

§ 223.205(a) do not apply to the incidental take of any member of a threatened species of sea turtle (i.e., a take not directed toward such member) during fishing or scientific research activities, to the extent that those involved are in compliance with all applicable requirements of paragraphs (d)(1) through (d)(8) of this section, or in compliance with the terms and conditions of an incidental take permit issued pursuant to paragraph (a)(2) of this section.

* * * * *

(8) *Restrictions applicable to large-mesh gillnet fisheries in the mid-Atlantic region.* No person may fish (including, but not limited to, setting, hauling back, or leaving in the ocean) with, or possess any gillnet with a stretched mesh size larger than 8 inches (20.3 cm), unless all gillnets are covered with canvas or other similar material and lashed or otherwise securely fastened to the deck or the rail, and all buoys larger than 6 inches (15.24 cm) in diameter, high flyers, and anchors are disconnected. This restriction applies in the Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone (as defined in 50 CFR 600.10) during the following time periods and in the following areas:

(i) Waters north of 33°51.0' N (North Carolina/South Carolina border at the coast) and south of 35°46.0' N (Oregon Inlet) at any time;

(ii) Waters north of 35°46.0' N (Oregon Inlet) and south of 36°22.5' N (Currituck Beach Light, NC) from March 16 through January 14;

(iii) Waters north of 36°22.5' N (Currituck Beach Light, NC) and south of 37°34.6' N (Wachapreague Inlet, VA) from April 1 through January 14; and

(iv) Waters north of 37°34.6' N (Wachapreague Inlet, VA) and south of 37°56.0' N (Chincoteague, VA) from April 16 through January 14.

[FR Doc. 02-30605 Filed 12-2-02; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 229

[Docket No. 001128334-2292-10; I.D. 112702B]

Taking of Marine Mammals Incidental to Commercial Fishing Operations; Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries (AA), NOAA, announces temporary restrictions consistent with the requirements of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan's (ALWTRP) implementing regulations. These restrictions apply to lobster trap and anchored gillnet fishermen in an area totaling approximately 1,600 square nautical miles (nm²) (2,965 km²), east of Portsmouth, NH, called Jeffreys Ledge, for 15 days. The purpose of this action is to provide immediate protection to an aggregation of North Atlantic right whales (right whales).

DATES: Effective beginning at 0001 hours December 5, 2002, through 2400 hours December 20, 2002.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the proposed and final Dynamic Area Management rules, Environmental Assessment (EA), Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) meeting summaries, and progress reports on implementation of the ALWTRP may also be obtained by writing Diane Borggaard, NMFS/Northeast Region, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930.

Several of the background documents for the ALWTRP and the take reduction planning process can be downloaded from the ALWTRP web site at <http://www.nero.nmfs.gov/whaletrp/>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Diane Borggaard, NMFS/Northeast Region, 978-281-9145; or Patricia Lawson, NMFS, Office of Protected Resources, 301-713-2322.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The ALWTRP was developed pursuant to section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) to reduce the incidental mortality and serious injury of four species of whales (right whales, fin, humpback, and minke) due to incidental interaction with commercial fishing activities. The ALWTRP, implemented through regulations codified at 50 CFR 229.32, relies on a combination of fishing gear modifications and time/area closures to reduce the risk of whales becoming entangled in commercial fishing gear (and potentially suffering serious injury or mortality as a result).

On January 9, 2002, NMFS published the final rule to implement the ALWTRP's Dynamic Area Management (DAM) program (67 FR 1133). The DAM program provides specific authority for NMFS to temporarily restrict the use of lobster trap and anchored gillnet fishing gear in areas north of 40°N. lat. on an expedited basis to protect right whales.

Under the DAM program, NMFS may: (1) require the removal of all lobster trap and anchored gillnet fishing gear for a 15-day period; (2) allow lobster trap and anchored gillnet fishing within a DAM zone with gear modifications determined by NMFS to sufficiently reduce the risk of entanglement; or (3) issue an alert to fishermen requesting the voluntary removal of all lobster trap and anchored gillnet gear for a 15-day period, and asking fishermen not to set any additional gear in the DAM zone during the 15-day period.

A DAM zone is triggered when NMFS receives a reliable report from a qualified individual of three or more right whales sighted within an area (75nm² (139 km²)) such that right whale density is equal to or greater than 0.04 right whales per nm² (1.85 km²). A qualified individual is an individual ascertained by NMFS to be reasonably able, through training or experience, to identify a right whale. Such individuals include, but are not limited to, NMFS staff, U.S. Coast Guard and Navy personnel trained in whale identification, scientific research survey personnel, whale watch operators and naturalists, and mariners trained in whale species identification through disentanglement training or some other training program deemed adequate by NMFS. A reliable report would be a credible right whale sighting.

On November 20, 2002, NMFS Aerial Survey Team reported a sighting of 8 right whales in the proximity of 43° 00' N lat. and 70° 08' W long. This position lies east of Portsmouth, NH, in an area called Jeffreys Ledge.

