



# MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

16 November 2020

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

Re: Permit Application No. 24356  
(Plimsoll Productions)

Dear Ms. Harrison:

The Marine Mammal Commission (the Commission), in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit application with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (the MMPA). Plimsoll Productions is requesting authorization to conduct filming activities on pinnipeds in California for an upcoming series on the National Geographic Channel highlighting the sensory and communication capabilities of wildlife and plants.

Plimsoll Productions is requesting authorization to film<sup>1</sup> Northern elephant seals at Año Nuevo State Park for four weeks between January 2021 and March 2022. Individuals of any age class and either sex could be harassed. California sea lions, harbor seals and Steller sea lions also could be harassed incidental to the filming activities. A state park monitor would always accompany the filmmakers into the field, and Drs. Colleen Reichmuth, Patrick Robinson and Caroline Casey of the University of California at Santa Cruz would serve as off-site advisors and may also serve as on-site advisors. The filmmakers would implement various measures to minimize impacts on pinnipeds and also would be required to abide by the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) standard permit conditions.

In its application, Plimsoll Productions proposed to approach and film fighting male elephant seals on foot, monitoring the reaction of seals during the entire approach, yet it did not explicitly indicate whether filmmakers would avoid positioning themselves between fighting seals. To ensure the safety of the filmmakers and minimize possible disturbance to the seals, the Commission recommends that NMFS issue the permit contingent on prohibiting filmmakers from positioning themselves between fighting male elephant seals.

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<sup>1</sup> Including filming on land and with unmanned aircraft systems.

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The Commission believes that the proposed activities are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA. Kindly contact me if you have any questions concerning the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter O. Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a distinct "O" before the last name.

Peter O. Thomas, Ph.D.,  
Executive Director