

Stranding Response Plan for the Mariana Islands Training and Testing Study Area **September 2016**

Strandings

Strandings, as defined by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), have occurred throughout recorded history, although U.S. stranding programs have only been keeping consistent records in some cases as long as the last three decades but more commonly the last decade. Strandings may result from many different causes, including, for example, infectious agents, biotoxins, starvation, fishery interaction, ship strike, unusual oceanographic or weather events, sound exposure, or combinations of these stressors sustained concurrently or in series. In many cases, a cause of stranding or death cannot be unequivocally determined for a number of reasons. Approximately five marine mammal strandings in the Mediterranean Sea, Caribbean Sea, and Eastern Atlantic Ocean and involving beaked whale species have been associated with active sonar however, scientific uncertainty remains regarding the exact combination of behavioral and physiological responses that link active sonar exposure to strandings (though several mechanisms have been theorized). Available evidence suggests that in some cases it may be the presence of additional specific environmental or physical conditions working in confluence with the exposure of marine mammals to active sonar that can potentially result in a stranding. The National Marine Mammal Stranding Network (created under the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program Act (MMHSRPA)) consists of over 100 organizations partnered with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to investigate marine mammal strandings in U.S. waters. Among other things, the plan discussed below is intended to contribute to the better understanding of why strandings occur.

Introduction to the Stranding Plan

Pursuant to 50 CFR Section 218.94, the plan outlined below will be included by reference and summarized in the Mariana Islands Training and Testing (MITT) final rule and included as part of (attached to) the Navy's MMPA Letter of Authorization (LOA). The LOA indicates the conditions under which the Navy is authorized to take marine mammals pursuant to Navy training activities, involving Navy sonar or explosive detonations conducted in the waters of the MITT Study Area. This Stranding Response Plan is specifically intended to outline the applicable requirements the authorization is conditioned upon in the event that a marine mammal stranding is reported in the MITT Study Area during a *major training exercise* (MTE) (see glossary below). As mentioned above, NMFS considers all plausible causes within the course of a stranding investigation and this plan in no way presumes that any strandings are related to, or caused by, Navy training activities, absent a determination made in a Phase 2 Investigation as outlined in Paragraph 7 of this plan, indicating that active sonar or explosive detonations in the MITT Study Area were a cause of and/or contributed to the stranding. This plan is designed to address the following three issues:

- **Mitigation** – When marine mammals are in a situation that can be defined as a *stranding* (see glossary below), they are experiencing physiological stress. When animals are stranded, and alive, NMFS believes that exposing these compromised animals to additional known stressors would likely exacerbate the animal's distress and could potentially cause its death.

Regardless of the factor(s) that may have initially contributed to the stranding, it is NMFS' goal to avoid exposing these animals to further stressors. Therefore, when live stranded cetaceans are in the water and engaged in what is classified as an *Uncommon Stranding Event* (USE) (see glossary below), the shutdown component of this plan is intended to minimize the exposure of those animals to Navy sonar and explosive detonations, regardless of whether or not these activities may have initially played a role in the event.

- **Monitoring** – This plan will enhance the understanding of how Navy sonar, other active acoustic sources and explosive detonations (as well as other environmental conditions) may, or may not, be associated with marine mammal injury or strandings. Additionally, information gained from the investigations associated with this plan may be used in the adaptive management of mitigation or monitoring measures in subsequent LOAs, if appropriate. We note that detections of stranded marine mammals in the MITT Study Area are typically accomplished using passive surveillance (*i.e.* individuals conducting their normal activities happen to see an animal and report it to the stranding network). If surveys or expanded active detection efforts are specifically used during Navy MTEs, we expect that the number of strandings detected during training may be higher relative to other times because of the increased targeted effort (again, this does not presume that the detected strandings are related to, or caused, by Naval activities).
- **Compliance** – The information gathered pursuant to this protocol will inform NMFS' decisions regarding compliance with Sections 101(a) (5) (B and C) of the MMPA.

In addition to outlining the necessary procedural steps for the Navy to undertake in the event of a USE during an MTE (as required by the LOA), this document describes NMFS' planned participation in stranding responses in the MITT Study Area, as NMFS' response relates specifically to the Navy requirements described here. The NMFS Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program (MMHSRP) and the participating Pacific Islands Regional Stranding Networks have specific responsibilities regarding marine mammal strandings and unusual marine mammal mortality events (UMEs) pursuant to Title IV of the MMPA and, in some cases, their Stranding Agreements (under Section 112c of the MMPA). This document does not serve to replace or preclude any of the procedures currently in place for NMFS' response to UMEs or to any normal operations of the stranding network. NMFS will pursue any activities to fulfill obligations relative to UMEs any time that a trigger is reached as determined by the Working Group on Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Events. This document highlights (or adds to) applicable existing (and in development) protocols and procedures to be used with the specific circumstances and specific subset of strandings addressed here, namely a USE in the MITT Study Area during the MTE. This document has been reviewed and approved by the NMFS staff responsible for conducting and overseeing the referenced activities and this plan will be implemented by NMFS to the degree that resources are available and logistics are feasible.

Of important note, in the Mariana Islands, available stranding response staff and resources are exceedingly limited. This plan sets forth an ideal NMFS response, however, due to the limited resources it will not always be possible for NMFS to proceed with all of the indicated objectives.

General Voluntary Stranding Notification Request

If, at any time or place within the MITT Study Area, Navy personnel find a *stranded marine mammal* (see glossary below) either on the shore, near shore, or floating at sea, NMFS requests the Navy contact NMFS immediately (or as soon as operational security considerations allow) as described in the MITT Stranding Communication Protocol. NMFS requests the Navy to voluntarily provide NMFS with species or description of animal(s), the condition of the animal (including carcass condition if the animal is dead – see glossary for condition codes), location, time of first discovery, observed behaviors (if alive), and photo or video (if available).

Stranding Notification during Training and Testing Provisions

If, at any time or place within the MITT Study Area shortly after (within 24 hours), and in the vicinity of (within 5 nmi) training or testing with mid- or high-frequency active sonar (MFAS or HFAS) or underwater explosive detonations, Navy personnel find a stranded marine mammal either on the shore, near shore, or floating at sea, Navy shall contact NMFS immediately (or as soon as operational security considerations allow) as described in the MITT Stranding Communication Protocol. NMFS requests the Navy provide NMFS with species or description of animal(s), the condition of the animal (including carcass condition if the animal is dead – see glossary for condition codes), location, time of first discovery, observed behaviors (if alive), and photo or video (if available).

If any marine mammal is observed either dead, injured or exhibiting signs of distress after an explosive detonation or use of MFAS or HFAS, Navy shall report to NMFS the date and time of the sighting, location (lat/long) of the animal(s), species identification (if known) or a description of the animal(s), and description of the animal's status (e.g. dead, injured but alive, injured and moving, unknown, etc.). NMFS further requests that the Navy take any feasible actions to recover any carcasses.

Navy Ship Strike Notification Provision

In addition, in the event of a ship strike by any Navy vessel, at any time or place, the Navy shall do the following:

- Navy immediately report to NMFS the species identification (if known), location (lat/long) of the animal (or the strike if the animal has disappeared), and whether the animal is alive or dead (or unknown)
- as soon as feasible report to NMFS, the size and length of animal, vessel class/type, length, speed, heading and operational status
- provide NMFS a photo or video, if possible.

Operational Response Plan

This section describes the specific actions the Navy must take in order to comply with the MITT LOA if a USE is reported to the Navy in the MITT Study Area coincident to, or within 72 hours of, an MTE. This Stranding Response Plan will include an associated MITT Stranding Communication Protocol, which will indicate, among other things, the specific individuals (NMFS Office of Protected Resources - HQ senior administrators) authorized to advise the Navy

that certain actions are prescribed by the Stranding Response Plan. A glossary is included at the end of this document. Words included in the glossary are italicized in this section the first time they are used.

