

## **DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

### **Department of the Navy**

#### **Record of Decision for the Hawaii-California Training and Testing Final Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement**

**AGENCY:** Department of the Navy, Department of Defense

**ACTION:** Record of Decision

**SUMMARY:** The United States (U.S.) Department of the Navy (DON), including both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps, after carefully weighing the strategic, operational, and environmental consequences of the Proposed Action, announces its decision to conduct training, testing, and modernization and sustainment of ranges (also referred to as military readiness activities) as identified in Alternative 1 of the Hawaii-California Training and Testing (HCTT) Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS). Implementation of Alternative 1 enables the DON to meet military requirements to achieve the levels of operational readiness required under Title 10 United States Code (U.S.C.) Sections 8062 and 8063. The full suite of mitigation measures detailed in Chapter 5 (Mitigation) of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS would be implemented to avoid or reduce potential impacts during military readiness activities under Alternative 1.

The DON, as the Lead Agency, and U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Army, and U.S. Air Force as Joint Lead Agencies, prepared the HCTT EIS/OEIS in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Executive Order 12114, *Environmental Effects Abroad of Major Federal Actions*, and applicable federal NEPA implementing regulations in place at the time the EIS/OEIS was initiated. The HCTT Final EIS/OEIS supports the issuance of new Letters of Authorization (LOAs) for the incidental taking of marine mammals under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is a cooperating agency for the HCTT EIS/OEIS because the scope of the Proposed Action and alternatives involve activities that have the potential to affect protected resources under the agency's jurisdiction and about which they have special expertise.

While the term "Action Proponents" used throughout this Record of Decision includes all the military services, this Record of Decision is the decision document for DON. The U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Army, and U.S. Air Force, will each prepare their own decision documents.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:** Contact the HCTT EIS/OEIS Project Manager, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, Pacific/EV21, 258 Makalapa Drive, Suite 100, Pearl Harbor, HI 96860-3134, (808) 472-1402; or access the website at <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/hctteis/>.

**A. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Pursuant to NEPA, 42 U.S.C. section 4321 et seq., and Executive Order 12114, DON announces its decision to implement its Preferred Alternative,

Alternative 1, including the full range of mitigation measures, as described in the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS.

**B. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES:** The Action Proponents have been conducting military readiness activities in the HCTT Study Area for decades. The tempo and types of military readiness activities have fluctuated with the introduction of new technologies, the evolving nature of international events, advances in warfighting doctrine and procedures, and changes in force structure (organization of ships, weapons, and personnel). Such developments influence the frequency, duration, intensity, and location of required military readiness activities from year to year. The HCTT Final EIS/OEIS reflects the most up-to-date compilation of training and testing activities deemed necessary to meet military readiness requirements into the reasonably foreseeable future. These military readiness activities include the use of active sonar and other acoustic sources, as well as the use of explosives.

The DON has implemented a programmatic approach to environmental compliance at sea for ranges, to ensure compliance with applicable environmental regulations and policies and preserve the flexibility necessary for DON to train and test at sea. The DON is currently in the fourth phase of implementing this programmatic approach. This Phase IV HCTT Study Area differs from the Phase III Hawaii-Southern California Training and Testing (HSTT) Study Area in that HCTT includes an expanded Southern California (SOCAL) Range Complex (proposed Warning Area 293 [W-293] and W-294 and the sea space beneath), new testing sea space between W-293 and Point Mugu Sea Range (PMSR), the inclusion of two existing training and testing at-sea range areas (PMSR and the Northern California [NOCAL] Range Complex), inclusion of ocean areas along the Southern California coastline from approximately Dana Point to Port Hueneme, and four amphibious approach lanes providing land access from NOCAL and PMSR (Figure 1-2 of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS).

