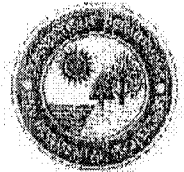


STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



April 18, 2008

J. M. Hinson CAPT, USN Director, Fleet Training Department of the Navy U.S. Fleet Forces Command 1562 Mitscher Avenue, Suite 250 Norfolk, VA 23551-2487

Re: Proposed Atlantic Fleet Active Sonar Training (AFAST); Consistency Concurrence

Dear Capt. Hinson,

This is in response to your consistency determination, received on February 20, 2008, for the proposed Atlantic Fleet Active Sonar Training (AFAST) program. That determination is required by Section 307(c)(1) of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, Subpart C of 15 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 930, and Section 11, Part VII(c) of the State of Connecticut Coastal Management Program and Final Environmental Impact Statement.

The proposed AFAST program activities would include, within Connecticut state waters, submarine object detection/navigational training and active sonar maintenance. Submarine object detection/navigational training would occur in the established submarine transit lanes while entering and exiting the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Connecticut. Active sonar maintenance would occur on-ship at the Submarine Base, and would be conducted before deployment, after major sonar array maintenance, and when systems are suspected of not operating at optimal levels. These activities would be conducted under the Navy's Preferred Alternative, i.e., the No-Action Alternative, which consists of continuing existing active training within existing Operating Areas (OPAREAs). This Department concurs with your determination that those proposed actions that would occur in Connecticut waters are consistent to the maximum extent practicable with Connecticut's approved Coastal Management Program pursuant to Section 22a-96(c) of the Connecticut General Statutes. ]

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[ Please be advised, however, that we have a number of outstanding concerns regarding the potential impacts of the more extensive training exercises to be conducted in the various designated OPAREAs on marine mammals, sea turtles and fish that migrate in and out of Long Island Sound on a seasonal basis that are more occasional visitors. These issues are also addressed in the Department's comments, dated March 31, 2008, on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS/OEIS) for the AFAST program. ]

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[ We are particularly concerned about the elevated number of potential acoustic exposures to which the most sensitive marine mammals evaluated in the DEIS/OEIS would be subjected, resulting in Level B harassment, under the preferred alternative compared to other alternatives that were rejected. Specifically, harbor porpoise, a state-listed species of special concern, would sustain 286,132 exposures under the Preferred (No-Action) Alternative, but only 28 exposures under either Alternative 1 or Alternative 2, both of which would designate specific active sonar training areas. Similarly, the federally endangered North Atlantic right whale would sustain 555 acoustic exposures under the Preferred Alternative, 210 under Alternative 1 and 192 under Alternative 2. We believe that it is difficult to quantify and predict whether, as concluded in the DEIS/OEIS, these effects would indeed be temporary. ]

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J. M. Hinson

April 15, 2008

or that they would not affect annual rates of recruitment or survival. Although these exposure patterns are reversed for other described mammal species, we would prefer, based on the potential impacts to harbor porpoise and right whale, that the Navy consider implementation of either Alternative 1 or Alternative 2 instead of the No Action Alternative. ]

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[ Although the DEIS/OEIS concludes that impacts to four species of sea turtles that that may occupy Long Island Sound during their life cycle, and that are federal- and state-listed as threatened or endangered, will be neither long-term nor significant, the DEIS/OEIS also accurately states on page 4-38 that sea turtle auditory capabilities and sensitivity are not well studied. The Navy's research program does not include funding to address the data gap for sea turtles. We therefore recommend that the Navy provide or support funding to further study these impacts. ]

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[ We are also concerned about the impacts of discarded sonobuoys on sea turtles. Specifically, we are concerned that sea turtles may become entangled in discharged sonobuoy parachutes, and that the parachutes may cover sea grass, vegetation or crabs on the sea floor on which they feed. ] We are further concerned that habitat that is not covered by parachutes may be contaminated by discarded batteries and lead weights. ] The DEIS/OEIS indicates that annually, an estimated 35,539 expendable instruments will be left behind in various OPAREAs from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of Maine. We recommend that the Navy consider the feasibility of retrieving the sonobuoys, and particularly the parachutes, as part of the AFAST training exercises, rather than leaving this significant amount of debris on the ocean floor. ]

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Please contact Tom Ouellette of the DEP Office of Long Island Sound Programs at 860-424-3612 or at [tom.ouellette@dep.gov](mailto:tom.ouellette@dep.gov) if you have any questions regarding this consistency concurrence or the accompanying comments. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Beverly C. Wingfield, Chief  
Bureau of Water Protection  
and Land Reuse

BCW/TO/ro

- cc: Allison Castellan, OCRM
- David Fox, DEP Environmental Review
- Julie Victoria, DEP Wildlife Div
- Mark Johnson, DEP Marine Fisheries Div.