB duriug the proposed exercises. Of this total, 121 of these exposures would occur during the spring Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise, 71 would occur during the summer Expenditionary Strike Group COMPTUEX exercise, 38 would occur during the summer Carrier Strike Group JTFEX exercise, and the remaining 50 exposures would occur during the winter Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise. All of these exposures assume that the proposed mitigation is not likely to be effective.

If we assume that some of these exposures might involve the same whale, then 191 of the 280 exposures might represent a single sperm whale that accumulates energy equivalent to 173 to 195 dB once, 76 of the 280 exposures might represent a single sperm whale that accumulates that energy equivalent twice, and the remaining 12 of the 481 exposures might represent a single sperm whale that accumulates that energy equivalent three times, and 1 sperm whale might accumulate that energy equivalent four times. One sperm whale might accumulate energy equivalent to between 195 and 215 dB once during the winter Carrier Strike Group COMPTUEX-JTFEX exercise.

If exposed to mid-frequency sonar transmissions, sperm whales are likely to hear and respond to those transmissions. The only data on the hearing range of sperm whales are evoked potentials from a stranded neonate (Carder and Ridgway 1990). These data suggest that neonatal sperm whales respond to sounds from 2.5-60 kHz. Sperm whales also produce loud broad-band clicks from about 0.1 to 20 kHz (Weilgart and Whitehead 1993, 1997; Goold and Jones 1995). These have source levels estimated at 171 dB re 1 μPa (Levenson 1974). The evidence available for this consultation suggests that the disproportionately large head of the sperm whale is an adaptation to produce these vocalizations (Norris and Harvey 1972; Cranford 1992; but see Clarke 1979). This suggests that the production of these loud low frequency clicks is extremely important to the survival of individual sperm whales. The function of these vocalizations is relatively well-studied (Weilgart and Whitehead 1993, 1997; Goold and Jones 1995). Long series of monotonous regularly spaced clicks are associated with feeding and are thought to be produced for echolocation. Distinctive, short, patterned series of clicks, called *codas*, are associated with social behavior and interactions within social groups (Weilgart and Whitehead 1993).

Sperm whales have been observed to frequently stop echolocating in the presence of underwater pulses made by echosounders and submarine sonar (Watkins and Schevill 1975; Watkins *et al.* 1985). Sperm whales also stop vocalizing for brief periods when codas are being produced by other individuals, perhaps because individual whales can hear sounds from other sources better when not vocalizing (Goold and Jones 1995). Sperm whales have moved out of areas after the start of air gun seismic testing (Davis *et al.* 1995).

The evidence available suggests that sperm whales are likely to detect mid-frequency sonar transmissions. In most circumstances, sperm whales are likely to try to avoid that exposure or are likely to avoid areas specific areas. Those sperm whales that do not avoid sound fields created by the mid-frequency sonar might experience masking or interrupt their vocalizations, echolocation, or foraging behavior. In either case, sperm whales that avoid these sound fields, interrupt or adjust their vocalizations, echolocating or foraging would experience significant disruptions of normal behavior patterns that are essential to their individual fitness. Because of the relatively short duration of the acoustic transmissions associated with the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises, we do not, however, expect these disruptions to result in the death or injury of any individual animal or to result in physiological stress responses that rise to the level of distress.

Like fin, humpback, and sei whales, individual sperm whales are also likely to respond to the ship traffic associated with the maneuvers might approximate their responses to whale watch vessels. As discussed in the *Environmental Baseline* section of this Opinion, those responses are likely to depend on the distance of a whale from a vessel, vessel speed, vessel direction, vessel noise, and the number of vessels involved in a particular maneuver. The closer sperm whales are to these maneuvers and the greater the number of times they are exposed (using the Navy's estimates of the cumulative exposures to sounds equivalents > 173 dB as an index of potential exposures), the greater their likelihood of be exposed and responding to that exposure. Particular whales' might not respond to the vessels, while in other circumstances, sperm whales are likely to change their vocalizations, surface time, swimming speed, swimming angle or direction, respiration rates, dive times, feeding behavior, and social interactions (Amaral and Carlson 2005; Au and Green 2000, Cockeron 1995, Erbe 2002, Félix 2001, Magalhães *et al*. 2002, Richter *et al*. 2003, Scheidat *et al*. 2004, Simmonds 2005, Watkins 1986, Williams *et al*. 2002). Some of these whales might experience physiological stress (but not "distress") responses if they attempt to avoid one ship and encounter a second ship during that attempt. However, because of the relatively short duration of the exercise, we do not expect these responses to continue long-enough to have fitness consequences for individual sperm whales because these whales are likely to have energy reserves sufficient to meet the demands of their normal behavioral patterns and those of a stress physiology.