### **Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to conduct military readiness activities in the HCTT Study Area to ensure the Action Proponents are able to organize, train, and equip service members and personnel needed to meet their respective Congressionally-mandated national defense missions. These missions are achieved in part by conducting military readiness activities within the HCTT Study Area. Section 1.5 of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS discusses the need for the Proposed Action in greater detail but, in general, at-sea training and testing are needed to ensure military forces are prepared to protect U.S. national security interests, prosecute war, and defend the nation.

The purpose of NMFS' action is to evaluate the Action Proponents' request for authorizations to take marine mammals, pursuant to section 101(a)(5)(A) of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1371) and its implementing regulations administered by NMFS, and decide whether to promulgate regulations and issue LOAs, including any conditions necessary to meet the statutory mandates of the

MMPA. The Final EIS/OEIS analyzes the environmental impacts associated with issuance of the requested incidental take authorizations for military readiness activities within the Study Area.

### **Public Involvement**

The lead agencies conducted extensive public involvement during the development of the EIS/OEIS, including public scoping, release of the Draft EIS/OEIS for review and comment, and release of the Final EIS/OEIS. Substantive comments received during scoping and the Draft EIS/OEIS review were considered during the development of the Final EIS/OEIS. Details on the public involvement process are found in Appendix L (Public Participation) of the Final EIS/OEIS. Five letters were received on the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS during the 30-day wait period, which ended on November 3, 2025.

### **Alternatives Considered**

The identification, consideration, and analysis of alternatives are critical components of the NEPA process and contribute to the goal of informed decision-making. The Action Proponents developed the alternatives considered in the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS after careful assessment by subject matter experts, including military commands that utilize the ranges, military range management professionals, and environmental managers and scientists, and in consultation with NMFS with regard to mitigation measures that are incorporated into each action alternative. The Action Proponents also considered changes in military policy and analyzed historical data to inform alternatives development.

Live training and testing, conducted in an appropriate environment to provide realism, is an irreplaceable aspect of meeting military readiness requirements. Training must be as realistic as possible to provide experience vital to success and survival of forces during military operations. Testing must be conducted, in the environment in which platforms and systems are intended to operate, to obtain critical performance data to support development. While both training and testing programs leverage simulation to supplement the development of ready forces or capabilities, it is not considered a substitute for live at-sea activities. The need for including live training and testing is discussed in Section 2.4 of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS.

Three alternatives are analyzed in the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS.

- **No Action Alternative.** The No Action Alternative considers that the Proposed Action would not take place (i.e., the proposed military readiness activities would not occur in the HCTT Study Area). This alternative is inherently unreasonable in that it does not meet Action Proponents' purpose and need. For NMFS, denial of an application for an incidental take authorization constitutes the No Action Alternative, which is consistent with NMFS's statutory obligation under the MMPA to grant or deny requests for take incidental to specified activities.
- **Alternative 1.** Alternative 1, the Preferred Alternative, reflects a representative year of training and testing to account for fluctuations in tempo, training cycles, testing programs and deployment schedules. The level of training and testing activities are expected to

support the Action Proponents' ability to meet military readiness requirements into the reasonably foreseeable future. For example, Alternative 1 does not analyze a maximum number of carrier strike group Composite Training Unit Exercises (one type of major certification exercise) every year, but instead assumes a maximum number of exercises would occur during 4 years of any 7-year period. As a result, Alternative 1 analyzes a maximum of 11 Composite Training Unit Exercises (and certain other coordinated events leading up to a Composite Training Unit Exercise) over a 7-year period. Alternative 1 also includes an annual level of testing that reflects the fluctuations in testing programs by recognizing that the maximum level of testing would likely not be conducted each year. The majority of testing activities that would be conducted under this alternative are the same as, or similar to, those conducted currently or in the past. This alternative also includes modernization and sustainment of ranges as described in Section 2.3.4 of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS.

- **Alternative 2.** Alternative 2 considers similar training and testing activities to Alternative 1, but reflects the maximum number of training activities that could occur within a given year and assumes that the maximum level of activity would occur every year over any 7-year period. As in the example given in Alternative 1, Alternative 2 does analyze a maximum number of Composite Training Unit Exercises every year, resulting in 14 Composite Training Unit Exercises in a 7-year period. Alternative 2 includes the testing of some new systems using new technologies, taking into account the potential for delayed or accelerated testing schedules, variations in funding availability, and innovations in technology development. To account for these inherent uncertainties in testing, this alternative assumes a greater level of testing efforts predicted for each individual system or program could occur in any given year. Additionally, this alternative includes modernization and sustainment of ranges, which would be unchanged from Alternative 1.

The Navy's standard operating procedures and entire suite of mitigations, including activity-based mitigation measures and geographic mitigations, are incorporated into the Preferred Alternative. The Action Proponents thoroughly considered and then eliminated from further consideration several alternatives that did not meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action. Section 2.4.1 of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS includes a description of alternatives considered but not carried forward for detailed analysis.

### **Corrections Subsequent to the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS Publication**

Following the public release of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS, minor errors were discovered and noted below. These corrections do not result in changes to the effects analysis as they were simply errors in how the information was presented in the Final EIS/OEIS.

- **Figure 5-2 and Figure K-26.** The figure depicting the proposed mitigation areas in the Hawaii Study Area appears in both Chapter 5 (Mitigation) and Appendix K (Geographic Mitigation Assessment). In addition to showing marine mammal mitigation areas, this

figure shows the shallow-water coral reefs, precious coral beds, and hard bottom substrate around the Hawaiian Islands. The original Final EIS/OEIS figure did not show the shallow-water coral reef in an inset focusing on the southern shore of Oahu. The figure was corrected and replaced in the Final EIS/OEIS available on the project website at <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/Current-Projects/At-Sea-Ranges/Hawaii-California-Training-and-Testing-EIS-OEIS/Final-EIS-OEIS/>.

- **Figure H-37.** In Appendix H, the figure that illustrates the offshore training areas around San Clemente Island incorrectly showed the Pyramid Cove Mine Training Range as used for only non-explosive training. This area is currently used and proposed for future use of both non-explosive training and explosive training (involving underwater detonations). The figure was corrected and replaced in the Final EIS/OEIS available on the project website at <https://www.nepa.navy.mil/Current-Projects/At-Sea-Ranges/Hawaii-California-Training-and-Testing-EIS-OEIS/Final-EIS-OEIS/>.

## Environmental Effects

The following table summarizes the potential environmental effects on each resource area associated with implementing Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative). Resources and issues considered but not carried forward for further consideration include land use, demographics, and children's health and safety (EO 13045, *Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks*). The Action Proponents' rationale for not including these resources and issues is provided in Section 3.0.3.2 of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS. The discussion below summarizes the effects of the Preferred Alternative on physical resources (air quality, sediments and water quality), biological resources (abiotic habitats, vegetation, invertebrates, fishes, marine mammals, reptiles, birds), and human resources (cultural resources, socioeconomic resources, and public health and safety). Standard operating procedures and mitigation measures that would reduce the potential for impacts on biological resources are provided in the respective sections of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS. The Action Proponents concluded that adverse impacts would be less than significant for all resource areas analyzed in the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS.

Resource	Summary of Effects
Air Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effects of military readiness activities on air quality were analyzed in the context of air pollutants emitted within the U.S. territorial sea (assessed under NEPA) and outside the U.S. territorial sea (assessed under Executive Order 12114, <i>Environmental Effects of Major Federal Actions</i>).</li> <li>• The emission of criteria pollutants resulting from activities in the Study Area would not cause a violation or contribute to an ongoing violation of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.</li> <li>• Emissions from the action alternatives would produce ambient hazardous air pollutant effects that are not expected to cause any discernable increase</li> </ul>

