

**FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
PROTECTED RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING
Jekyll Island, GA
March 6, 2017**

The Protected Resources Committee received updates from Jennifer Lee, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Protected Resources Division, and Dr. Chip Collier, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

NMFS Updates and Agenda Items

NMFS is compiling comments received regarding a requirement, which if implemented, would require all shrimp trawlers using skimmer trawls, pusher-head trawls, and wing nets to use TEDs designed to exclude small turtles in their nets. The comment period on the proposed rule ended on February 14, 2017. On December 29, 2016, NOAA Fisheries proposed listing the oceanic whitetip shark (*Cacharhinus longimanus*) as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Comments on this proposed rule must be submitted by March 29, 2017. There was some discussion on the estimate of the reduction in the population, estimate of at-vessel mortality, and potential identification issues. NOAA Fisheries is reviewing the information received during the public comment period on Atlantic Sturgeon critical habitat and will make any appropriate changes to the final rule. The final rule is expected in late May or early June 2017. The MMPA requires that NMFS evaluate U.S. fisheries annually and classify each as Category I, Category II, or Category III based on the extent of mortality or serious injury of marine mammals caused by each fishery. Category I and II fisheries are required to register with NMFS to lawfully incidentally take marine mammals, carry observers if requested by NMFS, and may be subject to a Take Reduction Plan. The spiny lobster pot fishery was added as a Category III fishery based on location and gear. The lobster fishery in the Gulf of Maine has the same color line marking required by the Marine Mammal Protection Act as the newly approved black sea bass pot fishery in the South Atlantic but the markings in the Gulf of Maine are 6 inch marks whereas in the South Atlantic markings are 12 inch marks.

The next meeting of the Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Team (BDTRT) will be an in-person meeting December 5-7, 2017. The main purpose of the BDTRT meeting will be to assess the Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Plan progress in meeting its short- and long-term goals for each affected strategic stock of bottlenose dolphins.

ASMFC Atlantic Sturgeon Stock Assessment Update

The Stock Assessment Subcommittee continues to work on the Atlantic Sturgeon stock assessment and plans to have the draft assessment sent out by mid-June and presented to the ASMFC Sturgeon Management Board in October 2017. The team continues to develop the stock assessment but data are limited for the assessment. There is limited information on catch, few surveys that encounter sturgeon, and no coastwide abundance index that passed index criteria for Atlantic Sturgeon. There are a lot of conventional and acoustic tag, return data across a long time series, which should allow for a relatively robust analysis and mark-recapture and/or acoustic detection modeling.

USFWS Updates

Red knot critical habitat final rule has not been completed. The agency continues to work on drafting a final description of the habitat.

Other Business

A regulation that was used by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to issue Double-Crested Cormorant depredation permits was deemed by the court to not have a sufficient range of actions and alternatives included in the Environmental Assessment. Therefore the USFWS has stopped issuing or renewing cormorant depredation permits, except in cases where public health and safety are involved. Permits may still be issued or renewed for scientific collection.

No Motions were made by the committee.

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

There were no directions to staff.

DRAFT Timing and Task Motion: