



The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator Announces Retirement

Bullard Counts Deep-Sea Corals Protections, Electronic Monitoring Pilots, and Groundfish Response Among Top Accomplishments Since 2012

NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator John Bullard announced that he will retire on January 5, 2018. Bullard, who took the top job in the agency's Gloucester-based office in 2012, will leave a legacy of improved relationships with the regulated community, the research community, environmentalists, local, state, and federal officials and agency partners, including the New England and the Mid-Atlantic fishery management councils and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

As the regional administrator responsible for leading the agency's approach to fisheries, habitat, sea turtle, and marine mammal issues from Maine to North Carolina as well as the Great Lakes region, Bullard also provided a much-needed conduit helping the regulated communities understand the critical role of science in informing management decisions.

"As the former Mayor of New Bedford, John brought with him a unique connection to the fishing industry, and used that connection to improve communication with all aspects of the industry and Congress during a very challenging period for the agency," said Sam Rauch, NOAA Fisheries Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs.

As Regional Administrator, Bullard worked with the fishery management councils and the commission to manage 44 fish stocks, including two, scallops and lobster, worth more than \$500 million each.

During his tenure, he faced the daunting New England groundfish crisis. Bullard met the challenge head on, making the tough and unpopular decision to impose emergency closures when the New England Council failed to act.

"I know how difficult these issues are, and I tried to tackle them with courage and compassion," says Bullard.

Bullard worked with Congress and state directors to deliver \$32.8 million in disaster assistance to affected fishing families and communities. In close collaboration with the New England Council, Bullard then put quotas and closures in place to protect cod and other depleted fish stocks.

Bullard's leadership in protecting living marine resources included removing approximately 30,000 miles of rope from Atlantic coastal waters to reduce



Bullard with Maine Captain Terry Alexander and crew on the F/V Jocka.



Bullard sailing north of 80 degrees north latitude.

whale entanglements and expanding critical habitat for North Atlantic right whales in the region by more than 25,000 nautical miles. He also oversaw development of a strategy to restore river herring populations, imposed catch caps on mackerel and herring fisheries, and removed dams and created fish passages to double fish runs in key Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts rivers.

"For me, John is an example of public service and more importantly, an example of working with stakeholders to have a positive impact on tough issues," said Dr. Jon Hare, science and research director at NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center. "I will miss working with him and am thankful for his time as regional administrator."

Bullard strongly supported groundbreaking actions created to bolster the Mid-Atlantic region's important recreational and commercial fisheries. In 2016, he approved the Mid-Atlantic Council's deep-sea coral amendment that protects 15 deep-sea canyons and a total area of 24 million acres, about the size of Virginia, where fragile, slow-growing corals live. These hotspots of biodiversity provide important habitat, refuge, and prey for fish and other marine life. Bullard has also advanced an action to protect small schooling fish, also known as forage fish, which serve as prey for larger fish, marine mammals, and sea birds. This would be the first ever action on the Atlantic coast to designate forage fish as important parts of the ecosystem and provide

protection for them.

"Throughout his tenure as regional administrator, John has been an engaged and dedicated participant in the council process, and he has played an important role in increasing focus on the Mid-Atlantic portion of the Greater Atlantic Region," said Chris Moore, executive director of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. "His insight and leadership have been especially valuable to the Mid-Atlantic Council during the development of several new initiatives such as the Deep Sea Corals Amendment, the Unmanaged Forage Fish Amendment, and the development of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management."

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Why Are There Recent Increases in Humpback Whale Mortalities?

Our Marine Mammal Response Program (MMRP) coordinates response activities to stranded marine mammals from Maine through Virginia. The MMRP works with several stranding network partner organizations, which serve as first responders to stranding events. We monitor annual trends of marine animal mortalities, injuries and illness.

During the summer of 2016, the MMRP identified an increase in humpback whale stranding events requiring close monitoring. By the end of 2016, the MMRP and the stranding network documented 21 humpback whale mortalities within the region, well above the five-year annual average of eight.

Humpback whales migrate to southern mating and calving grounds during the winter months. While the adults and calves are at these southern calving grounds, juvenile humpback whales overwinter off Mid-Atlantic States. We learned that our mid-Atlantic neighbors, in North Carolina, also documenting higher humpback strandings in 2016, which continued into 2017. North Carolina responded to a total of five humpback stranding in 2016, bringing the 2016 total to 26 cases. An additional 24 animals have stranded in the first half of 2017, bringing the total to 50 dead stranded humpback whales in a year and a half in mid-Atlantic US waters.

Stranding network responders collect data on all stranding events and conduct scientific internal

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Olivia Rugo • Managing Editor • 978-675-2167 • olivia.rugo@noaa.gov

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Cooperative Gear Efficiency Studies to Inform Upcoming Groundfish Stock Assessments

NOAA Fisheries' Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) is conducting operational stock assessments for 20 stocks managed under the New England Fishery Management Council's Northeast groundfish plan. Peer review of the assessments will occur in mid-September. The results will be used to make fishery management decisions for the 2018-2020 fishing years.

