



Contact: Teri Frady  
508-495-2239

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Aug. 29, 2008

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

NOAA's Fisheries Service today announced that East Coast trap/pot fishermen will get six additional months to switch from floating to sinking groundline – the line that connects multiple traps/pots when the gear is set. The conversion will help reduce the risk of entangling large whales in groundline and will be required in affected gear by April 5, 2009.

NOAA believes that the extension will have minimal effect on entanglement risks to large whales. The extension occurs 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 trap/pot gear is set. In addition, all other risk reduction measures that went into place in October 2007 remain in effect and are unchanged. For example, this extension does not change existing state and federal requirements for sinking groundline to be used in critical habitat areas for North Atlantic right whales.

The extension will help ensure that crab and fish trap/pot fisherman who will be required to use modified gear, understand they are affected by the requirement and how to comply with it. The extension also applies to American lobster trap/pot gear, which has been managed under rules for reducing entanglement risk since 1997.

NOAA will continue to ensure fishermen are aware of the new requirement through its liaisons to industry, an advisory panel with industry leaders, environmentalists and appointed officials, and through informational pull-outs published in trade publications.

Entanglement in fishing gear and collisions with ships are two primary causes of serious injuries and deaths among endangered large whales along the U.S. East Coast. Between 2002 and 2006, NOAA's Fisheries Service confirmed a total of 145 whale entanglements and 43 collisions between whales and ships along the U.S. East Coast and adjacent Canadian Maritimes.

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 understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

**On the Web:**

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

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