



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Teri Frady
(508)495-2239

NR 07.14
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 5, 2007

NOAA Fisheries Reducing the Risk of Large Whale Entanglement in East Coast Fishing Gear

NOAA Fisheries Service has issued a final rule implementing new measures to further reduce the risk of entangling large whales in fishing gear along the East Coast.

The new measures cover commercial fishing operations that use the types of trap/pot or gillnet gear that are known to, or could, harm large whales. The measures in the rule are identical to those identified as the preferred alternative in the final environmental impact statement for this action, published by the agency in August. The final rule and other supporting documentation can be accessed online here:
<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp>

More trap/pot and gillnet fisheries are now included under the whale protection plan, the areas exempted from all or portions of the plan are expanded both in coastal waters and in deep offshore waters, and more markings will be required on fishing gear to improve understanding of how and where entanglements occur. Short-duration management areas currently used to protect unexpected aggregations of Northern right whales will be eliminated six months after publication of the final rule. Expanded seasonal area management zones apply until one year after publication of the final rule, when affected fisheries would be required to use sinking groundline on a broad-scale basis. See the final rule and other supporting documentation for more specifics on these and other requirements.

Between 2001 and 2005, NOAA Fisheries Service confirmed 133 entanglement events, 42 ship strikes, and 292 mortalities among large whales along the Eastern seaboard of the U.S. and adjacent Canadian Maritimes. Entanglements were identified as the cause of 26 whale deaths, and ship strikes the cause of 27 deaths.

Several species of large whales are subject to entanglement, including the Northern right whale, which is also one of the most endangered. Since 1996, NOAA 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 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.

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

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

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

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