Resource	Summary of Effects
	to human health risks from hazardous air pollutant exposure in areas where public presence is expected.
Sediments and Water Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect sediments and water quality include explosives and explosives byproducts, metals, chemicals, and other materials not associated with explosives.</li> <li>• There would be no reasonably foreseeable adverse effects on sediments and water quality because the chemical and physical changes to sediments and water quality would be below the threshold of harmful effects.</li> </ul>
Vegetation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect vegetation include explosives (in-water) and physical disturbance and strike (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, seafloor devices, and pile driving).</li> <li>• The combined effect of all stressors is considered less than significant because there would be no persistent or large-scale effects on the growth, survival, distribution, or structure of vegetation.</li> </ul>
Invertebrates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect invertebrates include acoustics (sonar and other transducers), explosives (in-water), physical disturbance and strike (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, seafloor devices, pile driving, and cable installation), entanglement (wires and cables, decelerators/parachutes, and nets), and ingestion (military expended materials).</li> <li>• The combined effect of all stressors is considered less than significant due to the limited potential for effects relative to overall population sizes.</li> </ul>
Abiotic Habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect abiotic habitats include explosives (detonated at or near the bottom), physical disturbance and strike (vessels and in-water devices [including amphibious vehicles], military expended materials, seafloor devices, and pile driving).</li> <li>• The combined effect of all stressors is considered less than significant because the explosives and physical disturbance would occur at or near the surface, minimizing effects to the bottom substrate.</li> </ul>
Fishes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect fishes include acoustics (sonar and other transducers, air guns, pile driving, vessel noise, aircraft noise, and weapons noise), explosives (in-air and in-water), energy (in-water electromagnetic devices and high-energy lasers), physical disturbance and strike (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, seafloor</li> </ul>

Resource	Summary of Effects
	<p>devices, and cable installation), entanglement (wires and cables, decelerators/parachutes, and nets), and ingestion (military expended materials).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The combined effect of all stressors is considered less than significant because most exposures to individual stressors are non-lethal and the number of fishes impacted is expected to be small relative to overall population sizes.</li> </ul>
Marine Mammals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect marine mammals include acoustics (sonar and other transducers, air guns, pile driving, vessel noise, aircraft noise, and weapons noise), explosives (in-water, including at or near the water's surface), energy (in-water electromagnetic devices, high-energy lasers, and high-power microwave devices), physical disturbance and strike (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, and seafloor devices), entanglement (decelerators/parachutes, wires and cables), and ingestion (military expended materials).</li> <li>• Effects are not expected to interfere with feeding, reproduction, or other biologically important functions such that the continued viability of the population would be threatened.</li> <li>• The combined effect of all stressors is considered less than significant due to the sparse distribution of activities and the limited potential for injury and mortality.</li> </ul>
Reptiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect reptiles include acoustics (sonar and other transducers, air guns, pile driving, vessel noise, aircraft noise, and weapons noise), explosives (in-air and in-water), energy (in-water electromagnetic devices, high-energy lasers, and high-power microwave devices), physical disturbance and strike (vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials, seafloor devices), entanglement (wires and cables, nets, and decelerators/parachutes), and ingestion (military expended materials).</li> <li>• The combined effect of all stressors is considered less than significant due to the sparse distribution of activities and the limited potential for injury and mortality.</li> </ul>
Birds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect birds include acoustics (sonar and other transducers, air guns, pile driving, vessel noise, aircraft noise, and weapons noise), explosives (in-air and in-water), energy (in-air electromagnetic devices, in-water electromagnetic devices, high-energy</li> </ul>

Resource	Summary of Effects
	<p>lasers, and high-power microwave devices), physical disturbance and strike (vessels and in-water devices, aircraft and aerial targets, military expended materials, seafloor devices, pile driving), and ingestion (military expended materials).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The combined effect of all stressors is considered less than significant because exposure to most stressors would be limited. Although a few individuals may experience long-term effects and potential mortality, the effects of the stressors would generally be limited to short-term behavioral responses.</li> </ul>
Cultural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect cultural resources include explosives and physical disturbance and strike.</li> <li>• The effects of military readiness activities on cultural resources are considered less than significant due to the avoidance of known submerged cultural resources.</li> </ul>
Socioeconomic Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect socioeconomic resources include accessibility (availability of access to ocean and airspace), airborne acoustics (weapons firing, in-air explosions, aircraft, pile driving, and vessel noise), and physical disturbance and strike (aircraft, vessels and in-water devices, military expended materials).</li> <li>• The effects of military readiness activities on socioeconomic resources are considered less than significant because activities are generally conducted far from people. Overlap with non-military personnel would be rare, with minimal to no impact.</li> </ul>
Public Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressors with the potential to affect public health and safety include sonar and in-water explosions, in-air energy (high-energy lasers and microwaves), and physical interactions (aircraft, vessels, underwater devices/targets, munitions, seafloor devices).</li> <li>• There would be no reasonably foreseeable adverse effects on public health and safety because of the application of Standard Operating Procedures on all activities, designed to avoid hazards to military personnel and the general public.</li> </ul>

### Recent Scientific Information

The HCTT Final EIS/OEIS was prepared using the best available science to assess the potential environmental impacts associated with proposed military readiness activities to

be conducted in the Study Area. The lead agencies have reviewed science published since the preparation of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS and have identified no emergent best available science that would significantly change the analyses or conclusions in the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS. Since the release of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS, the Navy revised the technical report *Criteria and Thresholds for U.S. Navy Acoustic and Explosive Effects Analysis (Phase 4)* available on the project website. The revisions clarify certain data used in the analysis but do not change the criteria and thresholds applied in the acoustic impact analysis.

### **Agency Consultation and Coordination**

NMFS served as a cooperating agency throughout the EIS/OEIS process because of its expertise and regulatory authority over certain marine resources. Additionally, NMFS has adopted the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS as its NEPA documentation in support of its rule-making process under the MMPA. The Action Proponents also consulted and coordinated with other federal and state agencies, including the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), State Historic Preservation Officers, and Coastal Zone Management Act agencies within the HCTT Study Area concurrently with development of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS. A summary of the results from each consultation and coordination process is included below. See Appendix J of the Final EIS/OEIS for copies of the agency correspondence.

- **MMPA.** The Action Proponents submitted an application for 7-year incidental take authorizations to NMFS for stressors associated with certain training, testing, and range modernization activities as described under the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 1), including the use of sonar and other transducers, air guns, explosives, pile driving and vibratory extraction, land-based missile and target launches (including artillery), and vessel movement. NMFS expects to issue a Final Rule on November 25, 2025, and LOAs for DON's proposed training and testing activities, U.S. Coast Guard activities, and U.S. Army activities by December 19, 2025.
- **Endangered Species Act (ESA) (NMFS).** The Action Proponents requested initiation of formal consultation with NMFS on 36 ESA-listed species and 8 designated critical habitats, as well as conferenced on one proposed species. NMFS issued their Biological and Conference Opinion dated October 17, 2025, concluding that any adverse effects to ESA-listed species are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species, and that military readiness activities are not likely to adversely affect proposed or designated critical habitat. In addition to the Biological Opinion, NMFS issued an Incidental Take Statement. This Incidental Take Statement was coordinated by NMFS with the issuance of LOAs the Navy received for the incidental take of marine mammals pursuant to Section 101(a) (5) of the MMPA. The Incidental Take Statement exempts Navy actions as described in the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS from the prohibitions set forth in Section 9 of the ESA.

