



# MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

8 April 2014

Dr. Tammy Adams, Acting Chief  
Permits and Conservation Division  
Office of Protected Resources  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225

Re: Permit Amendment Application No. 14097  
(Southwest Fisheries Science Center)

Dear Dr. Adams:

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). Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) is seeking to amend permit 14097 that authorizes it to conduct research on marine mammals in the U.S. territorial and international waters of the Pacific, Southern, Arctic, and Indian Oceans. The current permit expires on 30 June 2015.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit amendment, provided that the conditions contained in the current permit remain in effect.

## **RATIONALE**

SWFSC is authorized to monitor, characterize, and/or assess abundance and distribution, stock structure, movement patterns, foraging and breeding ecology, haul-out behavior, life history parameters, and demography. Authorized activities include harassing, counting, observing, photographing, sampling, conducting photogrammetry on, and/or instrumenting numerous marine mammal species. SWFSC is authorized to conduct the specified activities on individuals of various age classes and either sex.

SWFSC is requesting five changes to its permit, including—

- (1) adding the use of unmanned aerial systems (UASs<sup>1</sup>) to collect breath samples from eastern North Pacific gray whales at an altitude of 2 m to assess hormone, thyroid, ketone, and various protein concentrations;

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<sup>1</sup> A hexacopter or quadcopter, weighing up to 2 kg, would be used.

- (2) adding the use of UASs, in addition to its authorization for fixed-wing aircraft, to photograph cetaceans at an altitude of 30 m to aid in abundance estimates and determining life history parameters;
- (3) adding the use of suction-cup tags, in addition to its authorization for attaching dart tags on up to 30 eastern North Pacific gray whales per year to increase the types of data collected—only gray whales older than 6 months would be tagged<sup>2</sup>, up to two tags<sup>3</sup> could be attached to an individual each year, and both a suction-cup and dart tag could be attached to a single individual concurrently;
- (4) adding the use of dart tags on up to 15 bottlenose dolphins and 15 Risso's dolphins per year to investigate habitat-use patterns, movements, anthropogenic impacts—females and their dependent calves would not be tagged, up to two tags<sup>4</sup> could be attached to an individual each year, and a second tagging attempt would not be made if tissue damage resulting from the first tagging attempt is observed; and
- (5) increasing the number of biopsy samples from one to five per year on up to 25 humpback whales in the Southern Ocean to determine if stable isotope signatures differ based on samples taken from various locations on the body, investigate changes in stable isotope signatures longitudinally, and determine tissue turn-over rates—only juveniles and adults would be sampled and individuals would be sampled only three times in any given day; and
- (6) extending the permit for one year.

Only the request to tag bottlenose and Risso's dolphins would change the numbers of cetaceans authorized to be taken annually. The other amendment requests would change the manner of taking or the number of times an individual would be taken. SWFSC's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee has reviewed and approved the protocols. Therefore, the Commission recommends that NMFS issue the permit amendment, provided that the current permit conditions remain in effect.

The Commission believes that the activities for which it has recommended approval are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA.

The Commission appreciates the opportunity to comment on this permit amendment application. Kindly contact me if you have any questions concerning the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,



Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

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<sup>2</sup> SWFSC would be authorized to tag females with dependent calves, although that method is not preferred because it is highly likely that the accompanying calf might dislodge the suction-cup tag.

<sup>3</sup> This primarily would occur if the first tagging attempt fails.

<sup>4</sup> This primarily would occur if the first tagging attempt fails.