

Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico Large Pelagics Longline Fishery

Fishing gear type: Longline

Current category: Category I*

Basis for current classification on the LOF: The total annual mortality and serious injury of long-finned pilot whale (Western North Atlantic [WNA] stock), pygmy sperm whale (WNA stock), and short-finned pilot whale (WNA stock) in this fishery is greater than 50% of the stocks' Potential Biological Removal (PBR) levels.

Current list of marine mammal species/stocks injured/killed (a ⁽¹⁾ indicates those stocks driving the fishery's classification): Atlantic spotted dolphin, Gulf of Mexico (GMX) continental and oceanic; Atlantic spotted dolphin, WNA; Bottlenose dolphin, Northern GMX continental shelf; Bottlenose dolphin, Northern GMX oceanic; Bottlenose dolphin, WNA offshore; Common dolphin, WNA; Cuvier's beaked whale, WNA; Gervais beaked whale, GMX oceanic stock; Killer whale, GMX oceanic stock; Long-finned pilot whale, WNA⁽¹⁾; Mesoplodon beaked whale, WNA; Northern bottlenose whale, WNA; Pantropical spotted dolphin, Northern GMX; Pantropical spotted dolphin, WNA; Risso's dolphin, Northern GMX; Risso's dolphin, WNA; Short-finned pilot whale, Northern GMX; Short-finned pilot whale, WNA⁽¹⁾; Sperm whale, GMX oceanic stock.

Estimated number of current participants: 94

Take Reduction Teams/Plans that affect this fishery: Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Plan (PLTRP), 50 CFR 229.36.

Year added to the LOF: 1996

Category when originally listed: Category I

Basis for original classification on the LOF: This fishery was listed as a Category I based on the extrapolation of observer data throughout the entire fishery using the total number of sets reported in logbooks. In 1994, this fishery was listed as Category II based on the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) section 114 classification system. In 1996, this fishery was placed in Category I based on the current LOF classification system (established in 1996 under section 118 of the MMPA). Incidental serious injury and mortality of pilot whales was estimated to be 26 animals/year in 1992-1993, or 93% of PBR at a minimum (PBR = between 4 and 28 animals). This estimated total mortality of pilot whales exceeded the 50% threshold for either long- or short-finned pilot whales. One Risso's dolphin was observed killed in 1993 in the Gulf of Mexico. NMFS also received sighting reports (both at sea and stranded on land) of whales (humpback, sperm, long-finned pilot, and minke whales) carrying gear that could be attributed to the pelagic longline fishery, and reports of a variety of other species injured or killed (including, but not limited to, bottlenose dolphins, harbor porpoise, Risso's dolphins, and unidentified large cetaceans).

Estimated number of participants when originally listed: 364

Past names, if any: None.

Gear description/method for fishing: The fishery uses a mainline of >700 lb (317.5 kg) test monofilament typically ranging from 10-45 mi (16-72 km) long. Bullet-shaped floats are suspended at regular intervals along the mainline and long sections of gear are marked by radio beacons. Long gangion lines of 200-400 lb (91-181 kg) test monofilament of typically 100-200 ft (30.5-61 m) are suspended from the mainline. Only certain sized hooks and baits are allowed based on fishing location. Hooks are typically fished at depths between 40-120 ft (12-36.6 m).

* The fishery is classified based on mortalities and serious injuries of a marine mammal stock greater than 50% (Category I) of the stock's Potential Biological Removal (PBR) level.

Longlines targeting tuna are typically set at dawn and hauled near dusk, while longlines targeting swordfish are typically set at night and hauled in the morning. Gear remains in the water typically for 10-14 hours. Fishermen generally modify only select sections of longline gear to target dolphin fish or wahoo, with the remaining gear configured to target swordfish, tuna, and/or sharks.

Target species: Swordfish, tuna (yellowfin, bigeye, bluefin, and albacore), dolphin fish, wahoo, shortfin mako shark, and a variety of other shark species.

