

**ALWTRP Scoping Meeting
Virginia Beach, VA
July 27, 2011**

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

Number in attendance (not counting NMFS staff): 5

Including:

- Mark Swingle, VA Aquarium and Marine Science Center, Take Reduction Team Conservation Representative

NOTES: This meeting did not have any Industry members in attendance. Mr. Gouveia and Ms. Swails gave their mid-Atlantic presentation and addressed questions and comments from those in attendance.

Meeting began at 6:00pm:

Mr. Gouveia provided an introduction
Scoping overview, rulemaking process overview

Mr. Gouveia provided an overview of ESA and MMPA mandates
Biological opinions
TRT process, PBR, and mandates

Mr. Gouveia provided a review of the history of the ALWTRP regulatory actions

Mr. Gouveia provided a summary on the need for addressing endline entanglements

Mr. Gouveia provided a presentation on the status of large whale stocks, PBR numbers, and recent entanglement events

Mr. Gouveia provided a summary of the vertical line model development
Inputs: whale SPUE and gear characterization

Mr. Gouveia summary of methods and results of vertical line modeling

Ms. Swails provided a presentation on the regulatory timeline
Proposed rule 2013
Final Rule 2014

Ms. Swails provided a summary of the 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 the co-occurrence data and suggested measures in the mid-Atlantic

Emphasizing gear marking

Ms. Swails described the request for proposals and described methods to submit them to NMFS

One commenter asked if known entanglement locations had been compared to co-occurrence data.

Ms. Swails indicated that the two datasets have been compared.

Mr. Gouveia mentioned the difficulty in attributing entanglements to fisheries and locations and emphasized the need for better gear marking.

One commenter inquired about suggestions made by fishermen in Maine thus far.

Mr. Gouveia responded that trawling up has been discussed, as well as gear modifications such as altering the breaking strength on portions of the endlines.

Mr. Gouveia mentioned a requirement in Mass. bay that requires using sinking and floating rope, and also a suggestion that fishermen use all sink rope to shorten the length of the endline.

Mr. Gouveia described another suggestion to use weaker rope, though he cautioned that the feasibility of weakening the breaking strength of rope is in question.

One commenter asked if stranding data had been incorporated into the co-occurrence model.

Ms. Swails stated that stranding data was used in the same manner as entanglement data, verifying with the SPUE/co-occurrence data to ensure consistency.

Mr. Gouveia mentioned that necropsy results from stranding are factored into the stock assessment process.

The same commenter asked for examples of gear marking suggestions.

Ms. Swails mentioned that state specific and fishery specific colored marking have been discussed.

Commenter asked if gear weighting had been discussed, and asked about addressing the likelihood that certain gear is to result in entanglement.

Mr. Gouveia mentioned that gear modifications seem less feasible as a management tool than an overall reduction in the number of endlines.

Commenter mentioned that the idea came to him from conch pots, which he stated are fished in singles and are less likely to kill a whale. He stated that a weak link at the surface system of a conch pot will not break because the conch pot is too light to counteract the force of a pulling whale.

Mr. Gouveia mentioned that while this may be true, there is little data to be analyzed in addressing the issue.

Commenter asked how much gear is recovered from entanglement events.

Mr. Salvador stated that gear of all shapes and sizes are recovered and emphasized the uncertainty involved in attempting to attribute gear to a specific region and fishery.

Commenter reiterated that trawls posed a higher risk to the whale than a single pot.

Commenter asked if there are weak link requirements for single pots.

Mr. Gouveia and Glenn confirmed that there are coastwide weak link requirements.

Mr. Gouveia stated that gear modifications to reduce risk are more likely to be focused on New England, where co-occurrence is high. He stated that gear marking and monitoring is more likely to be the plan for the Virginia and mid-Atlantic region.

Mr. Gouveia stated that feedback has been positive toward the co-occurrence model, stating that a common criticism has focused on a lack of sightings data and survey effort in the mid-Atlantic.

Commenter stated that the season in which aerial surveys are conducted is an important factor in the mid-Atlantic since right whales are only present in the region during specific times of year.

Mr. Gouveia agreed and stated that this was taken into consideration. He stated that survey effort is biased toward right whales since they are critically endangered.

TRT member stated that the team did support the model and the use of co-occurrence, but stated that the data deficiency in the mid-Atlantic is well-known and should be addressed. He also stated that whale presence is significantly lower in the mid-Atlantic, however.

TRT member stated that the impact of weak link implementation has been difficult to identify.

Mr. Salvador stated that a specific scenario in which weak links would most effectively work (surface entanglements near the buoy) is relatively rare and that entanglements can still occur with weak links present.

Ms. Swails requested further comments on gear marking possibilities.

Mr. Gouveia stated that some suggestions have been technologically advanced, albeit expensive. These include microchips embedded in fishing line. He highlighted technologies that have been researched such as “smart tape”, rope tracers, etc. and emphasized the low cost-effectiveness and poor feasibility of these options at present time.

Mr. Gouveia stated that cost-effectiveness will be the biggest factor in determining which gear marking measures are adopted.

TRT member stated that historically the TRT has not supported gear marking but now is in consensus that gear marking is a good thing and has important monitoring implications.

Mr. Gouveia described past unsuccessful attempts by NMFS to implement gear marking measures and stated that the idea is not being more positively received, though he did stress feedback stating that cost-effectiveness is very important.

Mr. Gouveia mentioned that the fishing industry has embraced gear marking upon realizing that marking will help prevent fisheries and regions from being falsely attributed to entanglements.

TRT member emphasized that this in part occurred from the groundline rule that was broadly implemented due to a lack of specific data on entanglements.

Commenter agreed and stated the importance of fishermen adopting marking to avoid being falsely implicated.

Mr. Gouveia agreed and described the upcoming monitoring plan and 5 year monitoring period to collect data and assess the effectiveness of groundline and endline management measures.

Commenter asked if the NMFS Southeast Region is conducting scoping meetings.

Mr. Gouveia indicated that they are and listed the dates and locations of the upcoming meetings.

Ms. Swails adjourned the meeting and reiterated the opportunities to submit comments and proposals.