

**Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Team Meeting  
September 16, 2010, Webinar**

**Key Outcomes**

**I. OVERVIEW**

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) convened the Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Team (PLTRT or Team) via webinar/teleconference September 16, 2010. (See **Attachment 1** for a copy of the agenda.) The meeting focused on the following primary objectives:

- Provide updates on Take Reduction Plan (TRP) implementation status, including compliance
- Present recent findings on stock structure, bycatch and mortality estimates
- Summarize recent and upcoming TRP-related research efforts
- Outline next steps

This summary report, prepared by CONCUR Inc., provides an overview of the meeting's key outcomes. It is presented in four main sections: (1) Overview; (2) Participants; (3) Meeting Materials; (4) Key Outcomes; and (5) Next Steps.

**II. PARTICIPANTS**

The four-hour teleconference was attended by 14 of the 23 Team members. Participating Team members were: Bill McLellan, Jean Cramer, David Kerstetter, Rich Seagraves, Sharon Young, Nina Young, Beth Lowell, Kris Lynch, Rich Ruais, Damon Gannon, Glenn Delaney, Dewey Hemilright, Laura Engleby and Kristy Long.

L. Engleby and Erin Fougères with NMFS Southeast Region (Protected Resources Division) convened the meeting. Scott McCreary and Bennett Brooks from CONCUR, an environmental dispute resolution firm specializing in marine resource and water issues, served as the neutral facilitators. Staffers from NMFS (Southeast, Northeast and Pacific Islands Regions, as well as the Southeast and Northeast Fisheries Science Centers and the Highly Migratory Species Division), NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and the U.S. Coast Guard supported the deliberations. Other participants included researchers from Duke University.

**III. MEETING MATERIALS**

Numerous meeting materials were provided to support the group's deliberations. Much of the material was provided prior to the meeting, but some documents and much of the presentation material were made available during the webinar itself. Copies of meeting materials can be obtained by contacting Erin Fougères at 727-824-5312 or via email at [erin.fougeres@noaa.gov](mailto:erin.fougeres@noaa.gov). Documents are also available on-line at: <http://www.concurinc.com/PLTRT/index.html>.

#### IV. KEY OUTCOMES

Below is a brief summary of the main topics and issues discussed during the meeting. This summary is not intended to be a meeting transcript. Rather, it provides an overview of the main topics covered, the primary points and options raised in the discussion, and areas of full or emerging consensus.

##### A. *Welcome and Introduction*

The meeting kicked off with a brief review of the meeting purpose and self-introductions. These were followed by review of both the agenda and meeting protocols.

The remainder of the meeting focused on a variety of presentations intended to update Team members on Plan implementation, stock structure, bycatch and mortality estimates, and recent research initiatives. The meeting agenda did not incorporate any proposed actions needing Team feedback or consensus.

Below is a brief overview of the presentation topics, along with (as appropriate) pertinent Team member comments.

- ***Team Composition and Membership.*** E. Fougères provided a brief update on Team composition, noting that Kris Lynch has replaced Mike Simpkins as the Marine Mammal Commission representative. She also noted a new member is needed to represent The Ocean Conservancy on the Team.
- ***Recent Findings on Pilot Whale Abundance and Mortality.*** Lance Garrison and Patricia Rosel, both with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, provided a detailed overview on recent findings related to pilot whale abundance and mortality. The presentation, available on the web, focused on the following topics: (1) providing the latest information on pilot whale stock structure from the Draft 2010 SAR (12,619 are long-finned and 24,674 are short-finned), as well as explaining the methodology; (2) confirming the short- and long-finned pilot whale stock overlap zone between 38- and 40-degrees latitude; (3) Science Center plans to parse mortality estimates by collecting better and more extensive bycatch and biopsy data this fall; and, (4) updates on longline observer biopsy samples, observed interactions and bycatch rates (lower than usual in 2009 along with a spike in the second quarter of 2010 due to three serious injury determinations tied to one set. Additionally, L. Garrison presented data for 2009 showing that, despite the TRP requirement limiting mainline length to no more than 20 nautical miles, mainline length continues to exceed the limit and has not changed much from earlier years. This factor suggests that compliance with mainline length requirements is not likely responsible for the drop in 2009 bycatch rate.

Team members were highly complimentary of the work presented. They also offered a handful of clarifying questions and comments, including the following:

- Seeking to understand whether moon phases (as opposed to or in addition to water temperatures) might impact the configuration of stock overlap zones. [L. Garrison said he did not think moon phases have an impact on stock splitting.]
  - Noting the high coefficient of variation (CVs) around the abundance estimates (and, therefore, the associated large confidence limits around the mean) and seeking to better understand whether those are likely to improve in the near future. [L. Garrison said he hopes CVs will improve due to back-to-back surveys planned for 2011 and 2012.)
  - Interest in better understanding how the Science Center will conduct the upcoming biopsy work and apportion mortalities and serious injuries.
  - Seeking to understand what percentage of sightings are in the overlap zone.
  - Interest in understanding whether there were any noteworthy characteristics associated with the three-take set described in the presentation. [L. Garrison said there was nothing to indicate any particularly noteworthy about the vessel or fishing practices (the vessel's mainline length was 19 nautical miles), though he did note that all three animals were exceptionally large.]
  - Seeking information on the relative geographic pattern of noncompliance. [This information is not currently available].
  - Seeking information on enforcement plans given the apparent lack of compliance with the limited mainline length. [L. Engleby noted the her office is in touch with enforcement on this issue, though both she and L. Garrison noted that near-term actions will likely be focused on education and outreach.]
  - Noting the discrepancy between the low 2009 bycatch rates and the non-compliance with 20-nautical mile limit on longline length.
- ***PLTRP Compliance Update.*** Larry Beerkircher with the NMFS Southeast Region Office provided an update to the Team on compliance with the Plan action requiring pelagic longline vessels to contact the Observer Program at least 48 hours prior to fishing in the Cape Hatteras Special Research Area (CHSRA). The presentation highlighted efforts to-date to track compliance via VMS, along with preliminary results (very high compliance, with just two of 24 vessels spot-checked out of compliance and one of those two was later identified as vessel that is usually in compliance). L. Beerkircher said that VMS alone is not sufficient to track compliance and will need to be supported by at-sea enforcement.

Team members posed only a handful of clarifying questions after the presentation. One participant sought to understand whether dockside compliance was an option. L. Beerkircher said this was not a viable option, as there's no way for enforcement personnel to determine whether fish on board were landed inside the CHSRA.

- ***False Killer Whale Take Reduction Program.*** Nancy Young with NMFS's Pacific Islands Regional Office provided an overview of the recent draft Take Reduction Plan adopted unanimously by the False Killer Whale Take Reduction Team. Her presentation provided an overview of Hawaii's false killer whale stocks and bycatch in Hawaii's longline fleet, as well as a summary of the Team's proposed regulatory and non-regulatory components, including research recommendations. One Team member who served on the False Killer Whale Team noted that recent research into weak hooks, while not yet conclusive, was sufficiently promising enough to convince Team members to include weak hook experiments and possible adoption as a key component of the plan.
- ***Potential Implications of BP Oil Spill for PLTRP Implementation.*** E. Fougères provided an update on the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, summarizing in particular its impact on wildlife, as well as describing the ramifications for NMFS staffers diverting attention from ongoing projects to address the crisis and cleanup. Both E. Fougères and L. Garrison noted that some PLTRT-related efforts, such as planned surveys and quarterly updates, have been deferred or delayed due to the temporary reallocation of resources to address the spill impacts.

One Team member sought additional information on deepwater impacts (i.e., plumes and apparent ocean floor deposits) and widespread use of dispersants, but L. Garrison indicated it was too early to provide any meaningful assessments. He also noted that the Science Center is extensively involved in gathering pre- and post-spill data to support a NRDA process (Natural Resource Damage Assessment).

- ***Hook-Type Research Updates.*** Two presentations – one by Charlie Bergmann (with NMFS's Pascagoula lab), the other by Team member Dave Kerstetter – focused on recent hook type-related research. Below is a brief synopsis of each.
  - ***Hook research updates.*** C. Bergmann's presentation summarized the results of recent experiments in the Gulf of Mexico to evaluate bluefin tuna bycatch mitigation measures in the yellowfin tuna fishery. The research effort focused on assessing the impact to target and bycatch rates of an experimental hook (customized 16/0 hook designed to bend with less force) versus more traditional gear. Bluefin tuna bycatch rates dropped by 75 percent (statistically significant) in 2008 and 2009, while yellowfin tuna catch rates were down 5.6 percent (not statistically significant). C. Bergmann noted, in response to a Team member question, that fishermen appeared comfortable with the small incremental decline in target species catch rate. Additional future testing is planned.
  - ***Variable strength hook tests.*** D. Kerstetter presented a detailed summary of his weak hook research efforts in the Atlantic, as well as a quick look at upcoming efforts in both the Atlantic and Hawaii longline fisheries. D. Kerstetter's recent efforts, focused on the North and South Carolina yellowfin tuna and swordfish fisheries, were designed to test the reduction in pilot whale bycatch through the use of weak hooks. Tests did not demonstrate significant differences in either target or bycatch. D. Kerstetter noted that future research is planned with funding from the New England

Aquarium, though he said there may be delays due to oil spill impacts and limited fishing vessel availability as fishermen have not recently been longline fishing in the area. In the Hawaii longline fishery, D. Kerstetter will be working with the Hawaii longline fishery and the Observer Program to test the impact on target catch rates using 4.5 mm wire diameter versus 4.0 mm wire diameter circle hooks, as provided in the FKWTRP.

