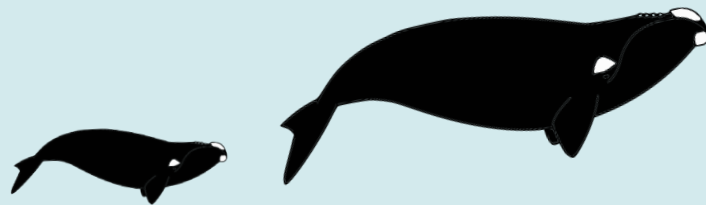


Scoping for modifications to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan: Phase 2

MAFMC Meeting
October 2021

Marisa Trego
Jen Goebel
Chao Zou
Crystal Franco
Colleen Coogan



[Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Website](#)



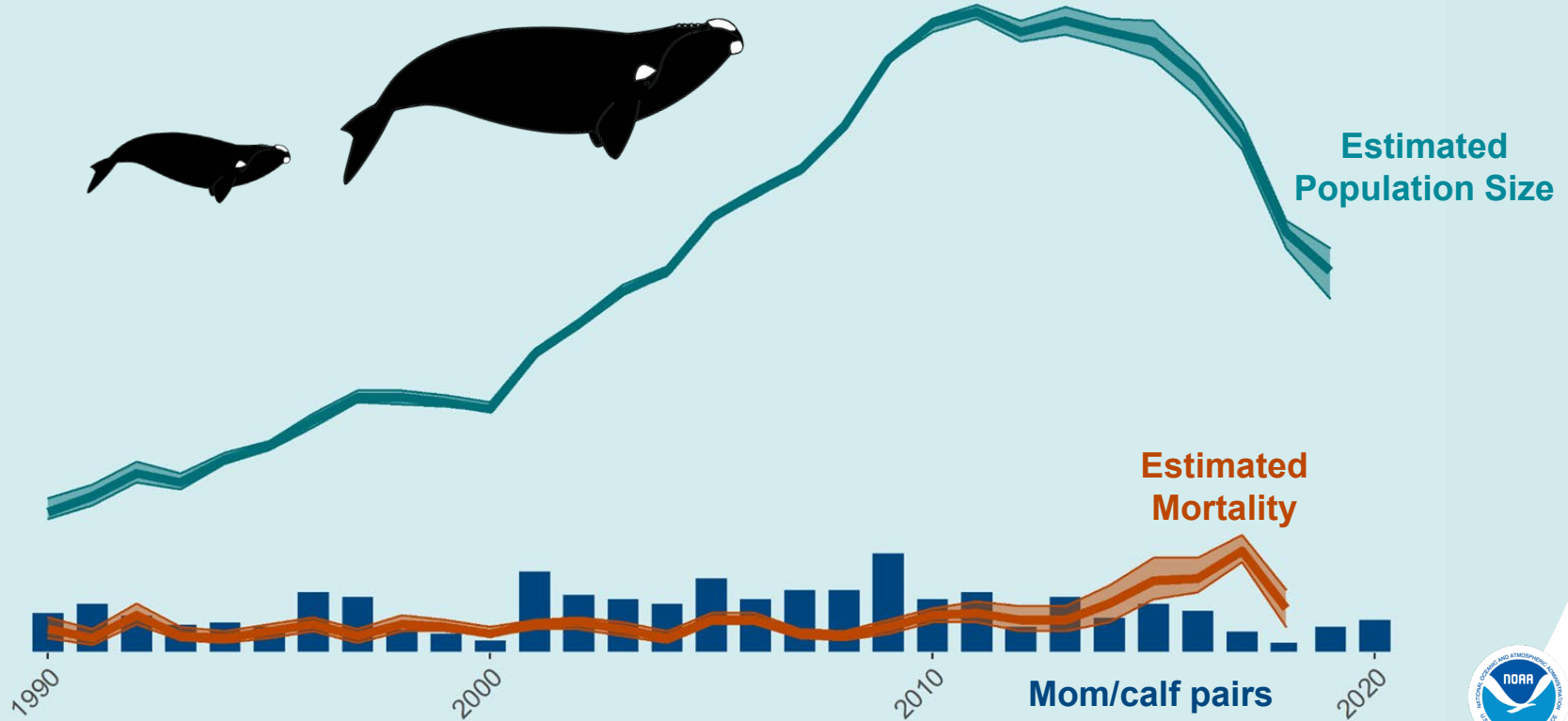
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Background

ALWTRP & Right Whale Population Decline

North Atlantic Right Whale Population in Decline Since 2010

Data from: Pace 2021, New England Aquarium, Florida Fish & Wildlife



Unusual Mortality Event: 2017 - present

~368

TOTAL WHALES IN 2019

<100

POTENTIAL MOTHERS

52

KNOWN MORTALITIES AND SERIOUS INJURIES

40

MOM/CALF PAIRS SINCE WINTER OF 2016/2017

5

SERIOUS INJURIES AVOIDED VIA
DISENTANGLEMENT

MORTALITIES

34 Known mortalities (9 US, 24 CN)

9 entanglements (4 US, 5 CN)

11 vessel strikes (3 US, 8 CN)

13 cause undetermined (2 US, 11 CN)

1 perinatal mortality

SERIOUS INJURIES

18 Known Seriously Injured (11 US, 4 CN)

14 entanglements (9 US, 5 CN)

2 vessel strikes (2 US)

2 cause undetermined (2 US)

Country apportioned according to the confirmed country or country where the incident was first sighted.