- **ESA (USFWS).** The Action Proponents requested informal consultation with the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office and Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office and received concurrence that military readiness activities may affect but are not likely to adversely affect seven ESA-listed species.
- **Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.** Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) assessments were submitted to NMFS Pacific Island and West Coast Region offices to initiate EFH consultation for potential adverse effects to essential fish habitat. During consultation, NMFS provided conservation recommendations to avoid, minimize, or offset impacts to essential fish habitat. The Action Proponents responded to the recommendations, completing consultation.
- **National Marine Sanctuaries Act.** The Action Proponents and NMFS submitted a Sanctuary Resource Statement to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) initiating consultation on military readiness activities that are likely to injure sanctuary resources that reside within the designated Channel Islands, Chumash Heritage, Cordell Bank, Greater Farallones, Monterey Bay, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale, and Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuaries and the proposed Pacific Islands Heritage National Marine Sanctuary to sound and other environmental stressors associated with training and testing activities. In addition, NMFS is required to consult on its associated proposal to issue incidental take authorizations under MMPA to the Action Proponents for takes on marine mammals within the national marine sanctuaries, incidental to HCTT activities. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries reviewed the Sanctuary Resource Statement and provided recommended alternatives to minimize injury and protect sanctuary resources. The Action Proponents and NMFS responded to those recommendations, concluding consultation.
- **Coastal Zone Management Act.** The Action Proponents submitted consistency determinations, including proposed activities that may have reasonably foreseeable effects on coastal uses or resources, to the Hawaii Office of Planning and Sustainable Development and California Coastal Commission (CCC). The Hawaii Office of Planning and Sustainable Development responded with a conditional concurrence. The conditions were part of the Proposed Action's Standard Operating Procedures and mitigation measures as described in the consistency determination and EIS/OEIS. For California, the CCC objected to the Action Proponents' consistency determination based on its determination that the activities as proposed were not fully consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the marine resource protection policy (Section 30230) of the California Coastal Act, which is one of the enforceable policies of the California Coastal Management Program (CCMP). In accordance with 15 Code of Federal Regulations section 930.43(e), the Action Proponents proceeded over the CCC's objection based on the Action Proponents' determinations that proposed activities are fully consistent with

the applicable enforceable policies of the CCMP. The Action Proponents' notification to proceed over the CCC's objection included a detailed rationale for each of the additional mitigation measures that the CCC was requiring for a consistency determination, describing why each measure was either not practical to implement or was not necessary for consistency with the CCMP.

- **National Historic Preservation Act.** Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Action Proponents engaged California and Hawaii stakeholders in separate consultations. For California, the Action Proponents consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office. The Action Proponents determined that the proposed HCTT undertaking would result in a finding of No Historic Properties Affected. For Hawaii, the Action Proponents also consulted with representatives from the State Historic Preservation Division, the National Park Service, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Native Hawaiian Organizations, and other interested parties. The Action Proponents determined No Historic Properties Affected by the proposed military readiness activities in the Hawaii Range Complex. Because no response was received from either office within 30 days, DON's responsibilities under Section 106 were fulfilled, 36 Code of Federal Regulations 800.4(d)(1)(i).

## **Mitigation Measures**

The Action Proponents worked collaboratively with the appropriate regulatory agencies through the consultation and permitting processes to develop and finalize the mitigation measures, which are actions taken to completely avoid, partially reduce, or minimize the potential for a stressor to impact a resource. Additionally, the Action Proponents considered mitigation measures proposed during the public participation process. These final measures are designed to be practicable to implement in accordance with the purpose and need for the Proposed Action, and implemented under either action alternative. Through this process, the Action Proponents agreed to adopt several additional mitigation measures suggested by the regulators, beyond those identified in the 2018 Phase III Final EIS/OEIS. Chapter 5 of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS presents full descriptions of the activity-based and geographic mitigation requirements, descriptions of the development and assessment processes, and discussions of measures considered but eliminated.

The Action Proponents analyzed potential mitigation measures individually and then collectively as a mitigation package to determine if mitigation would meet the appropriate balance between being environmentally beneficial and practical to implement. Each warfare community (aviation, surface, submarine, and expeditionary) conducted a comprehensive assessment to determine how and to what degree each individual measure and the iterative and cumulative impact of all potential measures would be compatible with planning, scheduling, and conducting military readiness activities under the Proposed Action. Through the mitigation development and assessment processes, the Action Proponents are committing to the maximum level of mitigation that is both beneficial and practical to implement under the Proposed Action. The Action Proponents' mitigation measures are organized into two categories, as described below.

- **Activity-Based Mitigation.** Activity-based mitigation was referred to as “Procedural Mitigation” in the 2018 HSTT and 2022 PMSR EIS/OEISs. Activity-based mitigations are fundamentally consistent across stressors and are employed throughout the Study Area; however, there are activity-specific variations to account for differences in platform configurations, event characteristics, and stressor types. Activity-based mitigations are designed to limit the potential for activities to be conducted when marine mammals and sea turtles are nearby. Section 5.6 of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS provides more information on activity-based mitigation.
- **Geographic Mitigation.** Designated portions of the HCTT Study Area where the Action Proponents will implement geographic mitigation for physical habitats, marine species habitats, or cultural resources are referred to as “mitigation areas.” In each geographic mitigation area, the lead agencies have agreed to activity limits, mitigation procedures, or special reporting requirements. Mitigation areas pertain to a stressor or mitigation type such as acoustic stressors, explosives, physical disturbance and strike stressors, or special reporting requirements. Section 5.7 and Appendix K of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS provides more information on geographic mitigation.

### **Monitoring and Adaptive Management**

The Navy maintains a scientific research and monitoring program for protected marine species and works collaboratively with NMFS to determine where monitoring efforts should be focused to comply with the requirements outlined in the HCTT permits and consultations. Through the Navy’s environmental offices and programs, U.S. Navy Marine Species Monitoring Program, Living Marine Resources Program, and Office of Naval Research, the Navy has sponsored research and monitoring for more than 30 years to improve the understanding of environmental effects from military readiness activities.

The Navy will continue submitting marine species monitoring reports, annual training and testing activity reports, and incident reports, as detailed in Chapter 5 of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS, to track compliance with MMPA and ESA authorizations. In its annual training and testing activity reports, the Navy will describe the level of training and testing conducted during the reporting period (i.e., the location and total hours and counts of active sonar hours and in-water and surface explosives used). For major training exercises, the reports will include records of individual marine mammal sightings when mitigation was implemented during the events. If they occur, the Navy will report incidents involving biological and cultural resources, such as strikes of protected species, sightings of injured or dead marine mammals and sea turtles, or impacts to submerged historic properties.

The Navy will continue to host marine species monitoring technical review meetings with NMFS, to include researchers and the Marine Mammal Commission. Additionally, Adaptive Management meetings will continue to be held with NMFS and the Marine Mammal Commission as a systematic approach to help account for advancements in science and

technology made after issuance of MMPA Regulations and LOAs. Through Adaptive Management, decisions, policies, or actions can be adjusted as the science and outcomes from management actions become better understood over time.

### **Responses to Comments Received on the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS**

Six comment letters/emails were received during the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS 30-day wait period.

The City Manager of Pacific Grove, California, requested clarification on sonar use in the vicinity of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary. The DON responded by email, providing the requested clarification, resulting in no changes to the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS.

A member of the public submitted a letter noting the distinction between Native Americans and Pacific Islanders, resulting in no changes to the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 9 submitted a letter confirming their review of the responses to their comments and the changes from the HCTT Draft EIS/OEIS. EPA acknowledged in the letter and its accompanying email, clarifications provided by the DON during a October 23, 2025, meeting with EPA. Both figure changes made to the Final EIS/OEIS described above in Corrections Subsequent to the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS Publication were a result of this meeting with EPA. No other changes in the document were required.

The Hawaii Department of Aquatic Resources (DAR) submitted comments on several issues. None of the comments resulted in changes to the Final EIS/OEIS.

