

**ALWTRP Scoping Meeting  
Jacksonville, FL  
August 23, 2011**

**NMFS Staff:** Barb Zoodsma, Kate Swails, Jessica Powell,

**Number in attendance (not counting NMFS staff): 10**

**Including:**

- Raymond King, Take Reduction Team Industry Representative
- Tom Pitchford, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Take Reduction Team State Representative

This meeting began with Ms. Zoodsma giving two overview presentations of the laws and regulations relevant to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan, the necessity of a proposed rule to reduce large whale takes associated with vertical lines, the co-occurrence modeled to help inform decisions related to this action, and the purpose and process behind scoping.

Ms. Zoodsma stressed that the scoping meetings were meant to engage stakeholders and acquire input early on in the process prior to the development of any formal plan or ideas.

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Commenter asked for clarification regarding the co-occurrence model for the Southeast. Commenter asked if right whale females with calves or females were pregnant would be weighed more heavily.

NMFS staff clarified that all whales regardless of sex or reproductive status would be weighted the same within the co-occurrence model. The model is not able to differentiate one whale from another. However, the ALWTRT may be interested in including special protections on known calving areas (this could be accomplished by weighting an area rather than weighting specific individual animals).

One commenter noted that attacks from great white sharks were not included in PBR.

Ms. Zoodsma explained that PBR did not include natural causes of serious injury and mortality, as well as clarified that the goal of the discussion was how to reduce serious injury and mortalities from vertical lines.

One commenter noted that it is disconcerting that gear marking are the same for the FL, GA, and SC vertical line fisheries (the system is too “broad brush”), therefore making the gear indiscernible between fishery and states. Commenter further suggested that gear should be marked by two colors (one for state identification and the other for fishery identification) thus making the gear easily identifiable to a state fishery.

The same commenter further noted that the proposed gear scheme could easily be applied to mark every 6 feet of the line. Commenter suggested that by coiling the line in a 6 ft coil, spray paint could then be applied quickly and efficiently to mark multiple sections of rope.

The other commercial crabbers in attendance agreed with this commenter regarding the gear marking scheme and the marking method.

A commenter in attendance directed a comment towards the commercial fishermen at the meetings, asking how well spray paint holds up on vertical line.

The commercial crabbers in the room noted that it holds up well; it may get slightly dirty but still visible.

A commenter noted that the current requirement to use a 600 pound weak link on blue crab gear was much too big. The commenter noted that the gear was so light that such a link would likely not cause the gear to break away if entangling a whale, especially a calf. The commenter further suggested that the gear team from the Northeast, study the Southeast gear and find a suitable weak link strength. The commenter likes the weak link idea because he would rather lose a pot than a fishery but he needs a lesser breaking strength in his area.

Ms. Zoodsma noted that this was an interesting idea and possibly a way to address the Teams' concerns because it would offer special protection to calves in the Southeast calving area if a weaker weak link was used.

The same commenter further noted that weak link regulation may need to be looked at regionally. The commenter noted that in Northeast Florida the currents and tides are weaker than in Sapelo, GA thus allowing Northeast Florida crab pot fishermen to use weaker weak links if necessary.

Ms. Zoodsma noted that Jacksonville tended to be a core calving area for right whales which would thus add to justification for regulating weak links regionally.

The same commenter also noted that weak link gear riggings needs to be made more consistent so that law enforcement could more easily identify gear that was not in compliance.

Commenter stated that the best option is to make the vertical lines safer and not reduce the number of lines.

Ms. Zoodsma inquired how far offshore blue crab fishermen tend to fish.

One blue crab fishermen noted that the 3 mi state line is sufficient. The commenter noted that having 3 mi off the beach to fish allows fishermen to follow the movement of the crabs if the wind or water temperature causes them to move offshore.

Commenter suggested that it would be helpful to have the trap pot/gillnet vertical line comparison graph per state.

Commenter inquired what length of line was typically removed from entangled whales.

Ms. Swails noted that length of line recovered varies from as little as 5 ft to as much as 1000 ft.

All fishermen at the meeting again indicated that gear markings should be a priority.

One commenter noted that there has been no known take of a whale due to vertical line from blue crab pot. Thus, the commenter suggested the best route would be to focus on gear markings and rectifying the weak link issue rather than reducing vertical line.

Two commercial crabbers noted that they would not set gear if they saw a whale.

Ms. Zoodsma inquired if fishermen ever check the website to look for aggregations of whale.

One commenter responded that it would be difficult to move set gear. Also, actual whale movements would be unknown (if whale's are seen in a specific area, it doesn't mean they'll remain there).