Multiklient Invest Newfoundland
Offshore Seismic & Environmental Data Collection Program, 2025–2029

Please note that as the documents are subject to change, these comments serve to highlight areas that the proponent must ensure are addressed in the registration documents. As the documents may undergo revisions, no definitive statements are made regarding its current compliance with these requirements and comments are subject to change, upon submission of the final documents.

The Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture (FFA) comments provided below reflect the comments previous provided to MKI for their withdrawn proposed project (*Newfoundland Offshore Seismic Program, 2024–2028*), as these programs share a similar scope for the seismic program. Additional consideration was made for the new met-ocean data collection component.

20241003-MKI 2025-2029-PD-Gov.tl (Distribution):

The FFA would like to participate in the review of this environmental assessment. However, please update your provincial departments distribution list to include Taylor Sheppard and Samantha Coombs. Additionally, kindly remove Olivia Dennis, as she is no longer with the department. Thank you.

20240919-MKI PD-NL Offshore Seismic and Environmental Data (Project Description):

Section 2.3 Mitigation and Monitoring for Marine Mammals, Sea Turtles and Seabirds

FFA advises that although the proponent states that the airgun array ramp ups will be delayed if a marine mammal or sea turtle is detected within the appropriate safety zone (minimum of 500 m), there is concern that the size of the safe zone may not be sufficient in protecting marine mammals and/or sea turtles from the electromagnetic fields. It should be noted that research on the effects of electromagnetic surveys on the behavior of electrosensitive animals is still very limited.

Section 2.2.6 Seismic Energy Source Parameters

FFA advises that the proponent be aware airguns may have various effects on marine organisms, ranging in severity from short-term physical startle reactions to long-term behavioral changes. It should be noted that research on the effects of airguns is still very limited. While the proponent does state that in one or more years, MKI may optionally use a two-airgun configuration called “Gemini”, which produces higher-quality seismic images than other configurations, implementation of marine vibroseis over airgun surveying is recommended. Research shows that the decreased amount of decibels used for the process of marine vibroseis can reduce the interference with marine organisms in the vicinity.

Section 2.2.7 Seismic Streamers and Ocean Bottom Nodes

FFA advises the proponent to consider that streamer cables, particularly those towed over long distances, may interact with marine mammals and other marine life. Entanglement, displacement, and behavioral disruptions should be assessed. Research on the impacts of towed streamers is still emerging, and caution should be applied, especially in ecologically sensitive areas. The proponent may also want to explore potential noise mitigation measures, such as spacing adjustments, to minimize impacts.

Ocean Bottom Nodes (OBNs) may have localized environmental impacts when deployed on the seafloor. The footprint of each OBN and the deployment/recovery process may disturb benthic ecosystems and species, especially in areas with fragile habitats such as coral, sponges, or other sensitive seabed communities. It is recommended that the proponent conduct pre-survey seabed assessments to avoid or mitigate disturbances to critical habitats. Additionally, consideration should be given to the timing and location of the survey to avoid critical life stages of benthic species.

Section 2.2.8 Floating Lidar Systems

FFA advises the proponent that Floating Lidar Systems (FLS) systems should be strategically placed to avoid busy shipping lanes and areas of high marine traffic to reduce the risk of collision. It is recommended that the proponent monitors the impact of FLS deployment and mooring systems on local marine life. While the FLS buoy is largely stationary, the chain or rope moorings could pose entanglement risks to marine species, particularly large whales and other migratory species. The use of whale-safe mooring designs or other mitigation measures should be explored to reduce the potential for entanglements. Additionally, the proponent should ensure that the deployment and retrieval processes of FLS are conducted in ways that minimize disturbances to sensitive marine ecosystems, particularly in regions of high ecological significance or near known critical habitats for endangered species.

Section 3.0 Environmental Assessment

FFA advises that the proponent be aware that the project/study area for the Controlled Source Electromagnetic Survey overlaps with the Northeast Slope Marine Refuge, as well as additional Significant Benthic Areas for sea pens outside of the Refuge. The Northeast Slope Marine Refuge was created to protect slow-growing, fragile cold-water corals and sponges and is closed to bottom contact fisheries. Sea pens, which are thought to be the dominant species of coral in the area, have slow growth rates meaning that once a colony is destroyed or threatened it takes a considerable amount of time for sea pens to re-establish. Cold-water corals and sponges provide essential habitat for juvenile fish, including those that are commercially valuable.

