



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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East Coast Trap/Pot Fishermen May Get More Time to Convert to Sinking Groundline

NOAA's Fisheries Service is proposing that East Coast trap/pot fishermen get six additional months to switch from floating to sinking groundline, a conversion that will help reduce the risk of entangling large whales in fishing gear.

NOAA is proposing the extension to ensure all crab and fish trap/pot operations, which are newly required to use modified gear, understand they are affected by the requirement and how to comply. The extension would also apply to American lobster trap gear, which has been managed under rules for reducing entanglement risk since 1997.

NOAA believes that the extension will have minimal effect on entanglement risks to large whales. The extension will occur during months when trap/pot fisheries are less active, so less gear is being used. Whales are not aggregating at this time in areas where the majority of pot/trap gear is set. In addition, all other risk reduction measures that went into place in October 2007 remain in effect and are unchanged.

There has been and will continue to be considerable outreach to fishermen on the new requirement through NOAA's liaisons to industry, an advisory panel with industry leaders, environmentalists and elected officials, and through informational pull-outs published in trade publications.

The proposed rule will publish in the Federal register on Friday, June 6 and public comments will be accepted through 5 p.m. on July 7. To view the proposed rule and instructions on submitting comments visit <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/regs/com.html> If the extension is implemented, sinking groundline—the line that connects multiple traps/pots when the gear is set—will be required by April 5, 2009, rather than October 5, 2008.

Between 2002 and 2006, NOAA's Fisheries Service confirmed 314 deaths among large whales along the U.S. East Coast and adjacent Canadian Maritimes. Of these, the majority, 249, were of undetermined cause, 21 were caused by entanglement, 27 by collisions with ships, and 17 by other causes. During these four years, NOAA confirmed a total of 145 whale entanglements and 43 collisions between whales and ships.

Several species of large whales are subject to entanglement, including the North Atlantic right whale, which is also one of the most endangered. Since 1996, NOAA's Fisheries Service has been working to eliminate this threat through a program of research, consultation with stakeholders, and regulatory actions. Gear requirements and special management areas have been a large part of this effort.

NOAA's 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.

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 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

Atlantic Large Whale Protection Plan: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp>