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NOAA PUBLISHES ANNUAL LIST THAT CATEGORIZES FISHERIES BY INTERACTION WITH MARINE MAMMALS

Many Updates to Report Improve Clarity and Functionality

NOAA's Fisheries Service today publishes its annual List of Fisheries that categorizes each U.S. commercial fishery based on the level of interaction each fishery has with marine mammals, as required by the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Each fishery is placed into one of three categories according to whether it has a frequent (Category I), occasional (Category II), or remote likelihood (Category III) of incidental mortality and serious injury of marine mammals.

After reviewing marine mammal stock assessment reports and other new information -- such as observer and marine mammal stranding data -- NOAA Fisheries Service is proposing several classification changes for this year's report.

NOAA Fisheries Service elevated the Alaska Cook Inlet set gillnet fishery to Category II from Category III, and reclassified the Mid-Atlantic mid-water trawl (Including Pair Trawl) fishery to Category II from Category I. Also, NOAA Fisheries Service reorganized the Category II California purse seine fisheries to better reflect the current state of these fisheries.

Five additional fisheries made it onto the list for the first time. The new Category II fisheries include the Mid-Atlantic flynet fishery, the Cook Inlet salmon purse seine fishery and the Kodiak Salmon purse seine fishery. The new Category III fisheries include the Washington and Oregon sardine purse seine fishery and the halibut bottom trawl fishery.

Fisheries are classified based on a two-tiered, stock-specific approach. The annual rate of marine mammals seriously injured or killed incidental to commercial fisheries is compared to the potential biological removal (PBR) level for each stock. The PBR level is defined in the MMPA as the maximum number of animals that may be removed from a marine mammal stock, while allowing that stock to reach or maintain its optimum sustainable population. Tier 1 considers the cumulative fishery-related incidental mortality and serious injury for a particular stock, while Tier 2 considers fishery-specific incidental mortality and serious injury for a particular stock.

- Tier 1: If the total annual mortality and serious injury across all fisheries that interact with a stock is less than or equal to 10 percent of the PBR level of such stock, then all fisheries interacting with that stock would be placed in Category III. Otherwise, these fisheries are subject to the next tier to determine their classification.

- Tier 2 - Category III: Annual mortality and serious injury in a given fishery is less than or equal to one percent of the PBR level.
- Tier 2 - Category II: Annual mortality and serious injury in a given fishery is greater than one percent but less than 50 percent of the PBR level.
- Tier 2 -Category I: Annual mortality and serious injury of a stock in a given fishery is greater than or equal to 50 percent of the PBR level.

Commercial fishers who participate in fisheries placed in Category I or II must register with the Marine Mammal Authorization Program and submit a \$25 fee, unless registration has been integrated with an existing state or federal registration program. The Marine Mammal Protection Act requires that all commercial fishers, regardless of Category, submit a report to NOAA's Fisheries Service within 48 hours of the end of each fishing trip if a marine mammal is injured or killed incidental to fishing operations.

The 2007 List of Fisheries was published in the Federal Register on (insert date). Copies of the proposed rule can be found on the Internet at: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/PR2/Fisheries_Interactions/list_of_fisheries.html or by contacting the Office of Protected Resources at 301)713-2322. You may also write, NOAA Fisheries Service, Office of Protected Resources, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries Service, please visit: www.nmfs.noaa.gov.