

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Center for Biological Diversity v. Raimondo

Raimondo · No. 22-cv-00117-JD · Decided October 24, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California denied the government’s request to stay deadlines under a settlement agreement requiring development of a humpback whale take reduction plan. The court concluded that the government had not shown sufficient grounds for an indefinite stay and that a Department of Commerce shutdown-plan exception for protecting protected species resources applied to the circumstances.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	James Donato
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	October 24, 2025
DOCKET	22-cv-00117-JD
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved to stay deadlines in an approved settlement agreement requiring the National Marine Fisheries Service to establish a humpback-whale take reduction team and hold its initial meeting. The court denied the stay.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the discretionary four-factor standard for stays: likelihood of success on the merits, irreparable injury absent a stay, substantial injury to other interested parties, and the public interest. It also applied the Ninth Circuit's requirement that a stay be denied when the applicant fails to meet the applicable irreparable-harm threshold and the general rule that stays should not be indefinite.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court order; persuasive rather than precedential

TOPICS

- injunctions
- endangered species act
- environmental law
- administrative law
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

environmental law

administrative law

civil procedure

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the government established sufficient grounds for a stay of the settlement agreement's take-reduction-plan deadlines during a lapse in appropriated funds.
2. Whether the Department of Commerce shutdown plan's exception for monitoring protected-species trust resources and taking necessary regulatory action applied to NMFS's obligation to develop a humpback-whale take reduction plan.
3. Whether the requested stay was impermissibly indefinite.

HOLDINGS

1. The government was not entitled to a stay because it failed to address or satisfy the controlling stay standards and did not establish good grounds for the requested relief.
2. The government failed to demonstrate that the shutdown-plan exception for monitoring protected-species trust resources and taking necessary regulatory action should be disregarded.
3. The requested stay could not be granted because it was indefinite in nature and the government did not establish grounds sufficient to justify such relief.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Our circuit has “underscored ‘the bedrock requirement that stays must be denied to all petitioners who did not meet the applicable irreparable harm threshold, regardless of their showing on the other stay factors.’”
(at 2)

“This is circular reasoning. The government’s construction of “monitoring” is arbitrary and self-serving, and wholly at odds with the requirements of the MMPA, the Endangered Species Act, and the Court’s conclusions in the summary judgment order.” (at 3)

“Consequently, a stay is denied. The provisions of the settlement agreement remain in full and active force.”
(at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act protect humpback whales, and the court had previously determined that NMFS could not indefinitely delay developing a take reduction plan while continuing to authorize incidental take permits. The approved settlement required NMFS to establish a take reduction team by October 31, 2025, and hold an initial meeting by November 30, 2025. Following a lapse in appropriated funds, the government sought a stay and asserted that NMFS employees were prohibited from working, but the Department of Commerce shutdown plan included an exception for monitoring protected-species trust resources and taking necessary regulatory action to avoid irreparable harm.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On March 14, 2023, the court granted summary judgment for Center for Biological Diversity, holding that defendants could not indefinitely delay development of a take reduction plan while continuing to authorize incidental takes of humpback whales. The parties later entered a settlement agreement, which the court approved and which imposed deadlines for establishing a take reduction team. After a lapse in appropriated funds, the government sought a stay of those deadlines; the court denied the request.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Center for Biological Diversity v. Raimondo, 661 F. Supp. 3d 964, 967-68, 971 (N.D. Cal. 2023)
- Nken v. Holder, 556 U.S. 418, 426, 433-34 (2009)
- In re Facebook Biometric Info. Priv. Litig., No. 3:15-CV-03747-JD, 2018 WL 2412176, at *1 (N.D. Cal. May 29, 2018)
- Leiva-Perez v. Holder, 640 F.3d 962, 965 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Dependable Highway Express, Inc. v. Navigators Insurance Co., 498 F.3d 1059, 1066 (9th Cir. 2007)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 5 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 6 7
CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL Case No. 22-cv-00117-JD DIVERSITY, 8 Plaintiff, ORDER RE
STAY 9 v. 10 GINA RAIMONDO, et al., 11 Defendants. 12 13 On March 14, 2023, the Court
granted summary judgment in favor of plaintiff Center for 14 Biological Diversity (CBD) and
concluded that defendants Raimondo and the National Marine 15 Fisheries Service (NMFS) could
not “indefinitely delay developing a take reduction plan while 16 continuing to authorize Section
1371(a)(5)(E) permits for the incidental take of endangered and 17 threatened humpback whales.”
Ctr. for Biological Diversity v. Raimondo, 661 F. Supp. 3d 964, 18 971 (N.D.

Cal. 2023).¹ Humpback whales are protected as a listed species under the Endangered 19 Species
Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1531 et seq., and under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, 20 16 U.S.C. § 1361
et seq. (MMPA). Id. at 967-68.

The parties subsequently stipulated to a 21 settlement agreement, Dkt. No. 297, which the Court
approved, Dkt. No. 298. Among other 22 obligations, the settlement agreement requires NMFS to
“issue a notice establishing a take 23 reduction team by October 31, 2025” and hold an initial take
reduction team meeting by 24 November 30, 2025. Dkt. No. 297 ¶ 1. NMFS has issued another
incidental take permit for 25 humpback whales to the commercial sablefish pot fishery.

