



NOAA
FISHERIES

Northeast
Region

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement from John Bullard:

Decision to Temporarily Shift the Gillnet Fishery Closure to Protect Harbor Porpoise to February 2013

To provide greater protection to harbor porpoise, I have decided that NOAA is going to take steps to shift, for one year, the gillnet fishery closure in the coastal Gulf of Maine slated for October and November to February and March. The closure will be implemented on February 1, 2013. The location and duration of the closure will remain the same.

Since 2010 harbor porpoise bycatch appears to be higher during February and March when compared to historical bycatch, which was highest in October and November. Adjusting the closure to begin in February should result in fewer harbor porpoise entanglements in commercial gillnet gear, if fishing behavior is consistent with recent years.

With the closure scheduled to begin soon, I felt it was imperative that we act quickly to evaluate this new information given the benefits to both harbor porpoise and fishermen. Normally we would have waited to share this information with the team of fishermen, environmentalists, scientists and managers who developed the original harbor porpoise/gillnet fishery plan when they meet in late October. My decision in no way reflects a lack of appreciation for the partnership we have with this team. We very much value this partnership and will continue to rely on their collective knowledge and expertise to identify long-term solutions to reduce fishery/harbor porpoise interactions. Our goal, like that of the team, is to protect harbor porpoise, and this action helps accomplish that goal.

I want to express my appreciation to the members of the Northeast Seafood Coalition for their offer to do more to help reduce harbor porpoise entanglements during October and November. It is critical that gillnet fishermen use the appropriate number of pingers (acoustic deterrent devices developed by fishermen) and ensure that they are properly working in all required areas. Proper pinger use is especially important in the Massachusetts Bay and Stellwagen Bank Management Areas beginning October 1 (a month earlier than otherwise required).

By using pingers effectively in the past, fishermen were able to reduce harbor porpoise entanglements from a high of nearly 1500 animals per year to 310 animals per year. We need that same amount of focused attention to reduce harbor porpoise entanglements now.

Working together, we can protect harbor porpoise and keep fishermen on the water.

John K. Bullard, NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Administrator