These operational assessments do not introduce new sources of information, but update the existing data used with that collected since 2015, the last time these stocks were updated. However, exceptions for new information can be made on a case-by-case basis. One such case this year is new information from cooperative research conducted by the NEFSC and industry partners aboard the F/V *Karen Elizabeth* in 2015 and 2016. The work focused on how efficiently the NEFSC scientific trawl survey gear catches flatfish.

"Cooperative and fully collaborative research with



industry and other partners is critical to the NEFSC. The twin trawl study is but one of many examples of using this research to improve our science," said Jon Hare, NEFSC director. The NEFSC will continue to

work through the fishery council's Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel to develop gear efficiency studies and other cooperative research.

The gear efficiency studies used a twin trawl vessel that conducted side-by-side tows using two identical nets with different sweeps; a rockhopper and a chain. The 2015 study targeted yellowtail flounder. The 2016 targeted witch flounder, and informed the 2016 benchmark assessment for this stock.

In mid-July, a peer review panel met to assess these gear efficiency studies. Their findings supported using the experimental results to update NEFSC survey catchability estimates for some flatfish stocks.

In late July, the region's Assessment Oversight Panel met to approve plans for the assessments and make decisions on whether an exception should be made to use new information. The panel also agreed that the experimental results could be used.

For more on the upcoming assessments, the panels, their reports, and the NEFSC plan for using the results, contact Arielle Baker at 508-495-4741, or at ariele.baker@noaa.gov, and visit us here: <https://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/groundfish/operational-assessments-2017/>

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Bullard also led the charge to modernize access and sharing of fishery dependent data in cooperation with the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, the fishing industry, the councils and the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program. He championed electronic monitoring pilot projects on fishing vessels with partners in the industry and environmental non-government organizations to increase coverage and improve the data on which our science is based.

"It's been an honor and pleasure to work with John. He has been a strong supporter of state/federal cooperation in the management of our shared marine resources," said Bob Beal, executive director of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. "We are grateful for his contributions to sustainable management and wish him the very best."

"I'm really proud of the work I've done with the GARFO team. They are intelligent, hard-working, and caring professionals, and I rely on them every day to make me smart on the many issues we face," said Bullard, who has no plans to slow down before he leaves. "There is work left to do before I leave—very important work. Still on my list are the Omnibus Habitat Amendment, the New England Council's Deep Sea Coral Amendment, some critical dam removals, electronic monitoring, the Carlos Rafael situation, the summer flounder crisis, and the continuing groundfish challenge, among others."

However, once he does bid the agency goodbye, he plans to literally sail into the sunset, provided the weather is warm enough! On August 7, the agency launched a one-month search for Bullard's replacement.

Schedule for Incorporating the 2017 Northeast Groundfish Operational Assessments into Management

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center is updating assessments for all 20 groundfish stocks. The peer review of the assessment updates will take place in Woods Hole, MA from September 11-15, 2017.

The preliminary schedule shows how the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) and NOAA Fisheries will use the assessment results to set catch limits for the 2018-2020 fishing years as part of Framework 57 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. Key opportunities for public input are in blue.

For more information, contact Mark Grant, Sustainable Fisheries Division, at 978-281-9145 or email him at Mark.Grant@noaa.gov.

Date	Meeting/Event	Location
September 11-15, 2017	Stock Assessment Peer Review	Woods Hole, MA
Late September 2017	Final assessment reports delivered to managers	
September 26-28, 2017	NEFMC Meeting - The Council will receive an overview on the groundfish stock assessment and other measures in Framework 57	Gloucester, MA
October 23-24, 2017	NEFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Meeting - The SSC will meet to recommend groundfish overfishing limits (OFLs) and allowable biological catches (ABCs)	TBD
November 2017	Meetings of various NEFMC groups, including the Groundfish Plan Development Team, the Recreational Advisory Panel, the Groundfish Advisory Panel, and the Groundfish Oversight Committee, to develop groundfish catch limits based on the SSC recommendations	TBD
December 5-7, 2017	NEFMC Meeting - The Council is scheduled take final action on groundfish catch limits in Framework 57	Newport, RI
Spring 2018	Council submits recommendations to NMFS for review and NMFS conducts proposed and final rulemaking	
May 1, 2018	Start of Fishing Year 2018	

New Monkfish Quotas, DAS, and Trip Limits Provide for Increased Fishing Opportunity

NOAA recently approved Framework Adjustment 10 to the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan, which sets monkfish quotas for fishing years 2017-2019 (May 1, 2017, through April 30, 2020). Framework 10 also increases days-at-sea (DAS) allocations and trip limits to provide additional fishing opportunities and increase flexibility, allowing the fishery to more effectively harvest its quotas.