1. Initial Stranding Response - The NMFS regional stranding network will respond to reports of stranded marine mammals in areas where there is geographic coverage by the stranding network, when feasible. All cetaceans that are responded to will receive examination appropriate to the condition code of the animal and the feasibility of the logistics. If a *qualified* individual determines that the stranding is a *USE*, NMFS staff (or other qualified individual) will initiate a *Phase 1 Investigation*. NMFS will immediately contact appropriate NMFS and Navy personnel (pursuant to the MITT Stranding Communication Protocol). NMFS and Navy will maintain a dialogue, as needed, regarding the identification of the *USE* and the potential need to implement shutdown procedures .

2. Shutdown Procedures – Shutdown procedures are not related to the investigation of the cause of the stranding and their implementation is in no way intended to imply that Navy sonar is the cause of the stranding. Rather, as noted above, shutdown procedures are intended to protect cetaceans *exhibiting indicators of distress* and involved in a *USE* by minimizing their exposure to possible additional stressors (Navy sonar or explosive detonations), regardless of the factors that initially contributed to the *USE*. Only individuals specifically identified in the MITT Stranding Communication Protocol (NMFS Protected Resources – HQ senior administrators) will be authorized to advise the Navy of the need to implement shutdown procedures (pursuant to the Stranding Response Plan/LOA).

a) If live (*Condition Code 1*) or freshly dead (*Condition Code 2*) cetaceans are involved in the *USE*, the Navy will implement the following procedures:

- If live cetaceans involved in the *USE* are in the water (*i.e.*, could be exposed to sonar), NMFS will advise the Navy of the need to implement shutdown procedures defined in the glossary (pursuant to the Stranding Response Plan/LOA).
- NMFS will coordinate internally, with the Navy, and with other agencies and entities with the intent of obtaining aerial survey arrangements. If an aircraft is available, a survey will be conducted within 14 miles (on the shore and in the water near the coast) of the stranding to look for additional animals that meet the *USE* criteria. NMFS will request that the Navy assist with aerial surveys, as resources are available.
 - If no additional animals that meet the *USE* criteria are found (including if no aircraft were available to conduct a survey), and the originally detected animals are not in the water, and will not be put back in the water for rehabilitation or release purposes, or are dead, NMFS will advise the Navy that shutdown procedures need not be implemented at any additional locations.

- If additional cetacean(s) meeting the USE criteria are detected by surveys, the shutdown procedures will be followed for the newly detected animal(s) beginning at 2(a) above.
 - If a qualified individual determines that it is appropriate to put live animals that were initially on the beach back in the water for rehabilitation or release purposes, NMFS will advise the Navy of the need to implement shutdown procedures pursuant to the Stranding Response Plan/LOA.
- b) If the Navy finds an injured (or entangled) or dead cetacean floating at sea during an MTE, the Navy shall notify NMFS (pursuant to MITT Stranding Communication Protocol) immediately or as soon as operational security considerations allow. The Navy should provide NMFS with the information outlined in the general notification provision above, as available. Based on the information provided, NMFS will determine and advise if a modified shutdown (i.e. a shutdown other than those described here, based on specific information available at the time) is appropriate on a case-by-case basis.
- c) In the event, following a USE, that: a) qualified individuals are attempting to herd animals back out to the open ocean and animals are not willing to leave, or b) animals are seen repeatedly heading for the open ocean but turning back to shore, NMFS and the Navy will coordinate (including an investigation of other potential anthropogenic stressors in the area) to determine if the proximity of Navy sonar operations or explosive detonations, though farther than 14 nm from the distressed animal(s), is likely decreasing the likelihood that the animals return to the open water. If so, NMFS and the Navy will further coordinate to determine what measures are necessary to further minimize that likelihood and implement those measures as appropriate. Navy and NMFS will maintain a dialogue regarding the plan to return the animal(s) to the water.
- d) If no live (Condition Code 1) or freshly dead (Condition Code 2) cetaceans are involved in the USE, NMFS will advise the Navy that shutdown procedures need not be implemented. Aerial surveys will be conducted if feasible (see second bullet under a, above).

