



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
NORTHEAST REGION
One Blackburn Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930-2298

March 3, 2005

Dear Trap/Pot and Gillnet Fisherman:

On February 25, 2005, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a Notice of Availability (NOA) in the *Federal Register* announcing the issuance of an Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (70 FR 9306). The DEIS identifies alternatives for amending the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) and analyzes the impacts of the proposed amendments to the ALWTRP on the human environment (i.e. biological, social, and economic factors). NMFS will be publishing a notice in the *Federal Register* announcing the dates and locations of several public hearings to be held during the public comment period (see schedule on reverse side). NMFS will also be publishing a proposed rule in the *Federal Register*, which will describe how modifications to the ALWTRP will be implemented.

The ALWTRP was developed pursuant to Section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) to reduce the level of serious injury and mortality of three strategic stocks of large whales (North Atlantic right, humpback, and fin) in Category I and II fisheries (i.e., those with frequent or occasional serious injury or mortality of marine mammals). The measures identified in the ALWTRP were also intended to benefit minke whales, which are not a strategic stock, but are known to be taken incidentally in gillnet and trap/pot fisheries. Since its implementation in 1997, the ALWTRP has been modified on several occasions to further reduce the serious injury and mortality of large whales in gillnet and lobster trap/pot gear.

In response to the continued serious injury and mortality of large whales from entanglement in commercial fishing gear, NMFS determined that additional modifications to the ALWTRP were warranted. Therefore, NMFS reconvened the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) in April 2003 to help evaluate the ALWTRP and discuss additional modifications necessary to meet the goals of the MMPA and Endangered Species Act (ESA). NMFS published a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register* to announce the agency's intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which would analyze the impacts of alternatives for amending the ALWTRP (68 FR 38676, June 30, 2003). NMFS held several public scoping meetings along the east coast in July 2003. Proposals developed by the ALWTRT at its April 2003 meeting and subsequent subgroup meetings were used to develop an issues and options document, which was made available to the public during the scoping process.

As a result of public input received during the DEIS scoping process, NMFS developed six alternatives, including a "No Action" or status quo alternative, to modify the ALWTRP. Although NMFS identified six alternatives, two of which are preferred, public comments are sought on all the alternatives. After considering comments received on the DEIS and proposed rule, NMFS will select one of the alternatives for implementation in the final rule. To obtain a complete copy of the DEIS and proposed rule (when published), please contact Marcia Hobbs (978-281-9300 ext. 6505 or Marcia.Hobbs@noaa.gov) or visit the ALWTRP web page (www.nero.nmfs.gov/whaletrp/). For questions regarding this action, please contact the ALWTRP Coordinator, Diane Borggaard (978-281-9300 ext. 6503 or Diane.Borggaard@noaa.gov).

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Kurkul
Regional Administrator



Schedule of ALWTRP DEIS Public Hearings

The dates, times, and locations of the ALWTRP DEIS public hearings are scheduled as follows:

- 1. Monday, March 14, 2005- Virginia Beach, VA**
6 - 9 PM
Sheraton Oceanfront
3501 Atlantic Ave
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23451
- 2. Tuesday, March 15, 2005-Kill Devil Hills, NC**
6 - 9 PM
Ramada Plaza/Nag's Head Beach
1701 S. Virginia Dare Trail
Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina 27948
- 3. Wednesday, March 16, 2005- Wilmington, NC**
6 - 9 PM
Ramada Inn Conference Center
5001 Market Street
Wilmington, North Carolina 28405
- 4. Monday, March 21, 2005-Barnegat Light, NJ**
6 - 9 PM
Barnegat Light Volunteer Fire House
W. 10th Street & Central Avenue
Barnegat Light, New Jersey 08006
- 5. Tuesday, March 22, 2005-Ocean City, MD**
6 - 9 PM
Clarion Resort Fontainebleau Hotel
10100 Coastal Highway
Ocean City, Maryland 21842
- 6. Wednesday, March 23, 2005-Cape Canaveral, FL**
6 - 9 PM
Radisson Resort at the Port
8701 Astronaut Blvd
Cape Canaveral, Florida 32920
- 7. Monday, March 28, 2005 -Plymouth, MA**
6 - 9 PM
Radisson Hotel - Plymouth Harbor
180 Water Street
Plymouth, MA 02360
- 8. Tuesday, March 29, 2005- Newport, RI**
6 - 9 PM
Hotel Viking
1 Bellevue Ave
Newport, RI 02840
- 9. Thursday, March 31, 2005 -Gloucester, MA**
6 - 9 PM
Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
30 Emerson Ave
Gloucester, MA 01930
- 10. Monday, April 4, 2005- Ellsworth, ME**
6 - 9 PM
Holiday Inn
215 High Street
Ellsworth, ME 04605
- 11. Tuesday, April 5, 2005 - Rockport, ME**
6 - 9 PM
Samoset Resort
220 Warrenton Street
Rockport, Maine 04856
- 12. Thursday, April 7, 2005- Portland, ME**
6 - 9 PM
Holiday Inn By the Bay
88 Spring Street
Portland, Maine 04101