- Regarding the request for additional information on mortalities of marine mammals, fish, and invertebrates, the Navy reports any injured or dead marine mammals and sea turtles to NMFS, who maintains those records. While individual fish could be killed or injured during underwater explosives activities, records of mortalities or injuries of fish are not kept. Based on the analysis included in the EIS/OEIS and DON's Biological Assessment, NMFS concurred with DON that the Proposed Action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any ESA-listed fish species.
- In response to DAR's request for aquatic invasive species preventative measures, DON's commitment to these measures were included in DON's response letter of July 3, 2025, to Hawaii's Office of Planning and Sustainable Development, found on p. J-113 in Appendix J of the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS. In addition, DON practices Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) as described in Table 3.0-27 in the EIS/OEIS, including SOPs that prevent or minimize the risk of invasive species introductions and spread from Navy activities.
- Regarding DAR's request for avoidance of contact/impact to coral during proposed activities, please see Section 5.7.1 and Section 5.7.2 in the Final EIS/OEIS. One comment requested consultation and best management practices to be developed to protect turtle nesting habitats. NMFS/USFWS is consulted for all activities that have the potential to impact ESA-species, and DON implements conservation measures to protect

the species. Additionally, Sikes Act requires annual meetings with NMFS, USFWS, and State Fish and Wildlife Agencies to review the conservation measures the military implements to protect natural resources. Each installation's Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan contains additional information.

The Windward Coalition for Community Concerns submitted comments primarily requesting clarifications on issues that were explained in the Final EIS/OEIS. Most of the comments were similar to comments received on the Draft EIS/OEIS. Regarding the question of explosives locations, both the Draft EIS/OEIS and the Final EIS/OEIS have been consistent that no explosives are proposed for use in Kaneohe Bay. None of the comments resulted in changes to the Final EIS/OEIS.

The State of Hawaii, Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) submitted comments emphasizing previous concerns they raised in their Draft EIS/OEIS comments. One such concern was impacts the proposed activities would have on Papahānaumokuākea, a potential Traditional Cultural Place (TCP), possibly eligible for registration within the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The HCTT Final EIS/OEIS explained that during consultation under Section 106 of NHPA for the Papahānaumokuākea National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS) designation, NOAA ONMS considered the site as potentially eligible as a TCP within NRHP. The DON acknowledges the potential eligibility and cultural importance of Papahānaumokuākea to the Hawaiian people and determined that the proposed actions do not have the potential to affect historic properties. DON also determined the proposed activities would not impact current and future cultural practices as characterized in Mai Ka Pō Mai, a Native Hawaiian Guidance Document for the Management of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and as it relates to both the Sanctuary Management Plan (2025) and the Monument Management Plan (2008).

The OHA letter also reiterated their concern regarding the Navy's approach to assessing vessel strikes and expended materials with respect to impacts to marine species. The Navy thoroughly analyzed effects of the military's specific activities on marine species to include whales under NEPA using the best available science and NMFS did consider civilian vessel strike information as applicable in analysis for MMPA incidental take authorization.

**C. CONCLUSION:** After careful consideration of the purpose and need for the Proposed Action, the analysis of potential environmental effects in the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS, relevant strategic and operational policies and guidance, proposed mitigation measures, and comments received from federal and state agencies, Native Hawaiian organizations, Native American tribes, non-governmental organizations, and members of the public, DON has decided to proceed with implementation of the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 1. Alternative 1 best meets the current and future training and testing needs of the lead agencies to meet their respective national defense missions as prescribed by Congress. Under Alternative 1, the lead agencies analyzed a representative year of training and testing to account for fluctuations in tempo, training cycles, testing programs, deployment schedules, and the use of synthetic training opportunities. With

implementation of the mitigation measures identified in the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS and associated regulatory documents developed in consultations with NMFS, the USFWS, and Hawaii and California state agencies, and adherence to management plans and monitoring requirements described herein and in the HCTT Final EIS/OEIS, environmental impacts associated with implementing Alternative 1 will be minimized. In addition, DON assessed the effects of Alternative 1 in accordance with Executive Order 12114 and concluded that there would be no significant harm to the environment in areas outside the United States, its territories, and possessions.

11/26/2025

Date



Elmer L. Roman  
Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary  
of the Navy  
(Energy, Installations and Environment)