Section 3.4 Consultations

Consultation section indicates that the proponent will consult with the Fish, Food and Allied Workers (FFAW) to discuss the project. The Newfoundland and Labrador fishing industry is an important ocean stakeholder. To mitigate any potential negative impacts on the marine environment and local fisheries, FFA advises that the proponent consult local fish harvesters, in all the Northwest Atlantic Fishing Organization (NAFO) Divisions within the project/study area, 3K, 3L, 3M, 3N, 30, 3Ps, 4Vn, 4Vs, and 6H, for information regarding fisheries in the area and to notify harvesters of their plans to use said area. Harvesters can be consulted directly, by way of local Small Craft Harbour authorities or through FFAW. Engagement with fish harvesters must continue to be a top priority throughout the lifetime of the project.

The project/study boundary also extends just beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) where NAFO holds jurisdiction over commercial fishing activity in those areas. It is advised that the proponent seek to include data from NAFO on fishing activity that might occur during the summer and fall in the project area that extends just beyond the EEZ. In addition to domestic fishing fleets, there may also be international vessels actively fishing in this area during the timeframe of the project.

20241002-MKI-2025-29-Draft Scoping Document:

Section 5.1. Boundaries

FFA advises that the proponent be aware of the Federal Marine Bioregion (the Newfoundland-Labrador Shelves) within the project/study area. All available ecological information and data (including experiential/traditional knowledge) should be taken into consideration when forming boundaries between biogeographic units. Testing should consider these data sources.

Section 5.2.5 Marine Mammals

FFA advises that the proponent be aware of the Endangered North Atlantic Right Whale (NARW).There have been increased sightings of the endangered NARW, *Eubalaena glacialis*, in Newfoundland and Labrador waters in recent years. The NARW is particularly vulnerable to extinction, being that it is a slow growing species with only approximately 336 animals remaining worldwide. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and Transport Canada have implemented a number of protective measures in an effort to minimize interactions with NARWs. From an economic perspective, Canada is now required to demonstrate stringent efforts to protect marine mammals to meet the United States (U.S) Import Provisions under the Marine Mammal Protection Act so that Canada may continue to export fish and seafood to the U.S. While the proponent considers that NARWs and other marine mammals could be in the area during experimental trials, they should also be aware of the possibility that interactions with NARWs can affect Canada’s ability to export seafood.

Section 5.2.6 Species at Risk (SAR)

FFA advises that the proponent be aware of the DFO Aquatic Species at Risk (SAR) Distribution (NAFO Divisions 3K, 3L, 3N, 30, 3Ps, 4Vn, and 4Vs) within the project/study area (See Annex 1). The SAR Program is responsible for carrying out DFO's mandate under the *Species at Rick Act* (SARA) to protect, recover and conserve all listed aquatic SAR in Canada.

FFA also advises that the proponent be aware of the DFO Species at Risk Critical Habitats (NAFO Divisions 3K, 3L, and 3Ps) within the project/study area (See Annex 1). Critical habitat is identified for species listed as Endangered or Threatened under SARA. Section 49(1)(a) of SARA requires that a species' Recovery Strategy/Action Plan include an identification of the species' critical habitat to the extent possible, based on the best available information, including information provided by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). It is important that the critical habitats be described and displayed in species recovery documents and action plans.

Section 5.2.7 Sensitive Areas

FFA advises that the proponent be aware of the Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) (NAFO Divisions 3K, 3L, 3N, 30, 3Ps, 4Vn, and 4Vs) within the project/study area (See Annex 1). EBSAs are areas within Canada's oceans that have been identified through formal scientific assessments as having special biological or ecological significance when compared with the surrounding marine ecosystem. Areas identified as EBSAs should be viewed as important areas where, with existing knowledge, regulators and marine users should be particularly risk averse to ensure ecosystems remain healthy and productive.

Section 5.2.8 Noise/Acoustic Environment

FFA advises that the proponent recognize that anthropogenic noise and vibration can cause auditory masking, leading to changes in individual and social behavior of marine species, hinder population recruitment and ultimately affecting the health of marine ecosystems. FFA recommends reduced vessel speeds as a method to reduce excess noise and vibration. Additionally, the proposed project area holds economic and ecologic value, FFA further encourages the establishment of a noise and vibration monitoring plan to monitor potential long-term effects.

Section 5.2.9 Presence of Seismic Survey Vessel(s)

FFA advises that the proponent be aware of biosecurity in relation to Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) and the movement of international vessels. AIS are an increasing risk to the province's native species, habitats, ecological structures and cultured fish. A coordinated approach is needed to prevent and mitigate the introduction and spread of harmful AIS. Both FFA and DFO regularly encourage proponents to exercise best practices to help prevent the introduction and spread of AIS. To help mitigate the potential spread of AIS we should ensure that the proponent follows recommended best practices and guidelines.

