

Harbor Porpoise Enforcement
Massachusetts Bay
March 2006

Background

The Harbor Porpoise Plan (HPP) prohibits the use of gillnets capable of catching multi species fish in an area called the Massachusetts Bay Closure Area (MBCA) during the month of March. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a state waters regulation which prohibits sink or bottom gillnets from Provincetown to Marblehead, including Cape Cod Bay, which complements the HP closure. These measures are for the protection of harbor porpoise.

NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), the United States Coast Guard (USCG), the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP) and NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources Division mounted an effort in March of 2006 to patrol the area and determine compliance levels within the HPP closure.

The area was patrolled using aerial and vessel resources provided by the USCG and MEP.

Results

No gillnets were observed in the Massachusetts Bay Closed Area. Compliance with the harbor porpoise gillnet prohibition was 100% for the days patrolled.

NOAA OLE/PRD and Mass Environmental Police Patrol:

No gillnet activity regulated by the HPP was observed. The patrol shifted focus to vessels and gear regulated by the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (Whale Plan). Two vessels, one gillnet and one lobster, were boarded and eight surface systems (buoys, floats, etc.) were checked for compliance with Whale Plan regulations. One warning and two violations of the Whale Plan regulations were issued as a result of these patrol efforts.

USCG Aerial Resources:

HU25 (Falcon) - 1 sortie. 2 hours. Sightings of gear (surface buoys) and fishing vessels operating in the area were observed though no gillnet vessels were observed.

USCG Vessel Resources:

USCGC SANIBEL (110' patrol boat) -
3 days (16 hours total in the MBCA)
60 sightings
47 queries
7 boardings
1 warning issued for gillnet 300 yds inside Western Gulf of Maine Closed Area(Multi Species FMP)
1 violation issued to a dragger (Early Times) for fishing with a small mesh net (Multi Species)

Notes: Most vessels operating in the area were from the ports of Gloucester, Scituate, Sandwich or Newburyport. Most vessels observed actively fishing were utilizing hook & line gear.

The NOAA Protected Resources Division thanks NOAA Fisheries OLE, the USCG and the Massachusetts Environmental Police for their efforts and looks forward to future enforcement activities.