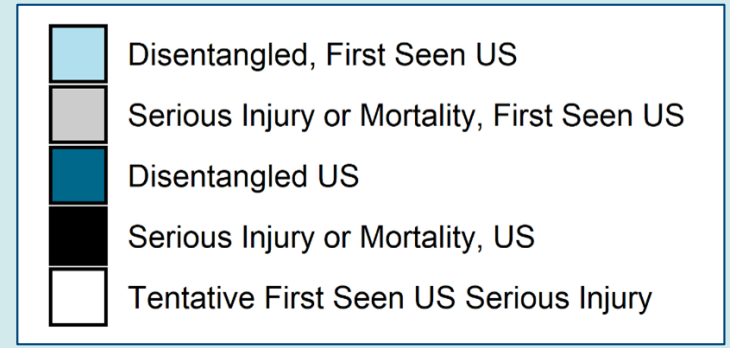
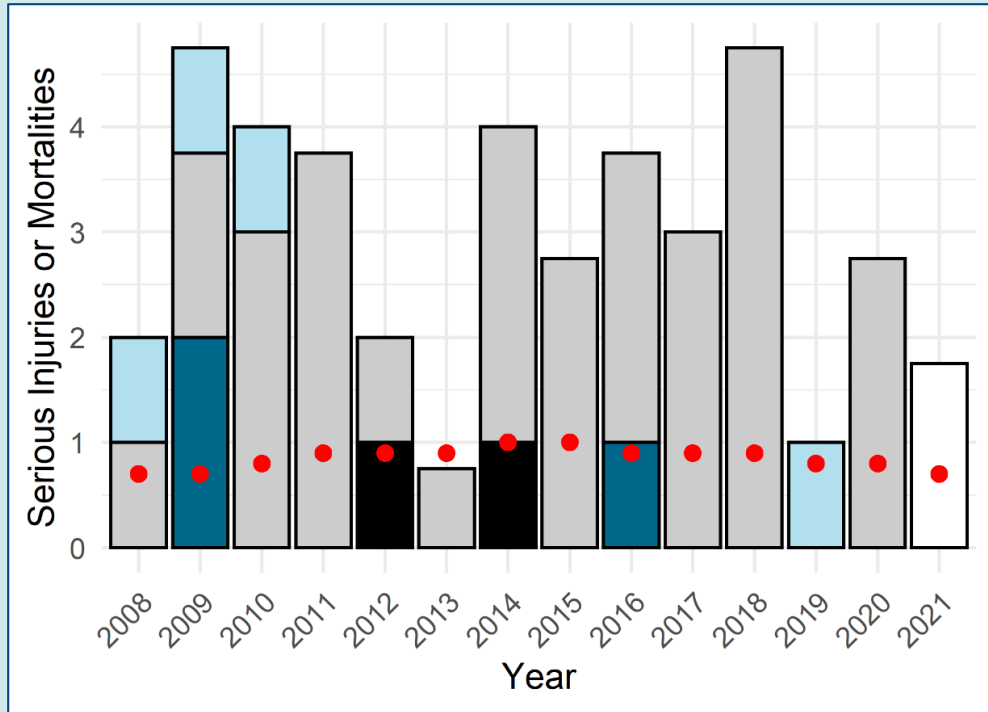
Note: the data here include 2 undetermined cases not included in the Unusual Mortality Event



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Right whale mortality and serious injury in U.S. exceeds PBR

Documented Mortality and Serious Injury* of NARWs
*Known US entanglements and those first seen in US***



Data from: Henry et al 2020, Henry et al 2015, Henry et al 2010, NMFS
 * Data from 2020 and 2021 are preliminary
 ** Graph does not include known Canadian entanglements or those first seen in Canada
 * Five year rolling average PBR



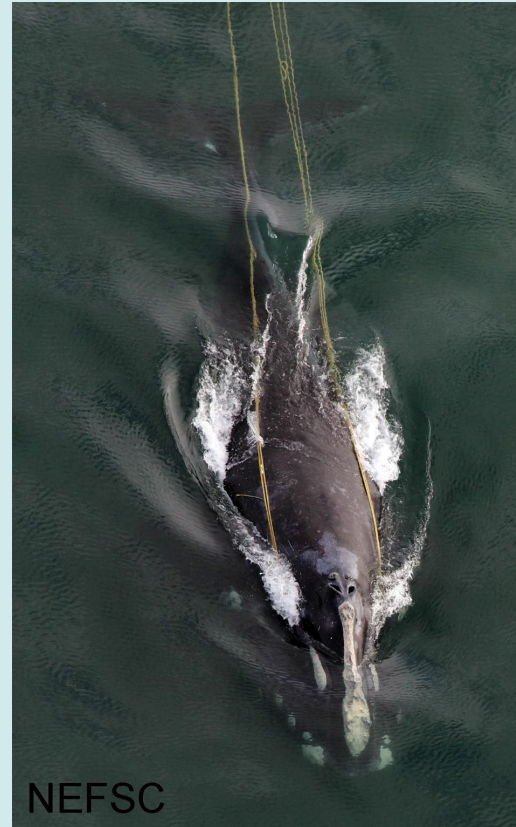
Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan

Required by MMPA if incidental mortality and serious injury in U.S. commercial fisheries exceeds Potential Biological Removal (PBR)

- Develop and recommend measures to reduce mortality and serious injury
- Consensus-based
- NMFS ultimately responsible for taking action

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team

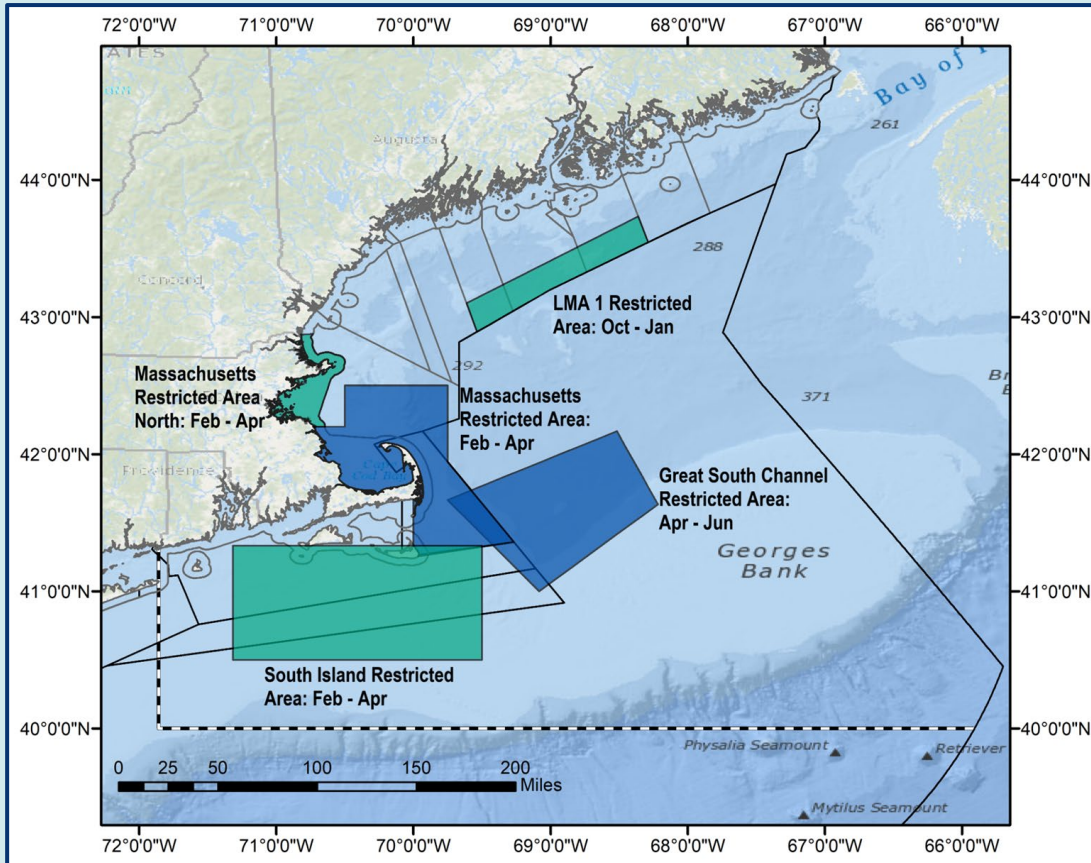
- 60 member team including 23 fishermen
- Right, humpback, and fin whales