As a result, we conclude that the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises are not likely to adversely affect individual sperm whales in ways or to a degree that would reduce their fitness. As we discussed in the *Approach to the Assessment* section of this opinion, an action that is not likely to reduce the fitness of individual sperm whales would not be likely to reduce the viability of the populations those individual whales represent by reducing the population dynamics, behavioral ecology, and social dynamics of those populations (that is, we would not expect reductions in the reproduction, numbers, or distribution of those populations). As a result, the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises would not be expected to appreciably reduce the sperm whales likelihood of surviving and recovering in the wild.

Sea Turtles. Sea turtles are regularly found along the coasts of the mid-Atlantic and southeastern United States. Information on sea turtle sightings decreases with increasing distance from the coast. However, aerial and ship-board surveys, observer records and logbooks from commercial fisheries, and satellite tracking studies suggest that sea turtles are likely to occur in the Action Area (e.g., James *et al*. 2005, Witzell 1999). Hatchling and juvenile age classes of sea turtles are found in the Gulf Stream and in the Sargasso Sea, in association with Sargassum habitats (for example, see Carr 1987, Coston-Clements *et al*. 1991, Spotila 2004, Witherington 2002). As a result, despite the Navy's efforts to site these exercises to the east of the western wall of the Gulf Stream, we assume that sea turtles are still likely to occur in the Action Area albeit at lower densities. In particular, hatchling sea turtles are more likely to occur in higher densities in waters east of the eastern wall of the Gulf Stream while sea turtles in older age-classes appear to have equal probabilities of occurring in waters to the east and west of the Gulf Stream.

The information on the hearing capabilities of sea turtles is also limited, but the information available suggests that the auditory capabilities of sea turtles are centered in the low-frequency range (<1 kHz) (Ridgway *et al.* 1969; Lenhardt *et al.* 1983; Bartol *et al.* 1999, Lenhardt 1994, O'Hara and Wilcox 1990). Based on this information sea turtles exposed to received levels of active mid-frequency sonar are not likely to hear mid-frequency sounds (sounds between 1 kHz and 10 kHz); therefore, they are not likely to respond physiologically or behaviorally to those received levels. As a result, mid-frequency active sonar associated with the proposed exercises "may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect" green, hawksbill, leatherback, or loggerhead sea turtles.

However, sea turtles that occur in the Action Area might encounter one or more of the parachutes after they have been jettisoned from these sonobuoys and could become entangled as a result. We cannot, however, determine whether such interactions are probable, given the relatively small number of sonobuoys that would be employed in each of the exercises, the relatively large geographic area involved, and the relatively low densities of sea turtles that are likely to occur in the Action Area. Given the large size of the Operating Areas, the relatively small number of sonobuoys that would be employed in an exercise, and the relatively low densities of sea turtles, an interaction between sea turtles and parachutes seems to have a very small probability; however, despite a very small probability, an interaction could be fatal to the sea turtle if it was entangled and drowned or if it swallowed a parachute. Nevertheless, we conclude that the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises are not likely to interact with sufficient number of adult or sub-adult sea turtles, if they interact with any sea turtles at all, to reduce the viability of the nesting aggregations those sea turtles represent by reducing the population dynamics, behavioral ecology, and social dynamics of those populations (that is, we would not expect reductions in the reproduction, numbers, or distribution of those populations). As a result, the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises would not be expected to appreciably reduce the likelihood of green, hawksbill, leatherback, or loggerhead sea turtles surviving and recovering in the wild.

Conclusion

After reviewing the current status of the endangered fin whale, humpback whale, North Atlantic right whale, sei whale, sperm whale, green sea turtle, hawksbill sea turtle, leatherback sea turtle, and loggerhead sea turtle, the environmental baseline for the action area, the effects of the proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises, and the cumulative effects, it is NMFS' biological opinion that the Navy's proposed 2008 Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises may adversely affect, but is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of these threatened and endangered species under NMFS' jurisdiction. Because critical habitat that has been designated for endangered or threatened species under NMFS' jurisdiction is not likely to be exposed to the direct or indirect effects of the proposed training exercises, the proposed exercises are not likely to adversely affect designated critical habitat amd, as a result, are not likely to destroy or adversely modify that critical habitat.

