

NMFS Office of Protected Resources

Review of Pinniped Stranding Events from March – July 2016

September 9, 2016

NMFS completed its review of several stranded pinnipeds reported on NMFS's website on March 16, 2016; April 12, 2016; June 30, 2016; and July 11, 2016. Based on the information available, NMFS determined these events do not warrant modifications to the Letters of Authorization for the U.S. Navy's Hawaii Southern California Training and Testing (HSTT) under 50 CFR 218.78(c)(1) or notice and comment procedures under 50 CFR 216.106(e) or 50 CFR 218.78(c)(1)(ii).

As reported: on March 10, 2016, two California sea lion (*Zalophus californianus*) carcasses were discovered at Silver Strand Training Complex – North Beach; on March 30, 2016, an unidentified pinniped (seal or California sea lion) carcass was discovered at the Naval Base San Diego piers; on June 16, 2016, a California sea lion carcass was discovered at Coronado Naval Amphibious Base; and on July 1, 2016, a California sea lion carcass was discovered in the vicinity of Silver Strand South in San Diego, California. The March 10 and June 16, 2016 discoveries were made shortly after, and in the vicinity of, the Navy's use of permitted high-frequency active sonar. The March 30, 2016 discovery was made shortly after, and in the vicinity of, the Navy's use of permitted mid-frequency active sonar.

The Navy originally reported that the July 1, 2016 discovery was made shortly after and in the vicinity of the Navy's use of permitted high-frequency active sonar. Upon further review, the Navy determined that its initial report was inaccurate and that no permitted high-frequency (or mid-frequency) active sonar was used in the vicinity. Nevertheless, NMFS's assessment set forth below applies equally to the July 1 discovery.

There is no stranding network responder dedicated to investigating reports of dead pinnipeds in San Diego County, so none of the reported strandings received a response or investigation by the stranding network. Consequently, the available information relating to each of the above strandings is very limited and is insufficient to allow NMFS to determine the likely cause(s) of the strandings. Because the available information does not support a causal connection between the Navy's HSTT training or testing and these pinniped strandings, NMFS concludes that none of the reported events warrants any actions pursuant to 50 CFR 216.106(e) or 50 CFR 218.78(c).