

**Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Team Webinar  
June 18, 2014**

**Key Outcomes Memorandum**

**Background:**

The National Marine Fisheries Service convened a webinar of the Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Team on June 18, 2014, to achieve the following objectives:

- Provide updates on bycatch data, recent developments in the fishery and research activity
- Address Team questions and comments, and consider implications for plan implementation
- Identify next steps

**Participation and Meeting Materials:**

The following 12 of the Team's 22 members (or alternates) participated in the call: Bill McLellan, Andrew Read, David Kerstetter, Brendan Cummings, Sharon Young, Beth Lowell, Terri Beideman, Glenn Delaney, Dewey Hemelwright, Fentress "Red" Munden, Laura Engleby and Kristy Long.

Staff from NMFS Southeast Regional Office and the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center also participated in the call, as did staff from NMFS headquarters, Office of General Counsel, Highly Migratory Species and the Pacific Islands Regional Office, as well as the U.S. Coast Guard. Scott McCreary with CONCUR and Bennett Brooks with the Consensus Building Institute facilitated the meeting. One member of the public joined the call.

The agency provided an agenda prior to the call. All other materials were presented during the call itself. Copies of meeting materials can be obtained by contacting Erin Fougères at 727-824-5323 or via email at erin.fougeres@noaa.gov.

**Key Outcomes**

L. Engleby welcomed participants to the call, noting the importance of taking stock of progress eight years after the Team's first meeting, and five years after PLTRP implementation, to begin considering whether there is a need for additional strategies to reduce mortalities and serious injuries. S. McCreary and B. Brooks reviewed the agenda and meeting protocols.

*Research Updates:*

The call included several updates on recent research activity. These included the following:

- **Weak hook research.** Charlie Bergmann with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) provided preliminary results of the Atlantic 2013-14 18/0 weak hook studies. The results compared control versus experimental weak hooks by: (1) catch rates of target species; (2) mean dressed weight and length; and (3) bait types. The preliminary results suggest a statistically significant increase in swordfish catch on the experimental hook (30.6% difference). He noted that additional research is needed to be done with other vessels to compile a more robust data set and in that way build greater buy-in for the use of weaker hooks in the fleet.

Team member comments focused on better understanding the details of specific interactions; in particular, understanding the nature and extent of remaining gear left on the animals and a logical rationale for the higher catch rates on weaker hooks. (C. Bergmann suggested bait may look more natural on lighter hooks.)

- **Hook testing research.** E. Fougères informed the Team that NMFS has provided additional funding to B. McLellan to do more testing (a data set of four additional hook types) of hook properties when tested in marine mammal heads, and she sought Team feedback on recommended candidate hook types to include in the follow-up research. (She also noted that NMFS has recommended testing Korean round carbon 18/0 hook.) Individual Team member recommendations centered on the following:
  - Include a 16/0 weak hook, since it was just included in the recent weak hook study
  - More generally, align hooks being tested with those being used in the ongoing weak hook studies
  - Ensure that any hook tested is consistent with sea turtle hook regulations

More broadly, Team members recommended compiling a comprehensive database that characterizes hooks used and studied and coded by several core elements: wire size and shape, flattened or round, offset, tempering of steel, maker, etc. Such a database, Team members said, would facilitate a more focused dialogue.

- **Satellite telemetry.** A. Read provided a brief update on preliminary results of the deployment of satellite-linked transmitters on short-finned pilot whales in the Atlantic. He noted two specific patterns based on data analyzed to-date from the tags: (1) most pilot whales move back and forth along the shelf break; and (2) pilot whales tend to move north during early summer. Read noted the program's intention to deploy more tags in the Atlantic this fall and again in 2015, with the goal of gathering data that can help further inform seasonal movements, habitat and temperature preferences. Finally, he noted that (1) a parallel tagging program in the Bahamas is generating data that could have implications for abundance calculations, and (2) Danielle Waples is testing interactive pingers in the Cape

Hatteras Special Research Area (CHSRA) with pelagic longline vessels from Wanchese, North Carolina.

- **Line cutter.** E. Fougères showed a brief video demonstrating a line cutter recently developed by C. Bergmann. The cutter is currently being tested on the water.

#### *Recent Data and Fishery Trends*

E. Fougères kicked off the presentations by noting that, consistent with the Team's widely-supported recommendation at its last in-person meeting, the Agency sent letters in 2013 to 46 vessel owner/operators who violated the explicit 20-nautical-mile mainline length regulations in the mid-Atlantic bight. (Specifically, letters were sent only to those vessels with mainline length sets greater than 25 nautical miles.) A copy of the letter text was shared with Team members.

Lance Garrison with the SEFSC then provided a detailed update on short-finned pilot whale stock assessment reports and mortality estimates, as well as an overview of trends in mainline length usage by the fleet. L. Garrison noted that there have been two updates to the SAR since the Team last met. The draft 2013 SARS is now being finalized; the draft 2014 SARS will be out for public comment shortly.

