

HPTRT Webinar

Thursday, November 16, 2017: 10:00am – 11:30 am

Key Outcomes

1. **Overview**

Provide updates on membership since last meeting
Review abundance, bycatch and compliance numbers
Review progress on enforcement efforts

2. **Participants**

TRT Members/Alternates:

Jackie Odell	Tara Cox
Cheri Patterson	Damon Gannon
Scott Olszewski	Kristen Monsell
Michael Greco	Jane Davenport
Erin Burke	Regina Asmutis-Silvia
Angel Willey	Douglas Feeney
Red Munden	Mark Swingle
Kristy Long	Meghan Rickard
Kiley Dancy	Dan Salerno
William McCann	

Staff from Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, NOAA General Counsel, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and members of the public also participated.

3. **Topics Presented/Discussed**

Abundance, Bycatch and Compliance (Palka and Orphanides)

Debra Palka presented an update on harbor porpoise abundance and the past season's fieldwork. Preliminary analyses of 2016 summer data from just the US waters suggest that the current population estimate is not decreasing, which would then mean PBR would be similar. She is currently waiting to add the estimated abundance from the Canadian Gulf of Maine waters (that have been included in previous harbor porpoise abundance estimates) to the US abundance. The Canadian waters were surveyed by Canadian scientists in 2016. When the abundance from both the US and Canadian Gulf of Maine region are added together, then the PBR can be updated using this new abundance estimate. She also shared species density prediction maps from the Atlantic Marine Assessment Program for Protected Species (AMAPPS) surveys.

Chris Orphanides presented a summary of 2016 bycatch estimates, harbor porpoise take reduction plan (HPTRP) compliance levels, deployment of a new pinger tester data sheet,

discussed longer term effort and bycatch trends, and provided a brief overview of a study documenting harbor porpoise diet off southern New England. The 2016 estimated bycatch was 148 harbor porpoises: 125 takes in New England, most of which occurred off southern New England, and 23 in Mid-Atlantic. Observer coverage for 2016 increased to about 8% in the mid-Atlantic and decreased to 10% in New England. The 2016 pinger compliance was 75% overall, down from 86% in 2015. Chris reminded us that these compliance numbers refer to pinger presence only, not functionality. He also reviewed new observer pinger testing forms put into the field in November 2017 that remove fields that rely on air pinger testers, incorporate LED light functionality, and address reasons behind why pinger functionality is sometimes recorded as unknown. Pinger functionality data from 2016 and part of 2017 (prior to the implementation of the new form) were challenging to assess because of a large number of pingers with unknown functionality, though it appears that pinger functionality may have decreased from years past. Observers appeared to have trouble assessing pinger functionality because of boat noise, discerning which pinger was pinging, and the need to sample incidental catch.

Regarding overall trends, decreased total combined effort during the fall and winter in New England is paired with an increase in fall and winter effort in Southern New England. Winter large mesh effort off of New Jersey has also appeared to decrease since 2012, which may have played a role in decreased bycatch in this region during recent years. The 5-year mean bycatch continues to decrease, and is well under PBR. Chris also briefly discussed a diet study that preliminarily found that porpoises are eating small sized fish of a variety of species, such as hakes and cephalopods, that are not typically caught in the gillnets that incidentally catch harbor porpoise.

Monitoring the Plan (Keane)

Ellen Keane presented a monitoring update on behalf of the GARFO Monitoring team. Feedback is welcome on the new format for presenting this information. Suggestions included - include summary statement of TRP; include map of closed areas or could link to the website; consider who is target audience – TRT members, fishermen or the general public; clarify compliance vs. functionality in pingers; include type of pingers used, to inform industry; describe gear characteristics - location, mesh size etc. to put into context; and include missing Canadian data.

Enforcement Update (Provencher)

Eric Provencher provided an update on JEA funding and actions. He will provide written notes separately.

4. Notes and Next Steps

- Not stepping back on pushing for compliance – although compliance is still at 75%, it is down 11% from last year
 - Need to increase education and outreach for pinger and gear requirements to maintain/increase compliance
- Increase OLE's tiered analysis
- Increase dockside compliance checks
- Work with OLE and JEA to address non-compliance areas
- Identify issues with pinger damage and functionality/operational challenges with NOAA's gear team
- Continue developing monitoring document – **send feedback or ideas to Ainsley**
- Work on new abundance estimates using aerial surveys from the US and Canadian studies in 2016
- Work with DFO on their bycatch estimates
- NOAA would like to see feedback on monitoring report layout, other ways to improve meetings and webinars – **send feedback to Ainsley**

5. Additional Webinar Participants

NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Office

Ainsley Smith
David Gouveia
Ellen Keane
Kate Swails
Eric Provencher
Glenn Salvador

NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center

Debra Palka
Chris Orphanides
Sean Hayes
Amy Martins
Stephanie Petrus

NMFS Office of General Counsel

Julie Williams

Public

Bennett Brooks, Consensus Building Inc.
Scott McCreary, Concur
MJ Debrosky

Jacob Boyd