



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

SEP - 7 2006

Dear Gillnet Vessel Owner/Operator:

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northeast Region Protected Resources Division staff have planned a series of outreach and education meetings related to the Gulf of Maine and Mid-Atlantic components of the Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan (HPTRP). These meetings will occur between October 2006 and January 2007. This letter is intended to provide you with information about the dates, locations, and purpose of these meetings.

Since the 1998 development and implementation of the HPTRP, takes of harbor porpoise by gillnet fisheries diminished significantly. However, recent observer information collected from 2004 to the present shows an increase in harbor porpoise takes in commercial gillnet fisheries. In some cases, these takes were linked to a lack of compliance by vessel operators with the HPTRP requirements. For vessels observed in the Gulf of Maine, lack of compliance included the absence, as well as the improper use, of pingers. In addition, further review of vessel trip report (VTR) data from 2005 to the present indicated some vessels fishing within HPTRP management areas when gillnets are prohibited, such as during the month of March in the Massachusetts Bay Closure Area. For the Mid-Atlantic, lack of compliance with the HPTRP requirements included non-compliance with the allowable number of nets per gillnet string.

In response to the above information, NMFS will be conducting outreach meetings with industry this fall and early winter at six ports from New Hampshire to New Jersey, which have been selected based on locations of high gillnet fishing effort as well as locations of observed harbor porpoise takes (see schedule on the reverse side). At these meetings, NMFS Northeast Region Protected Resources Division staff will review the current HPTRP regulations for both the Gulf of Maine and Mid-Atlantic regions. These meetings will also include pinger certification training and/or a pinger training refresher course (for the New England meetings only), as well as the distribution of new outreach materials durable enough to be kept on board your vessel. NMFS' goal is to meet with industry in an informal setting and raise awareness of the HPTRP.

For more information about the Gulf of Maine and Mid-Atlantic HPTRP outreach meetings, including directions and topics to be covered, please visit the HPTRP web site at http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/porptrp and click on "What's New" or contact one of the NMFS Northeast Region's Protected Resources staff members: Amanda Johnson at (978) 281-9300 extension 6513, John Higgins (Northeast liaison) at (207) 677-2316, or Glenn Salvador (Mid-Atlantic liaison) at (757) 414-0128.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Kurkul
Regional Administrator



Schedule of HPTRP Outreach Meetings

The HPTRP outreach meetings will take place at the following dates, locations, and times:

Tuesday, October 3, 2006 – 6 P.M.

Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
Annisquam River Marine Fisheries Field Station
30 Emerson Avenue
Gloucester, MA 01930

Thursday, October 5, 2006 – 6 P.M.

Urban Forestry Center
45 Elwyn Road
Portsmouth, NH 03801

Wednesday, November 1, 2006 – 6 P.M.

Corliss Auditorium
University of Rhode Island Narragansett Bay Campus
South Ferry Road
Narragansett, RI 02882

Thursday, November 2, 2006 – 6 P.M.

Hampton Inn New Bedford/Fairhaven
1 Hampton Way
Fairhaven, MA 02719

Thursday, November 9, 2006 – 6 P.M.

Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association
210-E Orleans Road
North Chatham, MA 02650

Wednesday, November 15, 2006 - 5:30 P.M.

(Following adjournment of the New England Fishery Management Council meeting)
Tavern on the Harbor
30 Western Avenue
Gloucester, MA 01930

Tuesday, January 30, 2007 – 6 P.M.

Ferrara's Restaurant
518 Arnold Avenue
Point Pleasant Beach, NJ 08742