3. Restart Procedures

- If at any time, the subject(s) of the USE die or are euthanized, NMFS will immediately advise the Navy that the shutdown around that animal(s)' location is no longer needed,
- Shutdown procedures will remain in effect until NMFS determines, and advises the Navy, that all live animals involved in the USE have left the area (either of their own volition or herded). Leading up to restart, NMFS will coordinate internally, with the Navy, and with other federal and state agencies with the intent of securing arrangements to track the movement of the animals (via aircraft, vessel, tags, etc.) following the dispersal of the USE. If the Navy has restarted operations in the vicinity of the animals, NMFS and the Navy will further coordinate to determine (based on location and behavior of tracked animals and location/nature of Navy activities) if the proximity of Navy sonar

operations is likely increasing the likelihood that the animals re-strand. If so, NMFS and the Navy will further coordinate to determine what measures are necessary to minimize that likelihood and implement those measures as appropriate.

4. Information - Within 72 hours of the notification of the USE the Navy will inform NMFS where and when they were operating Navy sonar or conducting explosive detonations (within 80 nm and 72 hours prior to the event). Within 7 days of the completion of any MTEs that were being conducted within 80 nm or 72 hours prior to the event, the Navy will further provide available information to NMFS (per the MITT Stranding Communication Protocol) regarding the number and types of acoustic/explosive sources, direction and speed of units using Mid-frequency sonar, and marine mammal sightings information associated with those training activities. Information not initially available regarding the 80 nm, 72 hours, period prior to the event will be provided as soon as it becomes available. The Navy will provide NMFS investigative teams with additional relevant unclassified information as requested (or classified information to designated NMFS staff), if available.

5. Phase 1 Investigation – Because of the variability of available resources across stranding network agencies in the Pacific Islands region, NMFS cannot currently commit, in advance, to the specific degree of investigation that will be conducted for any given stranding. Given the current fiscal environment and the reduction in federal funding, response resources are limited in some geographic regions. The ideal responses (Phase 1 and 2 Investigations) are described below (here and in # 7), and NMFS will respond in the indicated manner when resources are available and it is logistically feasible.

Within 4 weeks of a USE (when feasible), NMFS will conduct and complete the Phase 1 Investigation (list of procedures typically included in Phase 1 Investigation are included in the Glossary of this document, and a description of actual procedures are contained in the Standard Operating Procedures) for all USEs that occur in the MITT Study Area coincident with MTEs. Results from the Phase 1 Investigation will be categorized in one of the two ways discussed below and trigger the indicated action:

- If the results of the Phase 1 Investigation indicate that the USE was likely caused by something (such as entanglement or ship strike) other than Navy sonar or explosive detonations authorized by the Navy's LOA, then the USE investigation will be considered complete as related to the MMPA authorization.
- If NMFS cannot conclusively determine that the stranding was likely caused by something other than Navy sonar or explosive detonations authorized by the Navy LOA, then a Phase 2 Investigation will be conducted by qualified individuals, under the direction of NMFS staff, and an individual case report will be prepared for each animal (list of procedures typically included in Phase 2 investigation are included in the Glossary of this document).

6. Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) - The Navy and NMFS developed a National MOU (signed November 2011 and extended in May 2016) that allows the Navy to assist NMFS with the Phase 1 and 2 Investigations of USEs. Pursuant to this MOU, Navy and NMFS developed a

Regional Stranding Investigation Assistance Plan (RSIAP) that identifies regional assets, equipment, and locations or services that Navy may be able to provide NMFS in support of USE response and investigations (signed July 2013). The Navy may assist NMFS with the investigations by providing one or more of the in-kind services outlined in the RSIAP, when available and logistically feasible and when they do not negatively affect Navy operational or installation commitments.

7. Phase 2 Investigation – Please see # 5, above. Results from the Phase 2 Investigation will be categorized in one of the three ways discussed below and trigger the indicated action:

- If the results indicate that the USE was likely caused by something other than Navy sonar or explosive detonations authorized by the Navy’s LOA (such as entanglement or blunt force trauma), then the USE investigation will be considered complete as related to the MMPA authorization.
- If the results are inconclusive (*i.e.* NMFS can neither conclude that the USE was likely caused by something other than acoustic trauma nor conclude that there is a high likelihood that exposure to Navy sonar or explosive detonations were a cause of the USE), which is historically the most common result, then the USE investigation will be considered complete as related to the MMPA authorization.
- If the results of a comprehensive and detailed scientific investigation into all possible causes of the stranding event indicate that there is a high likelihood that Navy sonar or explosive detonations was a cause of the USE, one of the following will occur:
 - If the total mortalities determined to be caused by Navy sonar or explosive detonation do not exceed the number analyzed for the 5-yr period in the regulations, they will be recorded (to add on to if there is another stranding) and NMFS will take no further action beyond that indicated in 8, below.
 - If the total mortalities determined to be caused by Navy sonar or explosive detonations exceed the number analyzed for the five year period in the regulations, NMFS will begin the process of determining whether or not modification, suspension or withdrawal of the authorization is appropriate.

The Navy will be provided at least ten working days to review and provide comments on NMFS’ summary and characterization of the factors involved in the USE. NMFS will consider the Navy’s comments prior to finalizing any conclusions and/or deciding to take any action involving any take authorization.

8. USE Response Debrief and Evaluation – Within two months after a USE, NMFS and Navy staff will meet to discuss the implementation of the USE response and recommend modifications or clarifications to improve the Stranding Response Plan. These recommendations will feed into the adaptive management strategy discussed below.

9. Adaptive Management - The regulations under which the Navy's LOA (and this Stranding Response Plan) are issued will contain an adaptive management component. This gives NMFS the ability to consider the results of the previous years' monitoring, research, and/or the results of stranding investigations when prescribing mitigation or monitoring requirements in subsequent years. In the event that NMFS concludes that there is a high likelihood that Navy sonar or explosive detonations were a cause of a USE, NMFS will review the analysis of the environmental and operational circumstances surrounding the USE. In subsequent LOAs, based on this review and through the adaptive management component of the regulations, NMFS may require the mitigation measures or Stranding Response Plan be modified or supplemented if the new data suggest that modifications would either have a reasonable likelihood of reducing the chance of future USEs resulting from a similar confluence of events or would increase the effectiveness of the stranding investigations. Further, based on this review and the adaptive management component of the regulations, NMFS may modify or add to the existing monitoring requirements if the data suggest that the addition of a particular measure would likely fill a specifically important data or management gap. Additionally, the USE Debrief and Evaluation discussed above (in combination with adaptive management) will allow NMFS and the Navy to further refine the Stranding Response Plan for maximum effectiveness.

Communication

Effective communication is critical to the successful implementation of this Stranding Response Plan. Very specific protocols for communication, including identification of the Navy personnel authorized to implement a shutdown and the NMFS personnel authorized to advise the Navy of the need to implement shutdown procedures (NMFS Protected Resources HQ – senior administrators) and the associated phone trees, etc. (to be included in the document entitled “MITT Stranding Communication Protocols”) will be updated yearly (or more frequently, as appropriate).