Best practices to prevent the introduction and spread of AIS include:

- AIS awareness in waters frequented
- Taking precautions with respect to vessel traffic and gear movement between affected and unaffected areas to prevent introductions and spread
- Clean, drain and dry gear and ropes to prevent movement between areas by avoiding transportation of water from one location to another
- Routine vessel maintenance (i.e. cleaning the hull and using antifouling paint to prevent biofouling)
- Identifying and reporting any AIS to DFO

Additional information regarding AIS in the Newfoundland Region can be found on the Aquatic Invasive Species website. https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/ais-eae/index-eng.html

Annex 1:

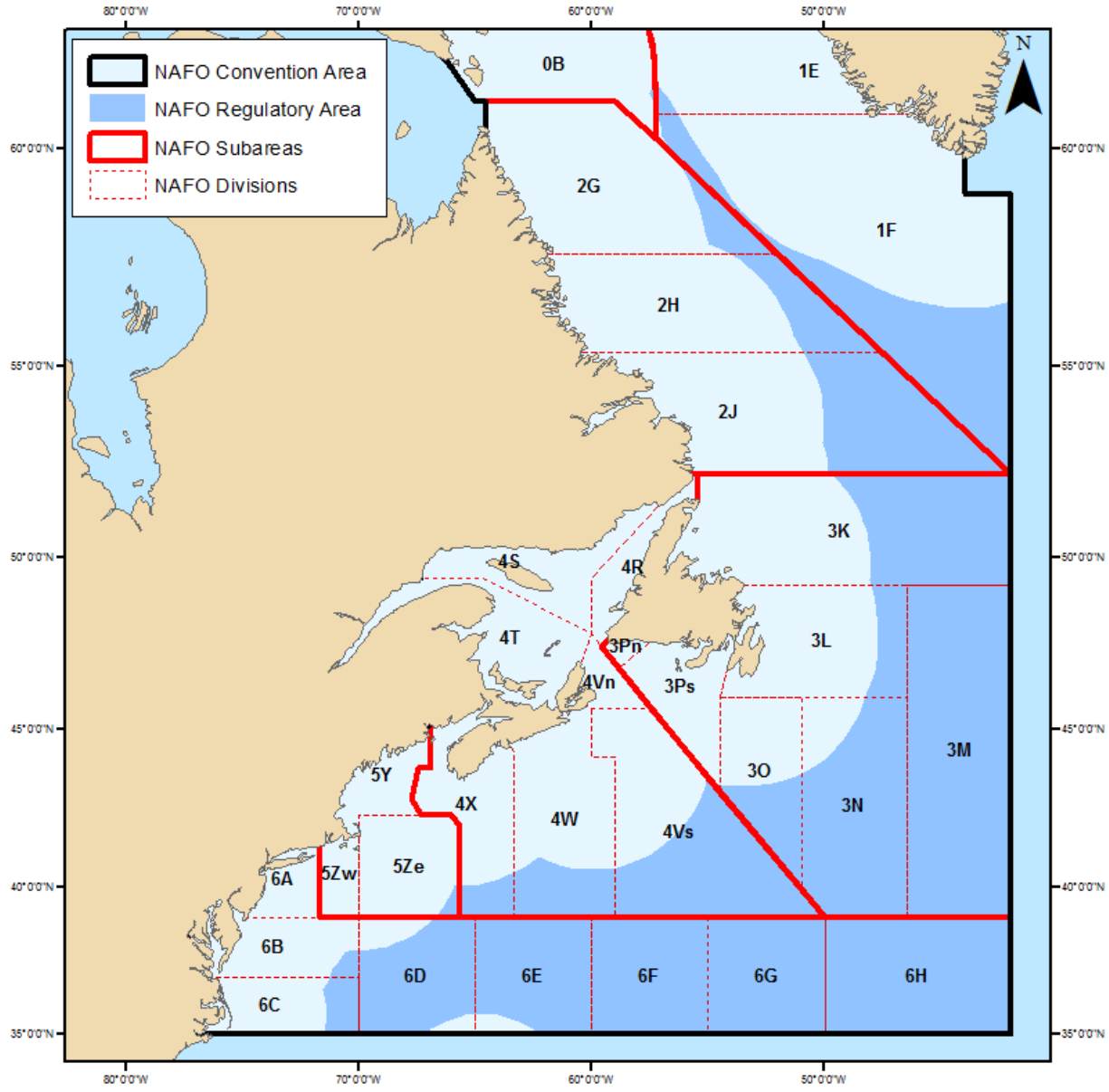


Figure 1: Northwest Atlantic Fishery Organization (NAFO) Regulatory Areas Map