See Taking of Threatened or 26 Endangered Marine Mammals Incidental to Commercial Fishing
Operations; Issuance of a Permit, 27 1 89 Fed. Reg. 96,230 (Dec. 4, 2024). The permit states that a
take reduction plan for humpback 2 whales “is under development.” Id. at 96,232-33. 3 The

government asks for a stay of the take reduction plan deadlines because of the lapse in 4 appropriated funds.

See Dkt. No. 314. The government proposes a stay for the duration of the 5 lapse and suggests that it may seek a further stay even when funding is restored. Id. ¶¶ 1, 4, 6. In 6 effect, the government again seeks to delay indefinitely the development of a take reduction plan 7 while it continues to permit the incidental take of humpback whales. CBD opposes a stay.

8 Dkt. No. 315. 9 A stay is denied. To start, the government did not acknowledge or address the controlling 10 standards. A stay is “an exercise of judicial discretion” and “[t]he party requesting a stay bears the 11 burden of showing that the circumstances justify an exercise of that discretion.” *Nken v. Holder*, 12 556 U.S. 418, 433-34 (2009) (citations and quotations omitted). “[F]our factors determine the 13 propriety of a stay: ‘(1) whether the stay applicant has made a strong showing that he is likely to 14 succeed on the merits; (2) whether the applicant will be irreparably injured absent a stay; (3) 15 whether issuance of the stay will substantially injure the other parties interested in the proceeding; 16 and (4) where the public interest lies.’” *In re Facebook Biometric Info*.

Priv. Litig., No. 3:15-CV- 17 03747-JD, 2018 WL 2412176, at *1 (N.D. Cal. May 29, 2018) (quoting *Nken*, 556 U.S. at 426). 18 Our circuit has “underscored ‘the bedrock requirement that stays must be denied to all petitioners 19 who did not meet the applicable irreparable harm threshold, regardless of their showing on the 20 other stay factors.’” Id. (quoting *Leiva-Perez v. Holder*, 640 F.3d 962, 965 (9th Cir.

2011)). In 21 addition, as general rule, “stays should not be indefinite in nature.” *Dependable Highway Exp., 22 Inc. v. Navigators Ins. Co.*, 498 F.3d 1059, 1066 (9th Cir. 2007) (citation omitted). 23 The government did not mention, let alone substantively discuss, any of these principles. 24 All it said was that funding has lapsed for NMFS and other agencies, as it has for the federal 25 judiciary, and that NMFS employees “are prohibited from working.” Dkt.

No. 314 ¶ 2. 26 But as CBD pointed out in its opposition papers, the Department of Commerce, which 27 houses NMFS, promulgated a “Plan for Orderly Shutdown Due to Lapse of Congressional 1 See Dkt. No. 315-1 at ECF pp. 63-64. One of the “[e]xcepted functions” includes “[m]onitoring 2 trust resources under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Marine 3 Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act and other authorities to avoid irreparable harm 4 to U.S. fishery or protected species trust resources and taking necessary regulatory action.” Id. at 5 ECF p. 63.

This exception fits the circumstances here to a T. As the Court concluded in the 6 summary judgment order, NMFS is required to develop a take reduction plan for humpback 7 whales as a necessary action to avoid mortality and serious injury to these protected marine 8 mammals. 9 The

government did not mention this exception in its stay request, and the Court directed 10 the government to explain why it should not apply here.

Dkt. No. 316. The government's 11 response, Dkt. No. 317, was unilluminating. The government says that the monitoring exception 12 does not apply because NMFS has elected to use it only to "prevent vessels from exceeding the 13 total allowable catch of certain species where the limit has already been exceeded or soon will be." 14 Id. at 3. This reads the exception to apply only to U.S. fisheries, and ignores the plain language 15 that covers "protected species trust resources." Dkt.

No. 315-1 at ECF p. 63. The government 16 also says that the exception is distinguishable from this case because NMFS has not taken any 17 regulatory action with respect to a take reduction plan for the whales, and has already issued a 18 permit allowing incidental take. Dkt. No. 317 at 3-4.

In effect, the government says the 19 monitoring exception does not apply because the government never developed a take reduction 20 plan in the first place. 21 This is circular reasoning. The government's construction of "monitoring" is arbitrary and 22 self-serving, and wholly at odds with the requirements of the MMPA, the Endangered Species 23 Act, and the Court's conclusions in the summary judgment order.

Overall, the government did not 24 demonstrate that the monitoring exception should be disregarded, and did not otherwise establish 25 good grounds for the indefinite stay it requests. 26 27 1 Consequently, a stay is denied.

The provisions of the settlement agreement remain in full 2 and active force. 3 IT IS SO ORDERED. 4 || Dated: October 24, 2025 5 6 JAMES#PPONATO 7 United Btates District Judge 8 9 10 11 12 © 15 16 = 17 Z 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28