The Stranding Response Plan is dependent upon advance notice to NMFS (HQ and Pacific Island Regional Office) of the planned upcoming MTE. The MITT Stranding Response Communication Plan outlines the exact procedure for the Navy to notify the Pacific Islands Regional Office 72 hours prior to the start of the MTEs. NMFS will keep information about planned MTE's in a confidential manner and will transmit information to NMFS personnel responding to USE's to the minimum necessary to accomplish the NMFS mission under this plan.

Glossary:

Condition Code – a method for evaluating the stage of decomposition of a stranded animal or carcass. Codes range from live animals (Code 1) to skeletal remains (Code 5) (modified from Marine Mammals Ashore: A Field Guide for Strandings by J.R. Geraci and V.J. Lounsbury).

- Code 1: Live animals
- Code 2: Freshly dead. The carcass is in good condition (fresh/edible), as if it has just died.
- Code 3a: The carcass is in fair condition, with only slight decomposition or scavenger damage. There may be slight bloating and a minimal smell.

- Code 3b: The carcass is moderately decomposed with obvious bloating, some sunburn (blackening and cracking of the skin), sloughing or missing skin, and scavenger damage.
- Code 4: The carcass is in an advanced state of decomposition with a strong odor, skin may be entirely missing, and there is likely extensive scavenger damage.
- Code 5: Mummified or skeletal remains. Skin may be draped over skeletal remains and any remaining tissues are desiccated.

Major training exercise (MTE) – An MTE, within the context of this document, means:

- Joint Expeditionary Exercise – 1 event annually, ten days per event
- Joint Multi-strike Group Exercise (Valiant Shield) – 1 event annually, ten days per event

Exhibiting Indicators of Distress – Animals exhibiting an uncommon combination of behavioral and physiological indicators typically associated with distressed or stranded animals. This situation would be identified by a qualified individual and typically includes, but is not limited to, some combination of the following characteristics:

- Marine mammals continually circling or moving haphazardly in a tightly packed group – with or without a member occasionally breaking away and swimming towards the beach.
- Abnormal respirations including increased or decreased rate or volume of breathing, abnormal content or odor
- Presence of an individual or group of a species that has not historically been seen in a particular habitat, for example a pelagic species in shallow bay when historic records indicate that it is a rare event.
- Abnormal behavior for that species, such as abnormal surfacing or swimming pattern, listing, and abnormal appearance

Phase 1 Investigation – A Phase 1 Investigation, for the purposes of this document, will typically include the following tests and procedures:

- Demographics of the stranding
- Environmental parameters
- Behavioral assessment of group
- Live animal
 - physical examination
 - blood work
 - diagnostics such as AEP or ultrasound
 - assessment or treatment
- Dead animal
 - External examination and external human interaction evaluation
 - Morphometrics
 - Photographs
 - Diagnostic imaging including CT/MRI scans or ultrasound as appropriate and feasible
 - Necropsy with internal examination, descriptions, photographs and sample collection

Note that several factors will dictate whether all or a subset of these procedures is conducted, including:

- The condition of a carcass
- For live cetaceans - the time it would take necessary personnel and equipment to arrive at the site
- Availability (both in time and space) of resources and feasibility of implementation

Phase 2 Investigation – A Phase 2 Investigation, for the purposes of this document, will typically include the following tests and procedures:

- Analyses and review of diagnostic imaging obtained in Phase I
- Histopathology
- Special stains
- Ancillary diagnostics (e.g., PCR for infections, gas emboli)
- CT of ears
- Additional diagnostic imaging as needed
- Histology of ears
- Case summaries
- Review

Note that several factors will dictate whether all or a subset of these procedures is conducted, including:

- The condition of a carcass
- Logistics for transport
- Available resources
- Validated diagnostic techniques

Qualified – NMFS has a rigorous set of standards and training in place to qualify stranding responders, however, since the stranding network is a largely volunteer network, there is significant variability from one area to another. Not all qualified individuals (veterinarians, technicians, etc.) will be NMFS employees. However, only specific individuals (NMFS Protected Resources, HQ – senior administrators) indicated in the MITT Stranding Communication Protocol will be empowered to advise the Navy of the need to implement shutdown procedures.

