

Southeast Vertical Line Risk Reduction Proposal: Rationale

December 2011

*We are seeking feedback from the ALWTRT on the following potential management scenarios.
Scenarios may be modified or re-evaluated based on pending analyses from IEC*

- We developed the proposal for the Southeast area based on ALWTRT deliberations, public comments, and preliminary SERO discussions.
- We propose to regulate both state and federal waters excluding waters within the previously defined exemption areas.
- Although the model depicts a low co-occurrence in the Southeast relative to the Northeast, we agree with many members on the ALWTRT that the calving area, and particularly the presence of small right whale calves, requires a conservative management approach in this area.
- We propose to monitor and implement a strict gear marking scheme in the Southeast to identify gear by fishery and state.
 - Gear marking has support from ALWTRT members as well as from fishermen who attended Southeast scoping meetings. Based on scoping meeting public comment, management scenarios for gear marking could include two color marks (one representing fishery, and the other representing state). The frequency of line marks should be based on length of gear removed from entangled large whales. Fishermen suggested an ideal marking scheme would involve coiling lines and then spray painting assigned color marks.
- We propose to address fishing effort creep in one of two ways: a) cap trap/pot fishing effort at existing levels, or b) include a defined trigger for trap/pot fisheries similar to 229.32(i)(1) for gillnet fisheries.
 - Option *a* would prevent further fishery expansion (and thus, increased entanglement risk to large whales) into areas of high right whale occurrence. For example, the core calving areas off Georgia and Florida would be protected.
 - Option *b* would allow fisheries to remain at status quo unless a large whale serious injury or mortality resulted from an entanglement with Southeast trap/pot fishery gear.
- Require 100 lb weak links for blue crab fishery off Florida.
 - In Florida, fishermen proposed weak link reductions due to the presence of calves and the weak currents with in Florida waters.

- Weak links are not proposed for waters off Georgia because, unlike Florida, whales and blue crab traps are segregated naturally by bathymetric constraints (whales occur further offshore in deeper water, blue crab traps occur closer to shore in shallower water).