INCIDENTAL TAKE STATEMENT

Section 9 of the ESA and Federal regulation pursuant to section 4(d) of the ESA prohibits the take of endangered and threatened species, respectively, without special exemption. Take is defined as to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct. Harm is further defined by NMFS to include significant habitat modification or degradation that results in death or injury to listed species by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding, or sheltering. Incidental take is defined as take that is incidental to, and not the purpose of, the carrying out of an otherwise lawful activity. Under the terms of section 7(b)(4) and section 7(o)(2), taking that is incidental to and not intended as part of the agency action is not considered to be prohibited taking under the Act provided that such taking is in compliance with the terms and conditions of this Incidental Take Statement.

This Incidental Take Statement treats the U.S. Navy's exemption to prohibitions contained in the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-136), which expired at the end of Calendar Year 2006 and was extended through Calendar Year 2009 as equivalent to an exemption to the prohibitions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The measures described in the *Reasonable and Prudent Measures* and *Terms and Conditions* (below), which are non-discretionary, must be implemented by the U.S. Navy in order for the exemption in section 7(o)(2) to apply. If the U.S. Navy fails to adhere to the terms and conditions of the Incidental Take Statement, the protective coverage of section 7(o)(2) may lapse.

Amount or Extent of Take Anticipated

The effects analysis contained in this Biological Opinion concluded that individual fin whales, humpback whales, and sei whales have small probabilities of being exposed to and are likely to respond to ship traffic associated with the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises. The closer these whales are to these maneuvers and the greater the number of times they are exposed (using the Navy's estimates of the cumulative exposures to sounds equivalents > 173 dB as an index of potential exposures), the greater their likelihood of be exposed and responding to that exposure. This biological Opinion also concluded that sperm whales are likely to be to exposed and likely to respond to that exposure in ways that constitute "harassment" for the purposes of the ESA. NMFS does not expect any threatened or endangered species to be injured or killed as a result of exposure to the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises (see the *Effects of the Action* section of this Biological Opinion for further discussion).

For the purposes of this biological opinion and incidental take statement, we assumed that the Navy's estimates of the number of times whales might be exposed to mid-frequency sonar associated with anti-submarine warfare exercises and accumulate energy equivalents greater than 173 dB represent the number of times a whale might be "taken" in the form of harassment (see Table 7 for these estimates, by species). We do not anticipate any of these whale species to die or exhibit responses that might constitute harm or injury.

Table 7. Estimates of the number of times different species of whales might accumulate energy equivalent to between 173-195, 195 - 215 dB, and greater than 215 dB rms^2 for 1 second during four anti-submarine warfare exercises in the Charleston, Cherry Point, and Jacksonville Training Ranges based on the effects' analyses contained in this Opinion

Species	Estimated No. of Exposure Events		
	173 - 195 dB	195 - 215 dB	> 215 dB
Fin whale		1-2	
Humpback whale	481	1	0
North Atlantic right whale	1	0	0
Sei whale		1-2	
Sperm whale	280	1	0

Effect of the Take

In the accompanying biological opinion, NMFS determined that this level of anticipated take is not likely to result in jeopardy to the species. The proposed exercises are not likely to result in destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. Studies of marine mammals and sonar transmissions have shown that fin whales, humpback whales, North Atlantic right whales, sei whales, and sperm whales are likely to respond behaviorally upon hearing mid-frequency sonar transmissions. Although the biological significance of those behavioral responses remains unknown, this consultation on the U.S. Navy's proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises has assumed that exposure to sonar transmissions might disrupt one or more behavioral patterns that are essential to an individual animal's life history. However, any behavioral responses of these whales to sonar transmissions are not expected to affect the reproduction, survival, or recovery of these species.

Reasonable and Prudent Measures

The National Marine Fisheries Service believes the following reasonable and prudent measures are necessary and appropriate to minimize the impacts of incidental take on threatened and endangered species:

1. The U.S. Navy shall implement measures to reduce the probability of exposing fin whales, humpback whales, sei whales, and sperm whales to mid-frequency sonar transmissions that will occur during the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises during 2008.

2. The U.S. Navy shall implement a monitoring program that allows the Navy and NMFS to evaluate the assumptions contained in this biological opinion and that underlie this incidental take statement.

3. The Navy shall submit a report that evaluates its mitigation measures and reports the results of its monitoring program.

