There are two species of pilot whales in the western Atlantic—
the short-finned pilot whale (Globicephala macrorhynchus) and the long-finned pilot whale (Globicephala melas).
These species are difficult to distinguish from one another at sea. Long-finned pilot whales are found primarily in the northern portion of the North Atlantic, and short-finned pilot whales are found primarily in the southern portion but live throughout the entire Atlantic. Habitat preferences are generally associated with water depth and temperature. Pilot whales are distributed holistically along the continental shelf-ridge off the southeast U.S. coast, and early spring to late spring, the short-finned pilot whales move closer to Georges Bank and out of the Gulf of Maine and more northerly waters, and remain in these areas through late autumn.

Pilot whales tend to occur in areas of high relief or submerged banks. They are also associated with the Gulf Stream wall and thermal fronts along the continental shelf edge. Pilot whales are distributed primarily along the continental shelf edge off the northeast USA coast, and are associated with the shelf-ridge and over prominent underwater topography from 50°N to 40°S latitude. In waters off the northeastern USA coast, the short-finned pilot whale is distributed from North Carolina to North Africa (and the Atlantic or long-finned pilot whale (Globicephala melas)) and the Atlantic or long-finned pilot whale (Globicephala melas) and short-finned pilot whales are found principally along the continental shelf-ridge off the southeast U.S. coast.

HARNESS is currently involved in defining areas which are critical to the survival and recovery of these species. Pilot whales are very social, and studies have shown that many remain in a social group for life. In order to protect these whales, areas must be defined which are critical to their survival and recovery. Pilot whales are distributed throughout tropical to warm temperate waters. The northern extent of the range of this species within the U.S. Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone is generally thought to be Delaware Bay.

Species of Concern

Atlantic White-sided Dolphin

Lagenorhynchus acutus

HABIT AT: Temperate and sub-polar waters of the North Atlantic, primarily in continental shelf waters of the 200–600 m depth contour. The species establishes wintering centers in South Carolina, offshore Florida and South Georgia, and along the 匍匐 edge of the continental shelf off New England and the Scotian Shelf. The species is distributed from Georges Bank to Jeffrey Ledge (off New Hampshire), with even lower numbers south of Georges Bank, as documented by a few specimens collected off New England and Nova Scotia in February and March. These observations appear to represent the southern extent of the species’ range. From June through September, large numbers of Atlantic white-sided dolphins are found in Georges Bank area. From January to April, these dolphins occur at significant densities from south of Georges Bank to Cape Hatteras, although herds have been reported as far south as eastern Florida.

DIET: Variety of small schooling fish and squid.

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Reducing Marine Mammal Interactions in Atlantic Trawl Fisheries

The distribution of observers is generally based on historic information of takes in the area, the type of fishing gear that is most critical in making management decisions to mitigate bycatch while ensuring bycatch reduction methods do not negatively impact commercially protected resources, and to monitor the status and health of marine mammals and sea turtles. These data are used to identify fisheries that interact with protected species, to estimate the take of marine mammals and sea turtles, and to evaluate the reliability of reports submitted by vessel owners and operators, which is listed as a threatened or endangered species under the ESA, or is designated as depleted under the MMPA.

The holder of a valid state or federal permit for a fishery that falls under one or more of the Category I or II fisheries is required to register under the Marine Mammal Authorization Program (MMAP). The MMPA requires all vessels participating in Category I and II to register under the MMAP. The MMPA also provides an authorization for commercial fishermen from the general taking prohibitions of the MMPA.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act — A Brief Overview

In 1972 Congress enacted the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), establishing a federal program to prevent the overexploitation of marine mammal populations, to minimize human incursions into the habitats of marine mammals, and to ensure their conservation and recovery. The MMPA is implemented through the authority, direction, and coordination of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in conjunction with other federal agencies.

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Voluntary Measures to Reduce Takes in Atlantic Trawl Fisheries

• Reporting all injuries and mortalities of marine mammals within 48 hours of returning from the trip, or in the case of non-vessel fisheries, during which the takes occurred using the mortality/injury reporting form.

• Taking an observer aboard, at need, of vessels registered in the MMAP.

• Implementing zero-time limits for the transitory taking of marine mammals.

• Using alternate fishing tactics to reduce interactions with marine mammals.

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Atlantic Trawl Gear Take Reduction Team (ATGTR T)

In September 2006, NMFS convened the ATGTR T under the MMPA. The ATGTR T is intended to address the following ecological and management needs:.


2. Addressing a specific need identified by the NMFS in implementing regulations that vary from specific guidelines.

3. Reporting all injuries and mortalities of marine mammals within 48 hours of returning from the trip, or in the case of non-vessel fisheries, during which the takes occurred using the mortality/injury reporting form.

4. Taking an observer aboard, at need, of vessels registered in the MMAP.

5. Implementing zero-time limits for the transitory taking of marine mammals.

6. Using alternate fishing tactics to reduce interactions with marine mammals.

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