In his presentation, Kerstetter emphasized the uncertain correlation between both pull strength on a machine and an animal's pull strength in the water, as well as animal pull strength and animal size and weight. He suggested several factors – direction of pull, hook attachment method and hooking location – could all impact the pull strength required to open a weak hook. He also noted constraints in working with manufacturers to produce customized weak hooks that behave in a consistent manner due to inter-batch variation based on the factory's source metal used to fabricate the hook. The lead time to produce weak hooks is also a factor, he said. He suggested that a more robust analysis would look at all of these factors in combination.

Team member questions and comments centered on the following:

- Confirming that D. Kerstetter's experiments are not changing hook shape, just size and strength.
- Comment from at least one fishery representative on the Team that he believes the fishermen would be willing to use the new weak hooks if the CPUE is the same and can help with non-retained bycatch.
- Emphasizing the important role the New England Aquarium plans in mobilizing and allocating funding for these types of experiments.
- ***Mid-Atlantic Bight Pilot Whale Project.*** Andy Read with Duke University provided an overview of recent research efforts into the ecology and behavior of short-finned pilot whales off Cape Hatteras. His presentation summarized his team's research efforts in the following methods: distribution surveys, photo identification, biopsy sampling, stable isotope analysis, DTag deployments, focal animal behavior, and sampling prey distribution. It also highlighted the focus of future work. Key presentation points included the following: evidence of some pilot whale residency with the CHSRA; and high variability in animal diving depth and behavior.
- ***Research RFP Status.*** E. Fougères provided a status report on the recent North Carolina Sea Grant competitive gear research funding opportunity. The RFP, which focused on several TRT-related research areas and provides the opportunity for cooperative research with the commercial fishing industry, scientists and others, closed on August 30, 2010 and proposals are currently undergoing peer review. D. Kerstetter said award notifications are expected by mid- to late-October.

## V. NEXT STEPS

Based on the discussion, the meeting yielded a handful of next steps:

- Southeast Region Office staff will continue producing and distributing quarterly Team updates, as they are highly valued by Team members. The existing format seems to work well for team members; no revisions were requested.
- The Team is expected to hold its next meeting in the fall of 2011. This meeting is expected to be an in-person meeting. NMFS and the CONCUR facilitation team will be in touch in 2011 to vet potential dates.
- Team members were asked to provide feedback via email or phone on the webinar format to B. Brooks and/or S. McCreary.

Any questions or comments regarding this meeting summary should be directed to Scott McCreary and Bennett Brooks with CONCUR or Laura Engleby and Erin Fougères with NMFS Southeast Region office. Scott and Bennett can be reached at 510-649-8008 and 212-678-0078, respectively; Laura can be contacted at 727-824-5312, while Erin can be reached at 727-824-5312.

**Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Team  
Webinar Teleconference  
Thursday, September 16, 2010, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.**

**DRAFT PROVISIONAL AGENDA**

*(As of 8/16/10; exact times and agenda items still subject to change,  
as not all presentations have been confirmed)*

**Welcome and Introductions** **1:00 p.m.**

- Meeting Objectives
- Agenda Review and Meeting Protocols
- Participant Self-Introductions

**Program Updates** **1:15 p.m.**

- Presentation and Team Discussion
  - Team Composition and membership (*Fougeres, 5 minutes*)
  - Recent findings on stock structure, bycatch and mortality estimates, research update and biopsy cruise plans (*Garrison/Rosel, 75 minutes*)
  - PLTRP compliance update (*Beerkircher, 20 minutes*)
  - Other (*20 minutes*)
    - False Killer Whale Take Reduction Program (*Young*)
    - Potential implications of BP oil spill for PLTRP implementation

**Break** **3:15 p.m.**

**Research Updates** **3:30 p.m.**

- Presentation and Team Discussion
  - Mid-Atlantic Bight (MAB) pilot whale project (*Read, 15 minutes*)
  - Variable strength hook results (*Kerstetter, 30 minutes - pending*)
  - Hook research updates (*Bergmann, 15 minutes*)
  - Research RFP status (*Fougeres, 10 minutes*)

**Next Steps** **4:40 p.m.**

- Team feedback on content and format of quarterly updates
- Future meetings (*planned for in-person, fall 2011*)
- Other

**Adjourn** **5:00 p.m.**