Additional Answers & Questions for the April 2013 Harbor Porpoise Working Group Meeting

Responses provided by Chris Orphanides, NEFSC, Protected Species Branch

Southern New England Update

How is the bycatch tracking in the South of Cape Cod area to this point? I believe a consequence closure was averted, in part, because both ASM and NEFOP data were not used for the first 2 years. But I understand from the call that ASM data are now being used in calculations. Is that true? And, following on that, based on the most recent year of data to date, what is the bycatch rate and is a consequence closure South of New England likely to be triggered based on the trigger in the current TRP?

In the NEFOP data 8 takes have been observed from December through March in Southern New England (2 in Dec, 2 in Jan, and 4 in March). One take was also observed in SNE on an ASM trip in January. As a comparison, the 2011-2012 HPTRP season had 3 observed takes and 104.60 observed landed metric tons, resulting in a bycatch rate above the target rate (0.029 vs 0.023). If the amount of NEFOP observed effort is about the same last season, the 2012-2013 bycatch rate would be well above the target rate (8/104.60 = 0.076). The amount of observed NEFOP effort would have to have increased greatly over last season for the two-year rate to be below the Southern New England target rate. ASM data has been used for the annual SAR estimates, but in previous consequence closure rate calculations, only the NEFOP data has been used to evaluate possible closures. Only NEFOP data was used to calculate the consequence closure bycatch rates because only NEFOP data was used to derive the trigger rates.

Pinger Compliance

Would the agency happen to know what the "compliance rate" (defined as both deployment of the correct number of pingers as well as the functionality of pingers) over this fall compared with previous years?

During the fall of 2012 pinger compliance in terms of deployment was 94.3% in the Coastal Gulf of Maine associated areas and 84.8% in Southern New England. Most non-compliant hauls in the CGOM appeared to be missing just one pinger as the hauls had on average 90% of the required pingers when not compliant. In SNE non-compliant hauls had on average 75% of the required pingers.

Among the hauls tested for functionality in HPTPP management areas during the fall of 2012, 84.8% of hauls with a full suite of pingers had all of the pingers functional. This is despite 97.5% of all pingers tested working in 2012. If this functionality is taken into consideration as was done in the past, the compliance rate would be 79% in the CGOM (94.3% x 8.48%) and 71.9% in SNE (84.8% x 84.8%)

During the fall, bycatch rates on compliant pinger hauls were roughly 1/3 of non-compliant hauls within areas that could trigger a closure (10hp/279.28mtons = 0.036 vs 2hp/18.77mtons = 0.106). For the calendar year, compliant hauls in areas that could trigger a closure were roughly half that of non-compliant hauls (vs 22hp/814.63mtons = 0.027 vs 7/122.97 = 0.057).

For 2012, there were 5 harbor porpoise caught on hauls with pinger testers present. Two hauls had all pingers present and working. One haul was missing one pinger and several pingers were not tested since the trip was focused on fish catch. However, the two pingers closest to the catch were reported to be working. One hauls caught 2 harbor porpoise, one pinger was missing, and another was not functioning.