Spatial/temporal distribution of effort: This fishery operates year-round and occurs within and outside the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone throughout Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico waters. The fishery has historically been composed of five relatively distinct segments with different fishing practices and strategies, including: Gulf of Mexico yellowfin tuna fishery; South Atlantic-Florida east coast to Cape Hatteras swordfish fishery; Mid-Atlantic and New England swordfish and bigeye tuna fishery; U.S. distant water swordfish fishery; and Caribbean Islands' tuna and swordfish fishery. In addition to geographical area, these segments have historically differed by percentage of various target and non-target species caught, gear characteristics, and deployment techniques.

Levels of observer coverage each year[†]: This fishery is observed under the Pelagic Longline Observer Program, a mandatory observer program that has been in place since 1992. The target observer coverage level was 5% of reported sets through 2001, and was elevated to 8% of total sets in 2002. Between 2000 and 2007, observer coverage of reported sets in the Gulf of Mexico component of the fishery was 4%, 4%, 3%, 5%, 5%, 7%, 8% and 16%. Observer coverage in the Gulf of Mexico during 2008 was 24.8% of reported sets. This high coverage rate reflects significantly elevated coverage during the second quarter (58.2%) associated with increased observer effort to document bluefin tuna interactions.

Management and regulations: This fishery is managed under the Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The dolphin fish and wahoo portions of the fishery are managed under the South Atlantic FMP for Dolphin and Wahoo. Regulations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act address the target fish species, as well as bycatch species protected under the Endangered Species Act and/or the MMPA. A portion of this fishery is subject to regulations under the Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Plan (50 CFR 229.36).

History of Changes on the LOF

2012 LOF:

- Added killer whale (GMX oceanic stock), sperm whale (GMX oceanic stock), and Gervais beaked whale (GMX oceanic stock) to list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery. A killer whale (GMX oceanic stock) and a sperm whale (GMX oceanic stock) were each injured in this fishery in 2008, and a Gervais beaked whale (GMX oceanic stock) was injured in this fishery in 2007.
- Updated the name of the Atlantic spotted dolphin stock from "Northern GMX" to "GMX continental and oceanic" to reflect the stock name in the 2010 SAR.

2010 LOF: Removed pygmy sperm whale (WNA) from the list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery because there have been no injuries or mortalities reported in the last 5 years. Observer coverage from 2000-2006 was 4-7%, with coverage often greater than 10% in some areas and seasons.

2008 LOF: Changed the name of the bottlenose dolphin stocks listed on the list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery from "GMX Outer Continental Shelf" to "Northern GMX continental shelf," and "Northern GMX outer continental shelf" to "Northern GMX oceanic." The names of the stocks were changed in the 2003 and 2005 SARs and the change was inadvertently left out of the LOF.

2007 LOF:

[†] Observer coverage levels include the latest information reported in the most current final Stock Assessment Report (SAR).

- Northern bottlenose whale (WNA) added to list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery because of an observed entanglement and serious injury in 2001.
- NMFS reviewed the other species listed on the list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery and determined that, while some species have not been observed injured or killed in the most recent 5 years, the fishery still operates in the same general areas and uses the same type of gear and therefore poses the same risk of interactions. Therefore, no other changes were warranted.
- Added dolphin fish and wahoo to list of target species in this fishery.

2006 LOF:

- Added a superscript “1” in Table 2 after long-finned pilot whale (WNA), pygmy sperm whale (WNA), and short-finned pilot whale (WNA), indicating that these stocks are driving the categorization of this fishery.
- Estimate number of participants updated from <200 to 94.

2005 LOF:

- Added to the list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery: Cuvier's beaked whale (WNA) and Mesoplodon beaked whales (WNA), because interactions had been documented by the observer program. Also, added short-finned pilot whale (Northern GMX) because interactions were documented in recent Stock Assessment Reports (SAR).
- Removed from the list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery: Humpback whale (WNA), Minke whale (Canadian East Coast), Striped dolphin (WNA), and Harbor porpoise (Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy) because interactions had not been documented in recent years.

2003 LOF: Pygmy sperm whale (WNA) added to the list of species/stocks incidentally killed/injured based on a report of a serious injury of this stock in this fishery in 2000. This single event translated to an average mortality and serious injury rate of 6 animals/year for 1996-2000, exceeding 100% of PBR (PBR=4.7).

2001 LOF: Estimate number of participants updated from 364 to <200. While there were 443 permits issued, these were not all active participants.