



Process for Considering Gear Modifications under the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP)

July 2012

The below represents a process for how the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) and NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will evaluate gear modification proposals. Information gained through the questions below will help the ALWTRT and NMFS to assess and respond to gear modifications that may be considered under the ALWTRP.

Process for Pre-Proposals

The ALWTRT and NMFS acknowledge that at the earliest stage of development, very little information may be available on a modification, and it would not be advisable to establish firm criteria that would have the effect of discouraging project proponents. Therefore, preliminary questions to consider for a pre-proposal include:

- (1) What component of the gear is this modification proposed for (bottom component, surface system, vertical line)?
- (2) How would this modification reduce risk to large whales?

Responses to these basic questions will help the ALWTRT and NMFS to determine if the idea has potential and if it is worth pursuing further and should be recommended.

Process for Gear Modifications

Refinement of a gear modification involves a number of steps including development of a prototype, laboratory testing, and field/ at-sea testing with modifications occurring at any step. To facilitate evaluation of these products, the ALWTRT and NMFS will evaluate responses to a standard set of questions that will be applied to products brought to the ALWTRT. These are not quantitative, but rather are a series of questions that help describe the product and its application so that it can be evaluated. The ALWTRT and NMFS have not presently established a minimum standard criteria or

threshold that must be met before a modification is brought to them for evaluation. The ALWTRT and NMFS are making these questions available to potential funding sources so that applicants will be aware of them as they develop their product.

The list of informational questions to evaluate products brought to the ALWTRT includes the following:

Product Description

- (1) What is the product / modification (material, size, etc.)?
- (2) Attach a photo and illustration.

Feasibility

- (1) What fishery(s) is the product designed for?
- (2) What is the cost of the product? How does that compare with what is currently used?
- (3) How is it applied / attached to the gear? Is it easy to apply/attach?
- (4) Is the product operationally safe?
- (5) What is the lifespan / durability of the product? How does that compare with what is currently used / other alternatives on the market?
- (6) What limitations are there on its utility (depth, current, etc.)?
- (7) Please describe the laboratory testing that this product has gone through (hours, conditions, etc.)?
- (8) Please describe the field / at-sea testing that this product has gone

through (hours, conditions, fisheries, etc.)?

- (9) Please describe any changes in fishing practices that would be necessary to accommodate the use of this product/modification.

Risk Reduction

- (1) Is there any evidence from documented entanglements in which this portion or aspect of the gear (to be modified) has caused or contributed to entanglements before?
- (2) How does the proposed product/modification reduce the risk the gear poses to whales?
- Does it make the gear less available to whales (e.g. reduce volume in the water column)
 - Does it reduce the likelihood that an entanglement will result in serious injury or mortality, and if so, how (e.g. break, disintegrate)?
 - Will this modification reduce risk for different species of large whales across different age groups? If not, which species and age groups would it benefit?
- (3) How likely is it that the product will have an opportunity to work (*i.e.* will it work no matter how the whale encounters the gear or only in limited circumstances)?

Relationship with Current Requirements of the ALWTRP

- (1) Is the proposed to replace an existing requirement under the ALWTRP?
- (2) Is this proposed to be used in combination with other requirements under the ALWTRP?
- (3) Can this be applied universally to all areas and fisheries? If not, what areas and fisheries could this apply to?

Recommendation from the ALWTRT

After reviewing the information available on the product, the ALWTRT may wish to make one of the following recommendations:

- (1) Further testing, development and evaluation (e.g. field [conditions, depths, fisheries, bottom type, currents, etc.], test tank, modeling). (The ALWTRT may specify certain concerns, areas/aspects to be investigated.)
- (2) Additional expert(s) need to be invited to future meetings to discuss product/modification (e.g. engineer, veterinarian, industry person, scientist).
- (3) This should replace a current requirement of the ALWTRP; requirement will be specified with consideration of the following:
- What is the recommended timeframe for implementation?
 - Should this apply universally to all areas and fisheries? If not, specify what areas and what fisheries this should be applied to.
- (4) This should be required as an addition to existing ALWTRP requirements, with a consideration of the following:
- What is the recommended timeframe for implementation?
 - Should this apply universally to all areas and fisheries? If not, specify what areas and what fisheries this should be applied to.
- (5) Use of this product should be encouraged, but not listed in the ALWTRP regulations as a requirement. (The ALWTRT will include recommendations for how it is to be "encouraged").

How to Send Information on your Pre-Proposal or Gear Modification to the ALWTRT

Please respond to the appropriate pre-proposal and gear modification questions above and send this information to the ALWTRP Coordinator: Kate Swails, National Marine Fisheries Service, Northeast Regional Office, 55 Great Republic Dr., Gloucester, MA 01930; Kate.Swails@noaa.gov