

ALWTRP Scoping Meeting
Morehead City, NC
July 26, 2011

NMFS Staff: Dave Gouveia, Kate Swails, Glenn Salvador, Mike Asaro

Number in attendance (not counting NMFS staff): 8

Including:

- Red Munden, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, Take Reduction Team State Representative
- Tom Burgess, Take Reduction Team Industry Representative

NOTES: This meeting began with introductory remarks by Mr. Gouveia, and overviews of the regulatory process, the purpose of scoping, large whale serious injury and mortality, and the co-occurrence model. Ms. Swails continued the presentation, discussing what the model means for mid-Atlantic fishermen. She and Mr. Gouveia then responded to comments and questions.

Meeting began at 6:00pm:

Mr. Gouveia provided an introduction

Scoping, statutory requirements, etc.

New management strategy focusing on specific areas, not broad-based

Scoping solicits feedback from stakeholders, early in the regulatory process

Mr. Gouveia provided an overview of ESA and MMPA requirements

Mr. Gouveia provided a summary of past ALWTRP measures, 1996 to present

Mr. Gouveia provided a summary of SI&M and PBR for right, humpback, and fin whales

Mr. Gouveia provided a summary of vertical line development

Description of co-occurrence

Development of co-occurrence model

Ms. Swails provided a summary of rulemaking goal and timeline

Ms. Swails provided management options: reduce line or make line safer

Address vertical lines

Address gear marking

Address gear characterization and reporting

Ms. Swails provided a presentation on gear, whale SPUE, and co-occurrence in the mid-Atlantic

Ms. Swails provided NMFS' mid-Atlantic goals

Gear marking

Monitoring plan/reporting

Ms. Swails provided a request for proposals

One commenter requested info on whale entanglements in sea bass pot gear.

Mr. Gouveia responded that it is difficult to identify gear to a region, and emphasized the need for better gear marking to accomplish this.

Commenter said he has never seen a whale in 50 years of fishing.

Mr. Gouveia explained that that is why effective gear marking could benefit mid-Atlantic fisheries.

One commenter expressed frustration that sea bass pot fishery is being restricted due to whale presence in NC, but there are few sightings and little co-occurrence.

Mr. Gouveia explained that this would be another benefit for mid-Atlantic fisheries industry from an effective gear marking system.

The same commenter suggested painting lines as a marking method.

One commenter stated that North Carolina fishermen use single pot trawls in under 20 fathoms.

Several commenters agreed that marking once in the top third and bottom third would be reasonable and effective.

One commenter stated that marking would not be a problem, but expressed frustration with current closures in the sea bass fishery.

One commenter asked if whale meat of taken whales could be used to feed starving people and also suggested using whale teeth for scrimshaw.

Mr. Gouveia explained that these suggestions are illegal under the MMPA.

The same commenter asked if there has been research into reflective lines to allow whales to “see” vertical lines in the water.

Ms. Swails explained that research on stiff rope and other technologies is being conducted.

Mr. Gouveia explained that there currently are feasibility limits to implementing these new technologies, stating that more research is required.

One commenter inquired about other ideas fishing industry representatives have provided NMFS in the scoping process.

Ms. Swails explained that gear marking, trawling up, and closures have all been discussed.

One commenter asked what gillnetters in particular have commented during the scoping process.

Ms. Swails explained that the data suggest that trap/pot fisheries are the primary concern. Mr. Gouveia explained that while others on the ALWTRT may disagree, NMFS is identifying trap/pots as the primary concern.

One commenter stated that increasing soak time of gear and fishing excessive numbers of pots is a concern to him. He stated that gear should be tended and fishermen should only fish what they can effectively tend. He suggested that gear should be brought in at night and referenced the black sea bass pot fishery in particular.

TRT member stated that this is under consideration by the MAFMC for the black sea bass FMP.

One commenter stated that he suspects there will be more important issues to be discussed with fishermen off of FL and GA in right whale calving grounds.

One commenter was pessimistic about the likelihood that NC fishermen will not be adversely affected by new regulations. He stated that environmental NGOs such as Pew and OCEANA will force NMFS to implement additional regulations. Despite this pessimism, he stated that he likes what he is hearing from Mr. Gouveia and Ms. Swails.

The same commenter called for Jane Lubchenco's resignation due to her past connections to Pew.

Several commenters restated that they see very few whales in NC waters, only transient animals.

Mr. Gouveia reiterated the importance of the scoping process and again requested NC fishermen work with TRT members to submit proposals.

One commenter stated that there are high numbers of NC gillnetters and trap/pot fishermen in NC, many of whom would be interested in hearing what was said at this scoping meeting, and also expressed his frustration with winter closures in the black sea bass fishery.

Two commenters stated that their experience with weak links showed their deterioration in water over time.

Mr. Gouveia gave a summary of the forthcoming monitoring plan and anticipated monitoring period. He emphasized that NMFS will be monitoring the effectiveness of the ALWTRP after this endline rule, with the exception of potential entanglements new or emerging fisheries.

TRT member commented on the jurisdictional differences in NC between the mid-Atlantic and southeast fishery management councils north and south of Cape Hatteras.

One commenter stated his concern that dead whales that were entangled in northern waters will float to the mid-Atlantic and be falsely attributed to mid-Atlantic/southern fisheries.

Mr. Gouveia reiterated the importance of marking requirements in addressing this concern.

Mr. Gouveia and Ms. Swails gave a concluding summary

Those in attendance approved of the use of co-occurrence as a management strategy and marking top and bottom third of endlines.

Several in attendance asked Mr. Salvador a few questions about the characteristics of past recovered gear.

Mr. Salvador answered the questions, indicating the high level of uncertainty involved in recovering and identifying entangling gear.

One commenter asked how large whale stock assessments are updated.

Mr. Gouveia explained the stock assessment process and discussed the status of right and humpback whales.

Mr. Gouveia explained the ESA 5 year status review process.

One commenter discussed vessel collisions pertaining to right whale scarification and mortality.

One commenter pointed to the high vessel traffic in the NC area.

Mr. Gouveia and Ms. Swails concluded the meeting.