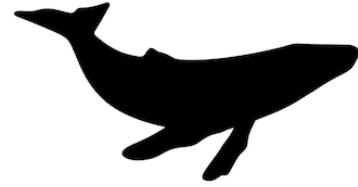


Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team

Meeting Summary

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
December 2018



I. Background

Take Reduction Plans are developed for marine mammal stocks that are listed as endangered, threatened, or declining, and likely to be listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act or listed as depleted under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) or are experiencing human-caused mortality that exceeds the stock's potential biological removal (PBR) level¹. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will convene a take reduction team (TRT) tasked with developing and reaching a consensus on a plan to reduce mortality and serious injury of the marine mammal in question from commercial fishing operations. Once the team has reached a consensus (six-month time limit) it is submitted to NMFS for review and implementation.

The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) was initially developed in 1997 in order to reduce the level of serious injury and mortality of Atlantic right whales, humpback whales, and fin whales resulting from interactions with gillnet and trap/pot fisheries. The ALWTRP contains formal regulations (gear modifications, area closure, time closures etc.) as well as programs aimed at expanding research, monitoring, and outreach efforts. The ALWTRP is a living document that can be modified as needs change and/or new information becomes available.

- ALWTRP regulations can be found at 50 CFR §229.32.
- More information on the plan contents and updates can be found online [HERE](#).

The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) operates as an advisory team, providing guidance on the progress of the ALWTRP and needed modifications or improvements. ALWTRT members consist of fishermen with experience in trap/pot and gillnet fisheries, conservation and environmental groups, scientists, and state and federal resource managers.

II. October 2018 TRT Meeting

The ALWTRT met in Providence, Rhode Island on October 9th through 12th to discuss potential strategies to reduce large whale entanglements and impacts from fixed gear fisheries, with a focus on reducing serious injury and mortality for North Atlantic right whales.

- The full agenda and all meeting materials can be found online [HERE](#).

¹ Potential biological removal (PBR) is defined by the Marine Mammal Protection Act as the “maximum number of animals, not including natural mortalities, that may be removed from a marine mammal stock while allowing that stock to reach or maintain its optimum sustainable population.”

The ALWTRT received updates on large whale entanglements, serious injuries, and mortalities, management and enforcement efforts, challenges facing North Atlantic right whale recovery, and recent research efforts including ropeless fishing and weak rope development.

- Serious injury and mortality from observed entanglements of North Atlantic right whales in U.S. waters has exceeded potential biological removal every year except for two (this is likely an underestimate).
- The Southeast U.S. Right Whale Aerial Survey (December 1st through March 31st, annually) has seen a decline in sightings from 21 calves per year in the 2000s to 10 calves per year since 2011. There were no calves sighted in 2018. Fewer sightings of other whales as well.

The ALWTRT discussed ALWTRP objectives and problem-solving goals and reviewed nine TRT member proposals for modifying the ALWTRP focusing on reducing risk by reducing the probability of entanglements, reducing risk by reducing the severity of entanglements, and research to inform future risk reduction efforts. Each proposal discusses how the changes would reduce injury and mortality to large whales, what fisheries would be affected, and the practical outcome of the proposal. General proposal themes included:

- New and/or modified seasonal closure areas.
- Increasing the visibility of rope to whales (red lines).
- Continuing to reduce vertical lines.
- Reducing the breaking strength of rope.
- Options for gear marking (rope color, improving visibility, increasing area/species markings), reporting (VTR, VMS, AIS, lost gear reporting), and research (aerial and acoustic surveys, ropeless technology).

The ALWTRT developed work plans to guide analysis of specific proposal elements to be evaluated and considered for refinement and consensus decision making at the March 2019 ALWTRT meeting.

III. Additional ALWTRP Resources:

- Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Webpage: [HERE](#)
- Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Outreach Webpage: [HERE](#)
- Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team Webpage: [HERE](#)
- Gear Guides:
 - Southeast Trap/Pot Gear Guide: [HERE](#)
 - Southeast Gillnet Guide: [HERE](#)
- Black Sea Bass Guides:
 - North Carolina: [HERE](#)
 - South Carolina/Georgia: [HERE](#)
 - Florida: [HERE](#)