Phase 1 Summary

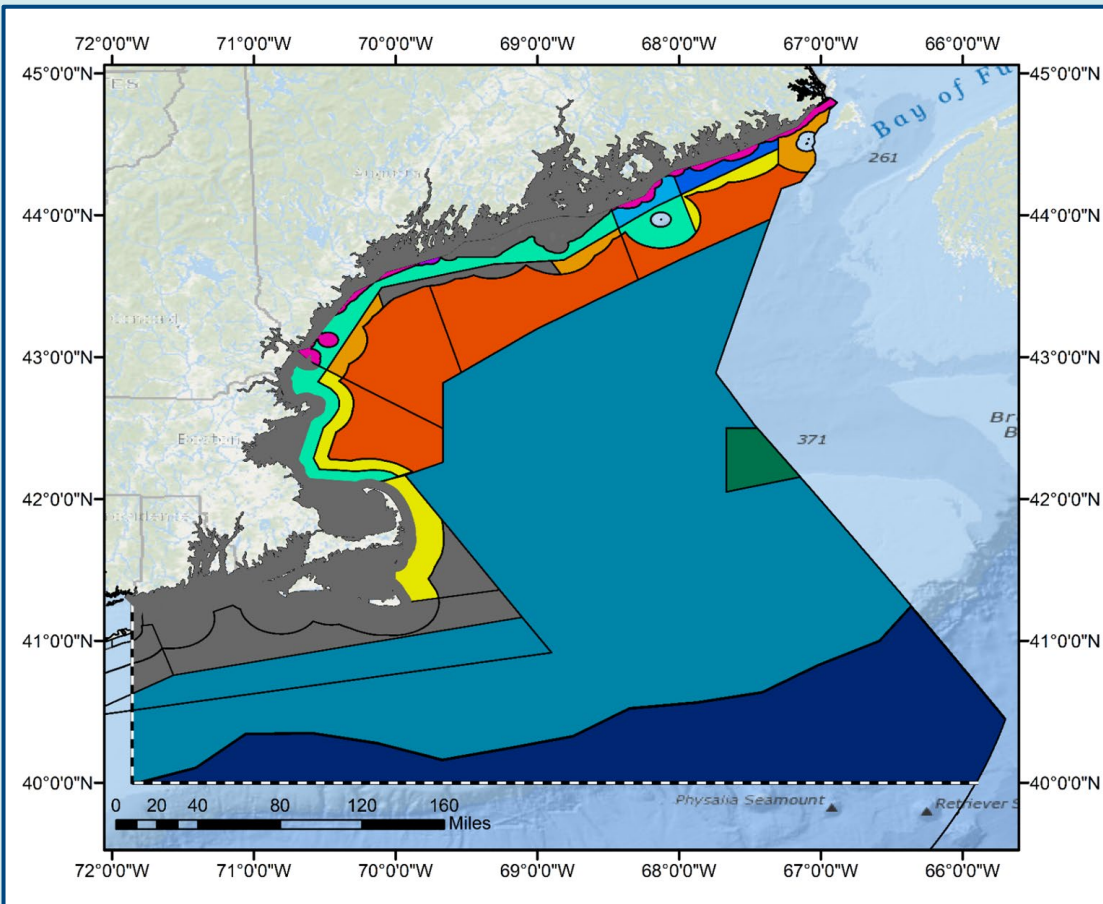
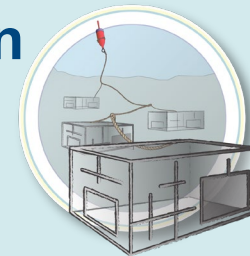
Rulemaking to reduce risk in Northeast lobster and Jonah crab trap/pot

Reducing Spatial Overlap of Right Whales and Gear



- Three new areas in green:
- Expansion of the Massachusetts Restricted Area north
- Two new restricted areas (LMA 1 and SIRA)
- All areas open to ropeless fishing with permits

Reducing the Number of Buoy Lines in the Region



Minimum number of traps per trawl

- No Change
- 2 Traps
- 3 Traps
- 5 Traps
- 8 Traps
- 10 Traps
- 15 Traps
- 20 Traps
- 25 Traps
- 35 Traps
- 45 Traps
- 50 Traps

* All areas with 5 or fewer traps per trawl must use only one buoy line

** In Maine LMA 1 Federal Waters Only: areas with 8 to 20 trap trawl minimums may use half of the minimum number of traps with only one buoy line

Reducing line strength and improving gear identification



Reducing risk of severe injury: Buoy lines will have weak inserts or manufactured weak line so that whales may be able to break free if they get entangled

Improve information on where entanglements happen:

- more marks per line
- new state or area specific colors
- unique marks in federal waters



Phase 2

Scoping for possible measures for NMFS to consider that will further reduce entanglement risk from U.S. commercial fisheries

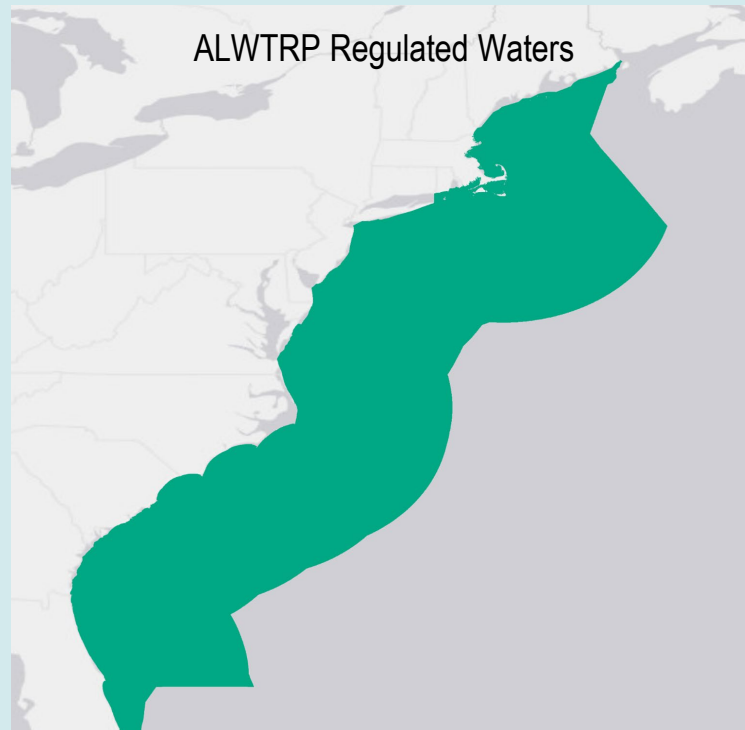
Phase 2: Overview

Need to reduce remaining risk coastwide

- Moving towards a risk reduction target that accounts for estimated mortality ~ 80%
- Currently re-assessing the target with new information and new PBR (0.7)

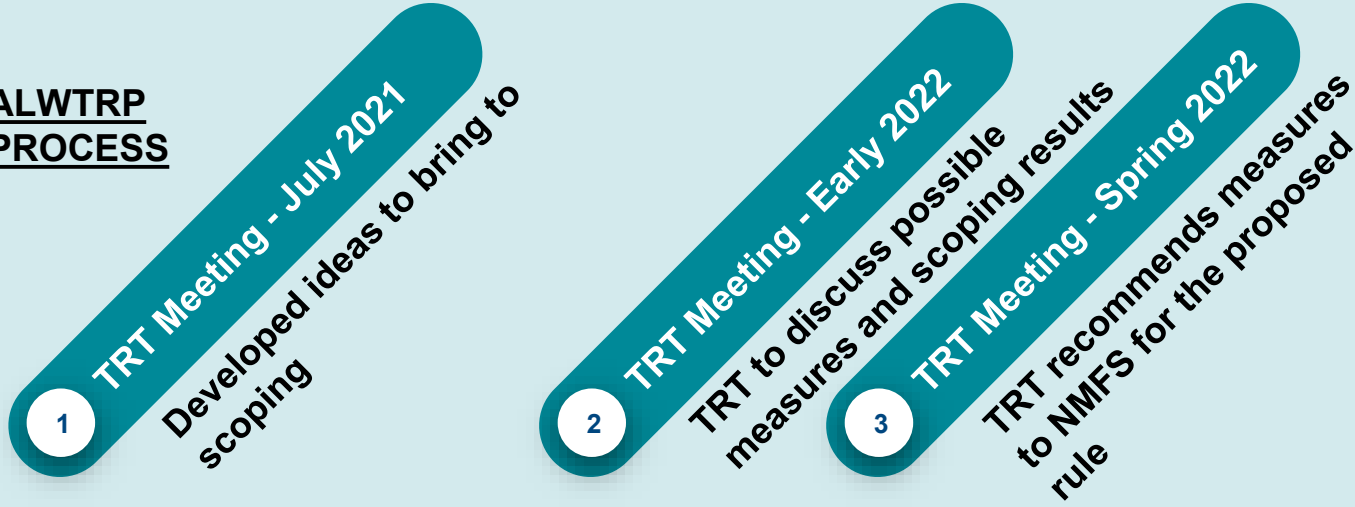
ALWTRT meetings began in spring of 2021

- Baseline distribution and risk
- Generated initial ideas (does not imply broad consensus for future team recommendations for rulemaking)



