

# SERO Protected Resources Division Briefing Document

## March 2019 SAFMC Meeting

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### Endangered Species Act (ESA) Listing Actions and Other Rulemaking

#### *Sea Turtle Conservation and Recovery Actions in Relation to the Southeastern United States Shrimp Fishery [No Change]*

- On December 16, 2016, NOAA Fisheries published a proposed rule that, 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 Final Rule is under review

### ESA Section 7-Related Actions and News

#### *FMP Consultations [No change]*

- Section 7 consultations on SA and Joint SA/Gulf of Mexico FMPs (Wahoo, Spiny Lobster FMPs) have been/will be reinitiated to address newly listed species/DPSs. With multiple SERO fisheries consultations reinitiated in the Southeast to address recent revised/new listings (e.g., Oceanic whitetip, Giant Manta Rays); consultation timelines are extended.

### Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) Actions and News

#### *North Atlantic Right Whales Calving Season [New]*

- As of February 12, 6 calves have been spotted this season.
- Right whale survey teams have been in place since December 1
- Last season, no newborn calves were spotted.

#### *Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team [Update]*

- The full team met in October 2018 to consider proposals for additional take reduction measures to get mortality and serious injury below PBR for critically endangered right whales. The team provided feedback for NMFS to analyze prior to the next meeting, at which time they will negotiate consensus recommendations to the agency. The next meeting was initially set for March 2019 but is being rescheduled for later this spring due the shutdown.

#### *North Atlantic Right Whale Unusual Mortality Event (UME) [Update]*

- Elevated North Atlantic right whale mortalities began in 2017, primarily in Canada, and were declared a UME. Since June 7, 2017, elevated North Atlantic right mortalities have been documented, primarily in Canada and were declared an [Unusual Mortality Event](#). In 2017, there was a total of 17 confirmed dead stranded whales (12 in Canada; 5 in the United States). To date in 2018, three whales have stranded in the United States. The current total mortalities for the UME is 20 dead stranded whales (12 in Canada; 8 in the United States). More information on this UME is provided at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-life-distress/2017-2018-north-atlantic-right-whale-unusual-mortality-event>.
- The most recent North Atlantic right whale population estimate is about 458 whales, which is up from around 270 in 1990, but has shown a consistent decline since the 2010 estimate of 483.

*Humpback Whale UME [No change]*

- Since January 2016, elevated humpback whale mortalities have occurred along the Atlantic coast from Maine through Florida. Partial or full necropsy examinations were conducted on approximately half of the whales. Of the whales examined at necropsy about 50% had evidence of human interaction, either ship strike or entanglement. These findings are not consistent across all of the whales examined, so more research is needed.

*Minke Whale UME [No change]*

- Since January 2017, elevated minke whale mortalities have occurred along the Atlantic coast from Maine through South Carolina. While minke whales are protected under the MMPA, the species is not listed as endangered or threatened under the ESA.
- Full or partial necropsy examinations were conducted on over 60% of the whales. Preliminary findings in several of the whales have shown evidence of human interactions or infectious disease. These findings are not consistent across all of the whales examined, so more research is needed.
- As part of the UME investigation process, NOAA is assembling an independent team of scientist to coordinate with the Working Group on Marine Mammal UMEs to review the data collected, sample stranded whales, and determine the next steps for the investigation.

*Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Plan Proposed Rule Development [No change]*

- SERO is working on a proposed rule to update regulatory and non-regulatory requirements of the Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Plan based on consensus recommendations from the Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Team after meetings in December 2015 and September and October 2016 (recommendations can be found in the Key Outcomes Memorandums at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/interactions/trt/pl-trt.html>).

*Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Plan [No change]*

- The Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Team (Team) was convened for an in-person meeting on December 5-7, 2017, to discuss modified or additional conservation measures to reduce gillnet bycatch of bottlenose dolphin estuarine stocks in North Carolina to levels required by the MMPA. The Team provided NOAA Fisheries with consensus recommendations for additional conservation measures, particularly related to North Carolina gillnet fisheries.