

HPTRT Webinar

Wednesday, November 30, 2016: 10:00am-12:00pm
Key Outcomes

I. Overview

The Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Team (Team) held a webinar on Wednesday, November 30, 2016. Objectives of the webinar included:

- a. Provide updates on membership since last meeting
- b. Review abundance, bycatch and compliance numbers from recent years
- c. Follow-up with sectors on pinger use
- d. Review progress on enforcement efforts

II. Participants

TRT Members/Alternates

Jackie Odell	Kristen Monsell	Regina Asmutis-Silvia	Jane Davenport	Kim McKown (and Lisa Bonacci)
Cheri Patterson	Scott Olszewski	Michael Greco	Russ Allen	Cindy Driscoll (and Amanda Weschler)
David Laist	Shanna Madsen	Bill McLellan	Sue Barco (and Mark Swingle)	Damon Gannon
Red Munden	Bill McCann	Pingguo He		

Staff from Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, NOAA General Counsel, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, NMFS Office of Protected Resources, and members of the public also participated (see attachment).

III. Topics Presented/ Discussed

- a. Welcome, Agenda Review, Membership Changes (Swails)
 - i. All presentations are posted on the Team's meeting webpage
 - ii. See Swails's presentation for a list of membership changes since the Team last met.
- b. Abundance, Bycatch, and Pinger Compliance (Palka/Orphanides)
 - i. Debra Palka presented an update on harbor porpoise abundance and the past season's field work. During 2016 US and Canadian scientists conducted line transect surveys from Florida to Newfoundland. The goal is to estimate a new abundance estimate for the Gulf of Maine/Bay of Fundy stock. The estimates will be in the next SAR.

- ii. Chris Orphanides presented recent bycatch estimates and compliance levels. Total estimated bycatch was at 211 which is the lowest estimate in a while. The 5-year mean bycatch has been decreasing since 2010. These numbers are draft numbers currently being reviewed by the SRG. There is still a theme of longer soak times and larger mesh sizes resulting in more bycatch.
 - 1. New England: Very low total bycatch estimate this year of 177. Most of the New England bycatch (73%) is in the winter in the Southern New England and Cape Cod South management areas. Total pinger compliance (referring to presence, not functionality) was 86%.
 - 2. Mid-Atlantic: Bycatch estimate was 33.49 and two takes occurred in February off New Jersey. Total compliance was 76%. Total large mesh compliance was 55% and small mesh compliance was 88%. There were also two hauls in a closed area.
 - iii. Orphanides also mentioned that the observer program is no longer using open air pinger testers due to accuracy issues. The program is considering revising pinger tester codes on the observer logs to interpret the 'unknown' value which is used when it is not known if pingers were present or pinging. Standardized comments would also help to assess pinger function via LED functionality. He pointed out that 6 harbor porpoises were caught on pinger tester hauls but no takes were directly associated with pingers of unknown functionality this past year.
 - iv. Generally, there was fairly consistent effort in New England during the winter and fall but effort shifts within the region. The lower annual bycatch in New England appears to correlate with increased use of pingers.
 - v. Discussion from the Team focused on potential effort shifts and reduction. Team members asked about the reduction of effort since 1995, how many total boats remain in the fleet, and if effort may shift again because of an upcoming Habitat Omnibus Amendment. The Palka and Orphanides looked at fishing effort in prep for this webinar but will look at it in greater detail. The Habitat Omnibus is not expected to shift effort as the availability of quota is the driving force behind effort and not opening a once closed area. To date, quota in New England has declined resulting in a decrease in effort.
 - vi. Members on the Team suggested that with observed shifts in effort to Southern New England (targeting monkfish) and with 73% of observed bycatch coming from this region perhaps there should be an emphasis on compliance in SNE.
- c. Report from Sectors on Pinger Use (Giacalone)
- i. Vito Giacalone, Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund (GFCPF), presented a chronology of pinger acquisitions and distributions. Vito described working with a pinger manufacturer to ensure that the high failure rate found in previous versions of pingers was corrected. Since 2010 GFCPF has nearly 8,000 pingers to active gillnetters. 6,300 of these pingers are LED pingers.

- d. Enforcement Updates (Provencher/Heckwolf)
 - i. Eric Provencher, Office of Law Enforcement, provided an update on actions taken with JEA state funding for MA, RI, and ME. During the fall, New England gillnet vessels are moving far offshore. In New England there has been a decrease in the gillnet fleet and effort in this fleet. Difficulties OLE faces include a lot of gillnetters have multiple permits to fish, so it is often hard to target/monitor a particular fleet/vessel or fishery if violations are detected. Enforceability is also difficult when using in-water pinger testers; it is preferred to board a boat and visually inspect the gear for compliance. They made a total of 16 contacts in which 13 were compliant and 3 were referred to the states for enforcement action. Details of these contacts can be found on the Team's website. Eric did not provide enforcement information for the Mid-Atlantic as funds are for JEA's in northern states (MA, RI, ME). In addition, pingers are not required in the Mid-Atlantic.
- e. Other Updates
 - i. GARFO has undergone a reorganization that created a new group within the Protected Resources Division. This group will focus efforts on Monitoring and Outreach. Some staff from the Marine Mammal/Sea Turtle group has moved over to this new group including, Dave Gouveia who will lead this new group. The TRT program will continue to be run under the Marine Mammal/Sea Turtle group.

IV. Next Steps

- a. The team raised many questions related to changes and shifts in gillnet effort. NMFS will coordinate with appropriate individuals to determine how best to answer remaining questions on gillnet effort now and in the future and how it has, or may affect, harbor porpoise bycatch.
- b. NMFS agreed to look more into Mid-Atlantic gillnet effort and summarize findings. It will take some time to do, but Center will also look into the decrease in harbor bycatch and see if there is any correlation with effort changes or pinger compliance.
- c. Since the webinar, a Team member suggested a potential way to increase compliance in the SNE area would be to build off of the success of Vito's program in the North. There is the potential to use the success of the northern program as a way to solicit financial partners in the environmental community. Team members are asked to provide NMFS their thoughts on ways we might help promote, raise funds to defray costs, and distribute new LED distribute pingers to fishermen in SNE. Vito's group will be constrained in using financial resources but could certainly assist via sharing contracts, providing pingers at cost and possibly even holding inventory to assist cash flows.

- d. The Team member requested that NMFS find out how many gillnetters operate out the ports along the Southern New England Coast to get a rough idea how many pingers may be needed in that area.

Attachment: Additional Webinar Participants

NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office

Michael Asaro
David Gouveia
Danielle Palmer
Mark Minton
Eric Provencher
Glenn Salvador

NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center

Debra Palka
Chris Orphanides
Sean Hayes
Amy Martins
Lisa Wilt
Justin Hanacek

NMFS Office of Protected Resources, Headquarters

Lisa White

NMFS Office of General Counsel

Julie Williams
Joseph Heckwolf

Public

Katie Moore, United States Coast Guard
Bennett Brooks, Consensus Building Inc.
Scott McCreary, Concur
Sarah Mallette, Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center