Key updates centered on the following:

- Ongoing work by the SEFSC suggests that water temperatures remain an effective way to make short- and long-finned stock assignments, though there is some uncertainty in stock assignment off the toe of Georges Bank.
- The most recent total abundance estimate for short-finned pilot whales is 21,515, with an  $N_{\min}$  of 15,913 and a PBR of 159 animals.
- The five-year average for mortality and serious injuries between 2008-2012 is 140, which is below the current PBR of 159. Total 2013 bycatch for pilot whales in the Atlantic is estimated to be 114 animals, moving the five-year average (2009-2013) to 147 (still below PBR). However, it was noted that five-year average will almost certainly increase substantially (and very possibly to a level above PBR) in future SARs, once the low bycatch in 2009 is no longer included in the data set that is used to compute the rolling five-year average.
- Pilot whale catch per unit effort in 2013 was lower than the prior two years, but is consistent with the overall cyclic pattern observed in prior years. Effort has been increasing over time.
- The most recent data suggests a greater percentage of observed sets are consistent with the 20-nautical mile length limit, with the number of sets greater than 20 nautical miles dropping from 58% in the 2010-2012 time period to 11% in 2013.

- At the same time, the observed data suggests a sharp increase in observed multiple sets (immediately sequential sets deployed by the same vessel (1) with less than 5 minutes between the end of the first set and the start of the next and (2) within 1 nautical mile of each other), increasing from about 5% historically to 42% during 2013. Typical mainline length of the observed immediately sequential sets is 15-18 miles. Implications for bycatch rate from this change in fishery practice are not yet known and may take a year or longer to better understand.

### *Discussion*

In addition to posing several clarifying questions to better understand the data presented, Team discussions included the following comments and observations:

- Commending the Agency for following up with those vessels that had not been complying with the 20-nautical mile mainline length limitation. Team members noted the apparent impact of stepped-up compliance efforts and encouraged the Agency to continue its effort and share the results broadly with TRT members and other interested parties.
- Voicing concern that bycatch may well grow to a number that exceeds PBR within the next two years, thereby making it necessary for the Team to begin identifying new management strategies capable of reducing bycatch. Specific suggestions for next steps included:
  - Underscoring the importance of eliciting industry feedback as soon as possible on the viability of a variety of potential hook modifications and other potential management measures. (See discussion below on *Outreach Efforts and Future Meetings* for more discussion of this point.)
  - Continuing efforts to identify potential modifications to terminal tackle
  - Recommending the Agency review lessons and findings from a recent international predation-reduction workshop to identify potential strategies (changing the acoustic signature, altering set patterns, eliminating hooks in middle of a set, etc.)
  - Considering strategies to reduce entanglements in mainlines
- Pressing for additional data analysis to better understand the potential ramifications of sequential sets – differential catch rates, interaction rates, etc. (One Team member noted sequential sets are little used in the CHSRA given the level of activity and limited space.)

One Team member sought an update on observer program issues related to the CHSRA; Observer Program staff noted that compliance with call-in requirements has generally been strong. Another Team member asked for an update on other pending fishery regulations that could potentially impact TRP effectiveness; HMS staff noted that, while no changes are

imminent, several important HMS revisions are being considered for both Bluefin tuna (Amendment 7), sea turtles (reinitiated biological opinion) and dusky sharks.

### *Outreach Efforts and Future Meetings*

The Team considered timing and strategies to engage fishermen in the next in-person meeting. Among the points raised were the following:

- Convene an in-person meeting during the first half of 2015, as that would enable the Team to draw on Observer Program data gathered in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters of 2014. Given fisheries and researcher constraints, the Team focused preliminarily on March or early April timeframe.
- When setting a specific time, NMFS was asked to consider the lunar cycle, fishing season and other rulemaking conflicts. It was also recommended that a meeting be held in the mid-Atlantic region to foster more widespread participation by affected fishermen.
- NMFS was encouraged to consider convening a separate and more informal workshop to get fishermen more engaged and gather their input and ideas regarding the viability of changes to terminal tackle. One concept would be to piggyback a workshop on an existing wintertime fisheries-related meeting.

### **Next Steps:**

Based on the discussion, the call yielded the following next steps:

- Consider holding an informal fishermen workshop in winter 2014/2015 to gather input into possible changes to terminal tackle (and other ideas) to reduce mortalities and serious injuries. NMFS will work with T. Beideman and others to identify possible timing and locations.
- Consider convening an in-person TRT meeting in March/early April 2015 to continue Team deliberations on strategies to reduce M&SI.
- S. McCreary and B. Brooks are to draft a key outcomes memorandum summarizing Team deliberations and proposed next steps.

Any questions or comments regarding this meeting summary should be directed to Scott McCreary and Bennett Brooks or Erin Fougères with NMFS Southeast Region office. Scott and Bennett can be reached at 510-649-8008 and 212-678-0078, respectively; Erin can be contacted at 727-824-5323.