Stranding – an event in the wild in which:

- (a) a marine mammal is dead and is –
 - (i) on the beach or shore of the United States; or
 - (ii) in waters under the jurisdiction of the United States (including any navigable waters); or
- (b) a marine mammal is alive and is –
 - (i) on a beach or shore of the United States and unable to return to the water;
 - (ii) on a beach or shore of the United States and, although able to return to the water, is in apparent need of medical attention; or
 - (iii) in the waters under the jurisdiction of the United States (including navigable waters), but is unable to return to its natural habitat under its own power or without assistance.

Shutdown Procedures – The act of the Navy ceasing operation of sonar or explosive detonations within a designated area for a designated time. The time is designated by the Restart Procedures (# 3, above). The designated area, for the purposes of this document, is an area within 14 nm of any live, in the water animal involved in the USE. This distance (14 nm) is the distance at which sound from the sonar source is anticipated to attenuate to approximately 140-145 dB (SPL). The risk function predicts that less than 1% of the animals exposed to sonar at this level (mysticete or odontocete) would respond in a manner that NMFS considers Level B Harassment. As indicated above in 2(d), if this distance appears too short (i.e., the proximity of sonar use may likely be deterring the animals from returning to the open water), NMFS and the Navy will further coordinate to determine what measures are necessary to further minimize that likelihood and implement those measures as appropriate.

Uncommon Stranding Event (USE) – A stranding event that takes place during an MTE and involves any one of the following:

- Two or more individuals of any cetacean species (not including mother/calf pairs, unless of species of concern listed in next bullet) found dead or live on shore within a two day period and occurring within 30 miles of one another.
- A single individual or mother/calf pair of any of the following marine mammals of concern: beaked whale of any species, *Kogia* sp., Risso’s dolphins, melon-headed whales, pilot whales, humpback whales, sperm whales, blue whales, fin whale or sei whales
- A group of two or more cetaceans of any species exhibiting indicators of distress.

Supplemental Documents in Development

MITT Stranding Communication Protocol – This document includes all of the communication protocols (phone trees, etc.) and associated contact information required for NMFS and the Navy to carry out the actions outlined in this Stranding Response Plan. This will be updated yearly (or more frequently, as appropriate).

Standard Operating Procedures for MITT – This contains protocols for the procedures that are necessary for NMFS staff to implement this Stranding Plan including:

- A protocol for the stranding responders that outlines the actions to take in the event of a USE during MTEs
- Protocols for the investigators that describe in detail the procedures implemented for conducting the Phase One and Phase Two Investigations

Memorandum of Agreement – The National MOU (finalized in November 2011 and extended in May 2016) established a framework whereby the Navy may assist with response and investigations of USEs. Regional Stranding Investigation Assistance Plans (RSIAPs) were developed and are the implementing plans of the National MOU. The RSIAPs identify regional assets, equipment, and locations or services that Navy may be able to provide NMFS in support of USE response and investigations. The RSIAP between the Navy Joint Region Marianas and the NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office was finalized and signed in July 2013.

LOA Stranding Plans in Other Geographic Regions

The frequency and nature of strandings (naturally occurring or otherwise), the nature of military readiness activities, and the NMFS resources and qualified staff available for stranding response, can be highly variable in different geographic regions, and sub-regions within those regions. Measures and procedures developed for and implemented in this Stranding Response Plan may not be appropriate, or even possible, in other geographic regions. As the need arises, NMFS and the Navy will work together to develop appropriate Stranding Response Plans for other geographic regions based on available information and resources. This Stranding Response Plan is not intended to serve as a template for other geographic regions, and, in fact, Stranding Plans for other areas may be significantly different.