Phase 2 Modifications to the ALWTRP

ALWTRP PROCESS



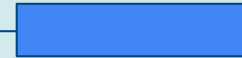
RULEMAKING PROCESS

We are here



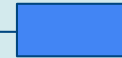
Scoping period

Proposed rule comment period



Draft EIS comment period

Final Rule 2023



Final EIS comment period



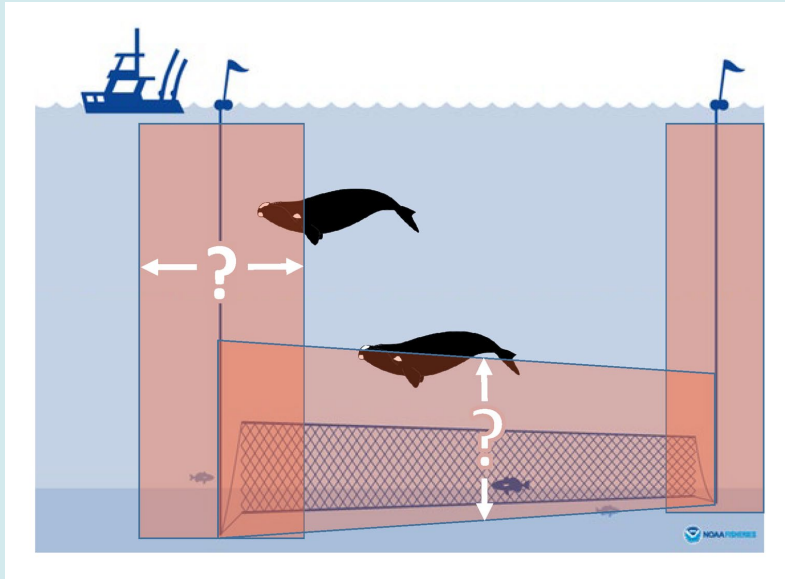
NEPA PROCESS



**NOAA
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Analysis of co-occurrence

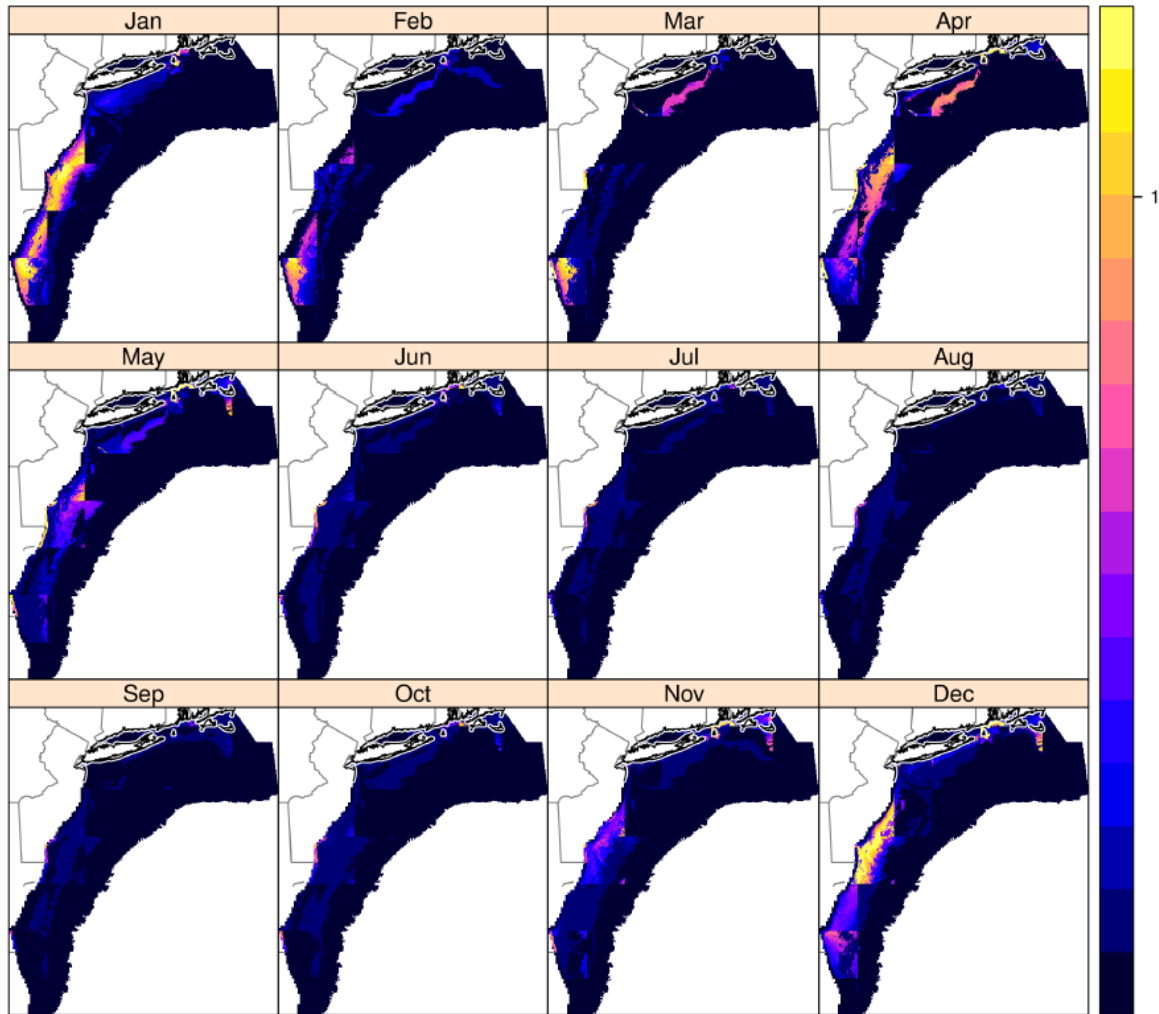
- **Decision Support Tool (NEFSC)**
 - **Reviewed by the Center for Independent Experts**
- **Monthly co-occurrence = whale density x gear density**
 - **Right whale density:** predicted based on sightings and environmental data
 - **Gear density:** buoy lines and nets (including net height)



* More information on the Decision Support Tool can be found [here](#) and in this [webinar](#).

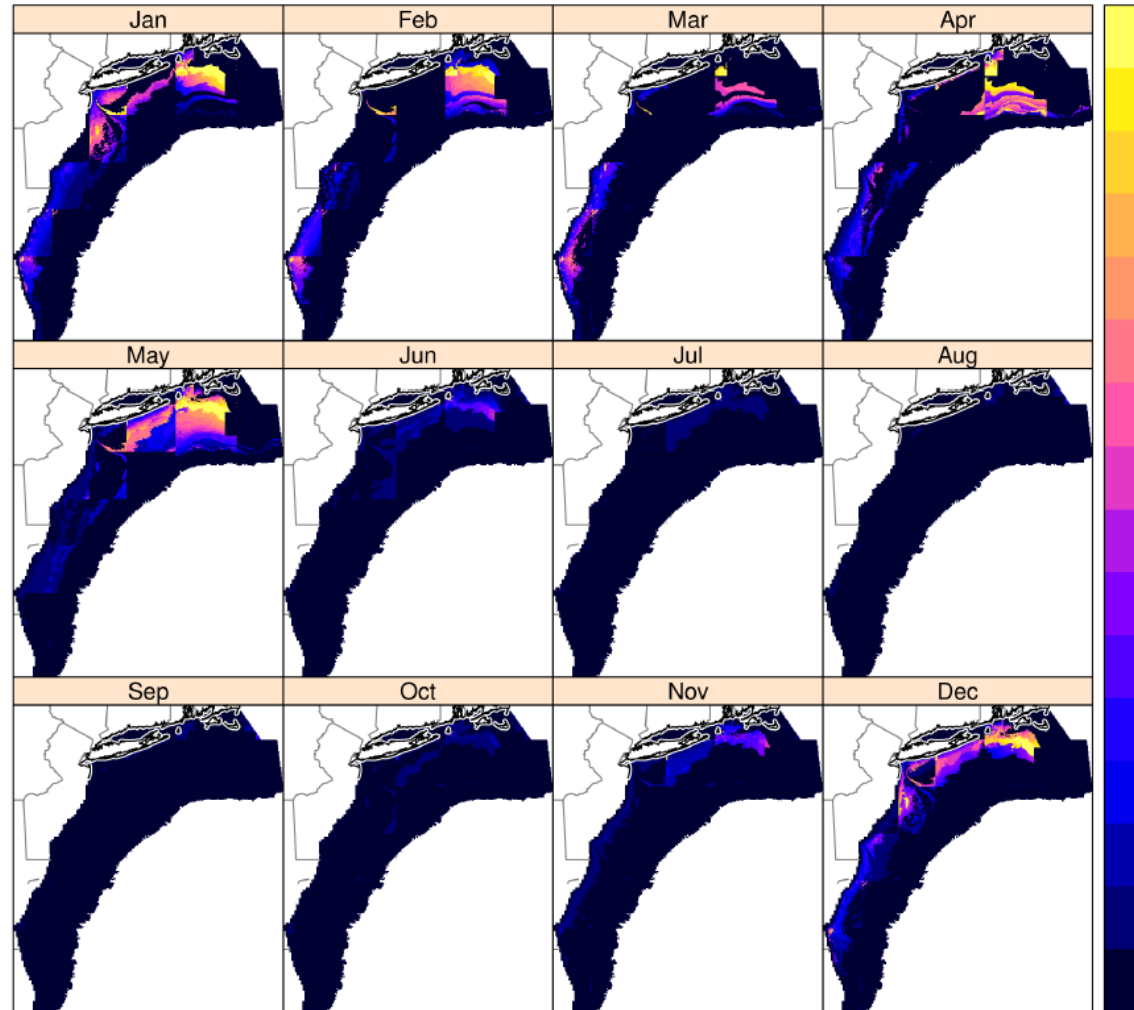
Mid-Atlantic & S. New England Trap/Pot Co- occurrence

Total CoOccurrence Score, Log-Scaled - Default

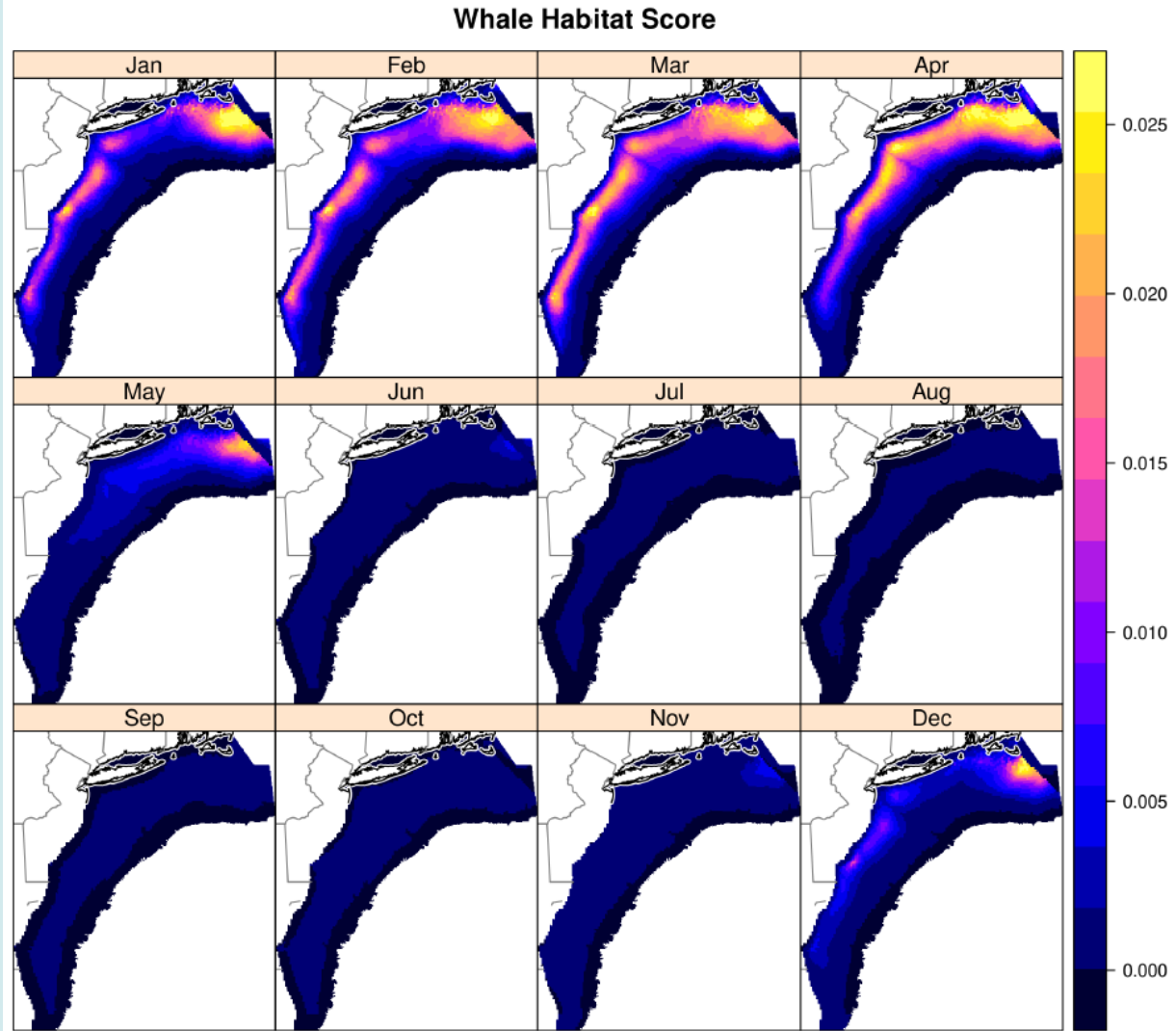


Mid-Atlantic & S. New England Gillnet Co-occurrence

Total CoOccurrence Score, Log-Scaled - Default



Mid-Atlantic & S. New England Whale Habitat Density



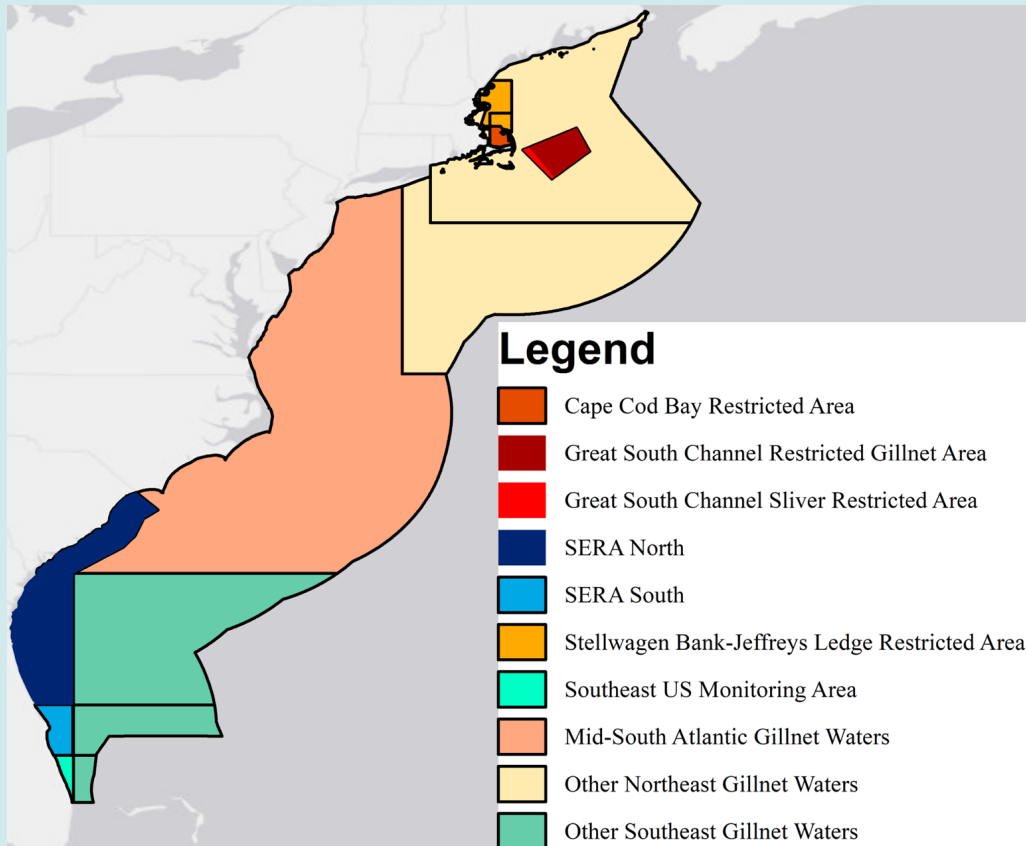
Initial ideas for new measures

Ideas from individual ALWTRT members to get the conversation started



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Reduce overlap between right whales and gillnet gear



