

February 6, 2017

Jolie Harrison, Chief, Permits and Conservation Division
Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225

Dear Jolie,

I am writing to provide comments on the U.S. Air Force 86 Fighter Weapons Squadron Long Range Strike WESP in Hawai‘i, in relation to potential impacts on protected species of marine mammals. The impact location for this operation is an area where sperm whales are regularly detected by the Navy as part of their acoustic monitoring on the PMRF hydrophone system, and an area where one of the sperm whales that we’ve satellite tagged in Hawai‘i has moved through (Baird 2016). I am surprised to see in Table 6-2 of the LOA Application that no sperm whales are expected to be affected by the Long Range Strike WSEP missions, given their known presence in the area. Similarly, fin whales and other large baleen whales use deeper waters of the area. While many of the baleen whales primarily are found in Hawai‘i in winter months, there are acoustic detections of fin whales in Hawaiian waters in 10 months of the year, and blue whales throughout the year (see review in Baird 2016), thus there is some probability of them being in the area of operations. Vocalizing sperm whales, as well as other species of both baleen and toothed whales, are easily detected and can be localized on the PMRF hydrophone system. Thus this system could be used in real time to mitigate impacts of the proposed activities by simply monitoring the range prior to initiation of activities and postponing operations until no vocalizing cetaceans have been detected within some time period. I would encourage the Office of Protected Resources to consider requiring a condition of the authorization for these activities to include real-time acoustic monitoring of the area through the PMRF hydrophones and using acoustic detections as a real-time mitigation measure.

I hope these comments are useful,

Best regards,



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Baird, R.W. 2016. The lives of Hawai‘i’s dolphins and whales: natural history and conservation. University of Hawai‘i Press, Honolulu, Hawai‘i.