Once a DAM zone is triggered, NMFS determines whether to impose restrictions on fishing and/or fishing gear in the zone. This determination is based on the following factors, including but not limited to: the location of the DAM zone with respect to other fishery closure areas, weather conditions as they relate to the safety of human life at sea, the type and amount of gear already present in the area, and a review of recent right whale entanglement and mortality data.

NMFS has reviewed the factors and management options noted above and, through this action, restricts lobster trap and gillnet gear set in the waters bounded by:

43°19'N, 70°35'W (NW Corner)
43°19'N, 69°40'W
42°39'N, 69°40'W
42°39'N, 70°35'W (SW Corner)

Please note that the western DAM boundary (70°35'W) from 43°11'N due north to 43°19'N will follow the coastline.

The restrictions for the DAM zone are as follows: All anchored gillnet and lobster trap gear must be removed from these waters and no new gear may be set during the 15-day restricted period. The restrictions will be in effect beginning at 0001 hours December 5, 2002, through 2400 hours December 20, 2002, unless terminated sooner or extended by NMFS, through another notification in the **Federal Register**. The restrictions will be announced to state officials, fishermen, Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) members, and other interested parties through e-mail, phone contact, NOAA website, and other appropriate media immediately upon filing with the **Federal Register**.

Classification

In accordance with section 118(f)(9) of the MMPA, the Assistant Administrator (AA) has determined that this action is necessary to implement a take reduction plan to protect North Atlantic right whales.

This action falls within the scope of alternatives and impacts analyzed in the Final EA prepared for the ALWTRP's DAM program. Further analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is not required.

Providing prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action would prevent NMFS from executing its functions to protect and reduce serious injury and mortality of endangered right whales. To meet the goals of the DAM program, the agency needs to be able to create a DAM zone and implement restrictions on fishing gear as soon as possible once the criteria are triggered and NMFS determines that a DAM restricted zone is appropriate. The criteria were triggered with respect to this temporary rule on November 20, 2002. If NMFS were to provide notice and an opportunity for public comment prior to the creation of a DAM restricted zone, the aggregated right whales would be vulnerable to entanglement which could result in serious injury and mortality. Therefore, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), the AA finds that good cause exists to waive notice and an opportunity to comment on this action to implement a DAM restricted zone to reduce the risk of entanglement of endangered right whales in commercial lobster trap and anchored gillnet gear as such procedures would be impracticable.

For the same reasons, the AA finds that, under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), good cause exists to waive the 30-day delay in effective date. If NMFS were to delay for 30 days the effective date of this action, the aggregated right whales

would be vulnerable to entanglement which could result in serious injury and mortality. Nevertheless, NMFS recognizes the need for fishermen to have time to remove their gear from a DAM zone once one is approved. Thus, NMFS makes this action effective beginning at 0001 hours December 5, 2002, through 2400 hours December 20, 2002. NMFS will also endeavor to provide notice of this action to fishermen through other means as soon as possible.

NMFS determined that the regulations establishing the DAM program and actions such as this one taken pursuant to those regulations are consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the approved coastal management program of the U.S. Atlantic coastal states. This determination was submitted for review by the responsible state agencies under section 307 of the Coastal Zone Management Act. Following state review of the regulations creating the DAM program, no state disagreed with NMFS' conclusion that the DAM program is consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the enforceable policies of the approved coastal management program for that state.

The DAM program under which NMFS is taking this action contains policies with federalism implications warranting preparation of a federalism assessment under Executive Order 13132. Accordingly, in October 2001, the Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs, DOC, provided notice of the DAM program to the appropriate elected officials in states to be affected by actions taken pursuant to the DAM program. Federalism issues raised by state officials were addressed in the final rule implementing the DAM program. A copy of the federalism Summary Impact Statement for that final rule is available upon request (**ADDRESSES**).

This rule has been determined to be not significant under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1361 *et seq.* and 50 CFR 229.32(g)(3)

Dated: November 29, 2002.

Rebecca Lent,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs/National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 02-30774 Filed 11-29-02; 2:54 pm]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 001005281-0369-02; I.D. 112602D]

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic; Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic; Closure

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS closes the commercial fishery for king mackerel in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the northern Florida west coast subzone. This closure is necessary to protect the Gulf king mackerel resource.

DATES: The closure is effective 12:01 a.m., local time, November 30, 2002, through June 30, 2003.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mark Godcharles, telephone 727-570-5305, fax 727-570-5583, e-mail Mark.Godcharles@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The fishery for coastal migratory pelagic fish (king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, cero, cobia, little tunny, dolphin, and, in the Gulf of Mexico only, bluefish) is managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic (FMP). The FMP was prepared by the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (Councils) and is implemented under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) by regulations at 50 CFR part 622.

Based on the Councils' recommended total allowable catch and the allocation ratios in the FMP, on April 30, 2001 (66 FR 17368, March 30, 2001), NMFS implemented a commercial quota of 2.25 million lb (1.02 million kg) for the eastern zone (Florida) of the Gulf migratory group of king mackerel. That quota is further divided into separate quotas for the Florida east coast subzone and the northern and southern Florida west coast subzones. On April 27, 2000, NMFS implemented the final rule (65 FR 16336, March 28, 2000) that divided the Florida west coast subzone of the eastern zone into northern and southern subzones, and established their separate