Reduce soak times

Restrict overnight soaks

Minimum/maximum number of nets on a string

Evaluate the use of tie-downs

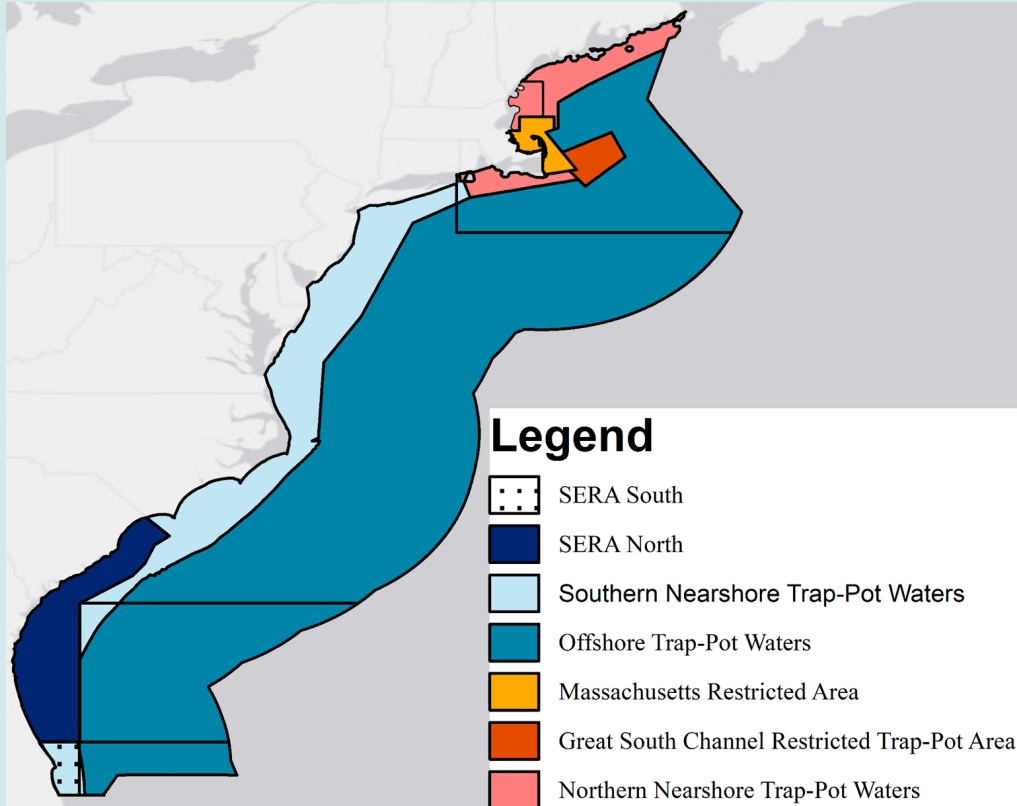
Hybrid ropeless gillnet

- E.g. one end ropeless, other end weak rope



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Reduce overlap between right whales and trap/pot gear



Change minimum traps/trawl

- Increase minimum traps/trawl (not in SE calving area)
- SE: Singles only with weaker gear