Terms and Conditions

In order to be exempt from the prohibitions of section 9 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, the U.S. Navy must comply with the following terms and conditions, which implement the reasonable and prudent measures described above and outline reporting and monitoring requirements, as required by the section 7 regulations (50 CFR 402.14(i))

1. To the maximum extent practicable, the U.S. Navy shall schedule one of the proposed training exercises to co-occur, in whole or in part, with the aerial surveys that are scheduled to be associated with the proposed Ship Shock Trial on the MESA VERDE (or schedule the Ship Shock Trial to co-occur with one of the proposed training exercises). The Navy shall use the results of those aerial surveys to identify the listed species that are likely to occur in the Action Area and their densities in the Action Area.
2. Within 120 calendar days of completing the proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises, the U.S. Navy shall provide the Chief, Endangered Species Division, Office of Protected Resources (with a copy provided to the Assistant Regional Administrator for Protected Resources in NMFS' Southeast Regional Office located in St. Petersburg, Florida) with a written report that shall include the following information:

    a. the start and end dates of each exercise;

    b. the number of hours of active sonar used during each exercise;

    c. the specific measures the Navy implemented prior to any one of the four exercises and following an exercise to reduce the probability of exposing marine mammals and sea turtles to active sonar at 500, 1,000, or 2,000 meters;

    d. the number of fin whales, humpback whales, North Atlantic right whales, sei whales, sperm whales and sea turtles that (i) had been detected within 500, 1,000, and 2,000 meters of a sonar dome during an active transmission and (ii) the

Navy's estimate of the number of fin whales, humpback whales, North Atlantic right whales, sei whales, sperm whales, and sea turtles that had been exposed to mid-frequency sonar at received levels equal to or greater than 173 dB and 190 dB;

e. the reports of the activity or activities that fin whales, humpback whales, North Atlantic right whales, sei whales, sperm whales, and sea turtles had been observed to exhibit while they were within 500, 1,000, and 2,000 yards of a sonar dome that were actively transmitting during the exercise (for example, a report should not identify 'playing"; it should identify the behavior that the observer interpreted as "playing").

Reports of an observation shall identify the date, time, and visual conditions associated (for example, if the observation is produced from a helicopter, the report should identify the speed, vector, and altitude of the airship; the sea state, and lighting conditions) with the observation; and how long an observer or set of observers maintained visual contact with a marine mammal;

f. an evaluation of the effectiveness of those mitigation measures at avoiding exposing endangered whales to active sonar transmissions. This evaluation shall identify the specific observations that support any conclusion the Navy reaches about the effectiveness of the mitigation measures;

3. Within 15 business days of completing an exercise, the Navy shall provide the Chief, Endangered Species Division, Office of Protected Resources with a verbal briefing that summarizes the starting and ending dates of the exercise, initial counts of the number of the different marine mammal species that were oberved within 2,000 yards of a vessel that had been transmitting mid-frequency active sonar, and the initial estimated distance between those mammals and the transmitting vessel.

4. The Navy will coordinate with the NMFS Stranding Coordinator for any unusual marine mammal behavior, including cetaceans that have stranded, beached (live or dead), are floating in the Action Area, or live cetaceans that are out of their habitat (including milling) at any time during or shortly after detonations associated with the Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises. After an exercise, NMFS and the Navy will prepare a coordinated report on the practicality and effectiveness of the protocol that will be provided to Navy/NMFS leadership.

CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 7(a)(1) of the Act directs Federal agencies to utilize their authorities to further the purposes of the Act by carrying out conservation programs for the benefit of endangered and threatened species. Conservation recommendations are discretionary agency activities to minimize or avoid adverse effects of a proposed action on listed species or critical habitat, to help implement recovery plans, or to develop information.

The following conservation recommendations would provide information for future consultations involving Navy training exercises that involve active sonar:

1. *Identify (or develop) and implement alternative methods for estimating the probability of exposing endangered and threatened species to active sonar*. During the section 7 consultations on this action and several other actions, NMFS had numerous discussions with the U.S. Navy about the limitations of the models the U.S. Navy used to estimate the probability of exposing endangered and threatened species to mid-frequency active sonar. In particular, those exposure models (a) do not estimate the probability of exposing sea turtles to active sonar or any other stressors associated with an exercise. (b) make assumptions about marine mammal abundance in an exercise area that may not be warranted (for example, the models assume that marine mammals are homogenously distributed throughout an exercise area and that the marine mammals will not try to avoid exposure to active sonar); and (c) do not explicitly deal with uncertainty about the abundance, density, distribution, or behavior of marine mammals in an action area. The U.S. Navy should work with NMFS Endangered Species Division and other parties with relevant expertise (the Marine Mammal Commission, International Whaling Commission, and the marine mammal research community) to identify (or develop) and implement more robust methods for estimating the probability of exposing endangered and threatened cetaceans, pinnipeds, sea turtles, and anadromous fish to different received levels of active sonar.

2. *Identify (or develop) and implement more robust methods for detecting the number or density of endangered and threatened species that are within 1 kilometer of Navy vessels that are employing active sonar*. The protective measures the U.S. Navy proposes to employ during these training exercises all depend on the ability of Navy personnel to detect marine animals at the water's surface. That is, if Navy watchstanders visually detect animals, the Navy can avoid exposing them to active sonar transmissions or to specific received levels of active sonar transmissions; if, however, Navy watchstanders do not visually detect animals, the animals are likely to be exposed to the sound field produced by mid-frequency active sonar transmissions. Because most marine mammals spend very little time at the ocean's surface and many of these species are difficult to detect when they are at the ocean's surface, visual detections by watchstanders has a very limited ability to prevent marine animals from being exposed to active sonar transmissions.

   The U.S. Navy should work with NMFS' Endangered Species, Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Conservation, and Permits, Conservation and Education Divisions; NMFS' Acoustics Program; and other parties with relevant expertise (the Marine Mammal Commission, International Whaling Commission, and the marine mammal research community) to identify (or develop) and implement more reliable methods for detecting endangered and threatened cetaceans, pinnipeds, sea turtles, and anadromous fish in the water column in association with Navy training exercises that employ mid-frequency active sonar. The results of this effort should detect marine animals in the water column within 1 kilometer of an Navy vessel and should work when those animals are not vocalizing.

3. *Idenitfy and support research on the cumulative impacts of active sonar exposures.* As this Opinion discusses, there is limited information on the cumulative effects of active sonar exposures on endangered and threatened marine mammals, sea turtles, and anadromous fish (here, cumulative, refers to responses that accumulate to produce consequences that are more severe than the responses would have been had they not accumulated). The U.S. Navy should work with NMFS Endangered Species Division and other parties with the relevant expertise (the Marine Mammal Commission, International Whaling Commission, and the marine mammal research community) to identify and support research on the cumulative effects of anthropogenic sound on cetaceans, pinnipeds, sea turtles, and anadromous fish. This includes the cumulative impacts on the distribution, abundance, and the physiological, behavioral and social ecology of these species.
4. *Idenitfy and support research on the interactive effects of active sonar exposures.* As this Opinion discusses, there is limited information on the probable responses of endangered and threatened species given exposure to mid-frequency active sonar when exposures to active sonar are combined with exposure to other stressors, including active sonar (low- and high-frequency sonar), other potential stressors associated with Navy training exercises (underwater detonations and ship traffic, for example), and other physical, chemical, and biotic stressors endangered and threatened species are exposed to within the marine environment. The U.S. Navy should work with NMFS Endangered Species Division and other parties with the relevant expertise (the Marine Mammal Commission, International Whaling Commission, and the marine mammal research community) to identify and support research on the interactive effects of active sonar on endangered and threatened cetaceans, pinnipeds, sea turtles, and anadromous fish. This includes the cumulative impacts on the distribution, abundance, and the physiological, behavioral and social ecology of these species.

In order to keep NMFS Endangered Species Division informed of actions minimizing or avoiding adverse effects or benefitting listed species or their habitats, the U.S. Navy should notify the Endangered Species Division of any conservation recommendations they implement in their final action.

REINITIATION NOTICE

This concludes formal consultation on the U.S. Navy's proposed Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises in 2008. As provided in 50 CFR 402.16, reinitiation of formal consultation is required where discretionary Federal agency involvement or control over the action has been retained (or is authorized by law) and if: (1) the amount or extent of incidental take is exceeded; (2) new information reveals effects of the agency action that may affect listed species or critical habitat in a manner or to an extent not considered in this opinion; (3) the agency action is subsequently modified in a manner that causes an effect to the listed species or critical habitat not considered in this opinion; or (4) a new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by the action. In instances where the amount or extent of authorized take is exceeded, the U.S. Navy must immediately request reinitiation of section 7 consultation.

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