Trap caps

- Fish pots, blue crab, whelk
- Any fisheries with no cap

Extend Final Rule from Phase I to other trap/pot fisheries in NE

Phase 2: Scoping Topics for Restricted Area Risk Reduction



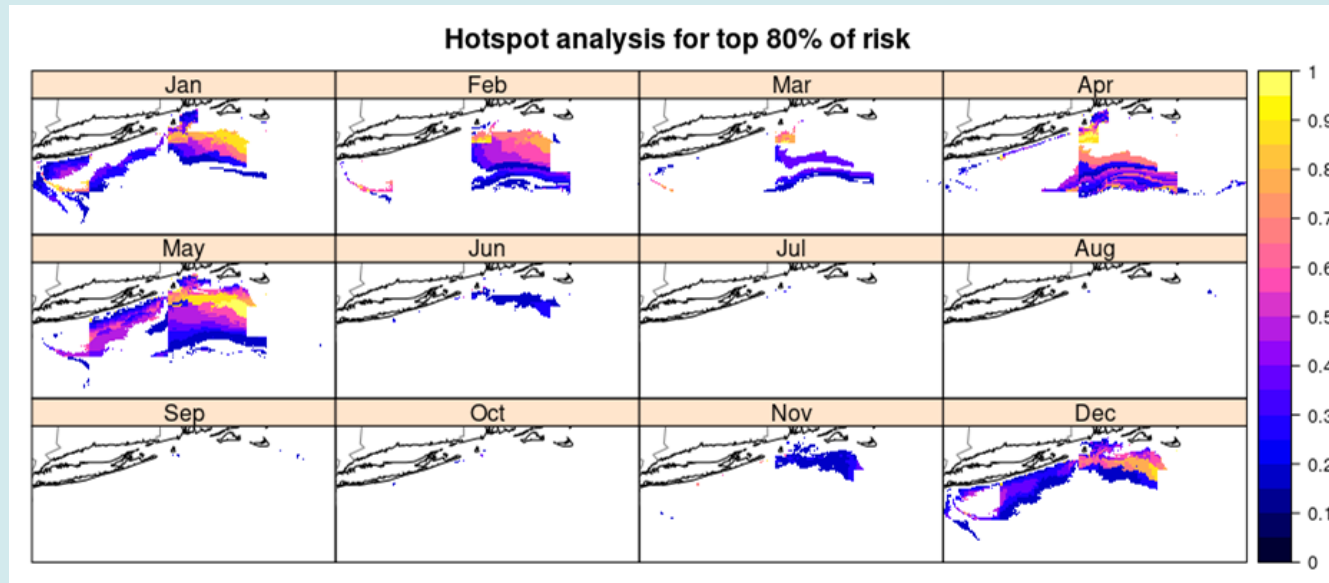
Re-evaluate existing restricted areas:

- Allow ropeless testing
- Re-evaluate boundaries or timing of existing closures
 - Cape Cod Bay RA
 - Great South Channel RA
 - Southeast RA North and South
- Include SE Black Sea Bass fishery management closures in the Plan

Scoping Topics for Restricted Area Risk Reduction

New areas based on hot spots:

- Rolling restricted areas or delayed fishing season up the coast in Mid-Atlantic with whale density
- Southern New England restricted area
- Dynamic management



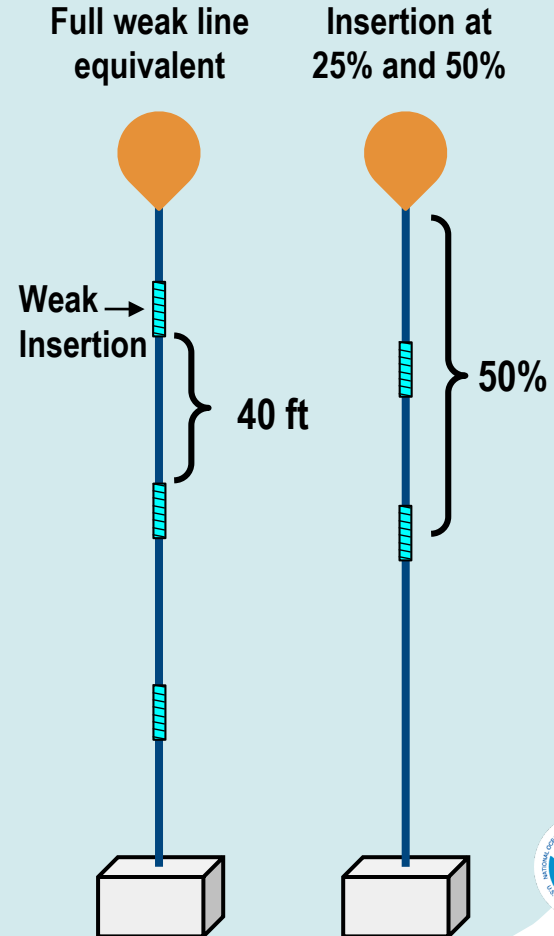
Phase 2: Scoping Topics for Gear Strength

Require maximum 1,700 lb breaking strength rope or regular inserts in buoy line (40-60 ft)

Cap line diameter ($\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{5}{8}$ in. max to differentiate from Canada)

Expand gear modifications such as weak inserts in gillnets to year round in the mid- Atlantic

Weaker weak inserts with a smaller anchor in gillnet panels



Scoping Topics for Gear Marking

Modify gear marking for greater visibility and greater resolution between:

- Different states
- State and Federal Waters
- U.S. vs Canada
- Gear type



Phase 2: Scoping Topics Involving Fishing Effort Management

- Cap latent effort in gillnet fisheries
- Consider limited entry for open access fisheries, e.g. skate fishery
- Reduce soak times
- Implement minimum/maximum number of nets on a string
- Consider challenges determining effort and managing unmanaged fisheries (eg. striped mullet, blue catfish caught in gillnets)
- Develop consequences for documented take



Input needed: How to reduce right whale entanglement risk

- Input on the possible measures presented today
- Additional measures NMFS should consider to reduce right whale entanglement risk
 - Gear or effort reduction
 - Restricted areas
 - Reducing gear strength or lethality
- Improving gear marking - better resolution of where incidents occur
- Current fishing practices



Pass It On: Input/Public Comment Opportunities

Written comment:

- Comments must be submitted by October 21, 2021.
- Written comments can be submitted at any time to nmfs.gar.alwtrt2021@noaa.gov

Speak to someone during final call-In day, (978) 282-8479:

- Tuesday, October 12, 2021, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. EST

Calls may be recorded. If the phone line is busy, please leave a voicemail. Please note that the phone line WILL NOT be operational outside of these days and hours.

Remaining Scoping Meetings:

Date	Gear Type	States
Oct 12 (Tues)	Gillnets	Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, and Northern North Carolina
Oct 14 (Thurs)	Gillnets	Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island



Questions