Framework 10 increases trip limits in both the northern and southern fishery management areas:

Northern Fishery Management Area incidental landing limits for vessels fishing on a groundfish DAS increase:

Category C: from 600 to 900 lb tail weight/DAS
Category D: from 500 to 750 lb tail weight/DAS

Southern Fishery Management Area trip limit increases for limited access vessels:

Category A and C: from 610 to 700 lb tail weight/DAS

Category B and D: from 500 to 575 lb tail weight/DAS

Vessels can fish for five more DAS in the Southern area, an increase from 32 to 37 DAS.

For more information, contact William Whitmore, Sustainable Fisheries Division, at 978-281-9182 or email him at William.Whitmore@noaa.gov

Management changes and total allowable landing increases approved in Framework 10

Management Area	Total Allowable Landings (TAL)		TAL Change (%)
	Current (mt)	Revised (mt)	
NFMA	5,854	6,338	8.27
SFMA	8,925	9,011	0.96

Streamlining Reporting for Groundfishermen

In response to requests from fishermen, NOAA has made modifications to the vessel monitoring system (VMS) requirements for Northeast multispecies (groundfish) vessels in an effort to streamline reporting requirements and eliminate redundancies. Limited access Northeast multispecies vessels declared into a single broad stock area (BSA) are no longer required to submit a vessel monitoring system (VMS) trip-level catch report on the return to port prior to crossing the demarcation line.

Vessels on a groundfish trip must still submit a VMS catch report if the vessel has declared into 1) Multiple BSAs, 2) the Eastern US/Canada area, or 3) sector exemption(s) with catch reporting requirements. The frequency of catch reports required may vary based on the vessel's declared activity.

If you have questions about catch reporting requirements, please refer to NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Region's VMS webpage at www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/vms/ or contact the Northeast VMS Team at (978)281-9213.

Helping Sea Turtles

Some people are surprised to hear that we have four species of sea turtles (green, Kemp's ridley, loggerhead, and leatherback) commonly found in our region (ME to VA) during the spring, summer, and fall. Turtles are in our area to feed on jellies, crabs, and mollusks in coastal areas. All sea turtles in the U.S. are protected under the Endangered Species Act. This is because their numbers declined and they continue to be vulnerable to many threats including hunting and egg harvesting, destruction of habitat, vessel strikes, and interactions with fishing gear. We are working to reduce these threats to try to recover sea turtle populations.

Safe Handling

Sea turtles are often found in the same time and place as fishing gear, which can unfortunately lead to unintentional interactions that cause serious injury or death of the turtles. We have documented interactions between sea turtle and many types of gear, including dredges, gillnets, hook and line gear, longlines, pot/traps, pound nets, trawls, and weirs. You can help reduce the threat to sea turtles

with prompt and thorough handling and resuscitation. All fishermen are responsible for the proper handling and resuscitation of sea turtles. These requirements are found at: http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/stranding/SeaTurtleHandlingResuscitationv1.pdf. Your actions can make a difference between life and death for a turtle.

Please Report

When a sea turtle becomes entangled in the vertical lines of fixed gear, releasing it can be challenging and complicated. These entanglements often involve live, injured animals, and line may be wrapped many times around multiple body parts. To ensure survival, entangled turtles must be handled carefully so that disentanglement efforts cause no further injury. Even a small amount of gear can eventually lead to serious injury or death so all gear must be removed before release.

Because sea turtle entanglements are complex, we need to learn more about where and why they occur, and how our handling procedures may be improved.

Additionally, there is potential risk in handling large, powerful animals (leatherbacks can weigh over 1000 lbs). For these reasons, we ask you to first report sea turtle entanglements to the Sea Turtle Disentanglement Network (STDN) via our hotline 1-866-755-NOAA (6622).

Remember to report sea turtles and sturgeon on your federal vessel trip reports (VTRS)

Once you make your report to the hotline, please stand by the turtle at a safe distance until receiving further instructions.

Standing-by an entangled turtle is crucial because it ensures that network responders can easily relocate the turtle. Network members usually respond quickly to assess the condition, completely and safely disentangle, and provide medical care, if necessary, for the turtle. In some cases, factors such as distance from shore or weather prohibit responders from reaching the entangled turtle in a timely manner. To prepare for these situations, fishermen participating in the Atlantic bluefish, American lobster, mackerel/squid/butterfish, monkfish, Northeast multispecies, Northeast skate complex, spiny dogfish, and summer flounder/scup/black sea bass fisheries are authorized to disentangle turtles from their own gear. These fishermen have received a placard describing sea turtle disentanglement techniques (contact our office if you need another one). Please always still report entangled turtles to the marine animal hotline first- our network is ready to assist you and the turtle at any time.

For additional information, contact Kate Sampson, Protected Resources Division, at (978) 282-8470 or e-mail kate.sampson@noaa.gov.

**If you encounter an entangled sea turtle or marine mammal, please contact the NMFS marine animal hotline immediately.
1-866-755-NOAA (6622)**



Whales

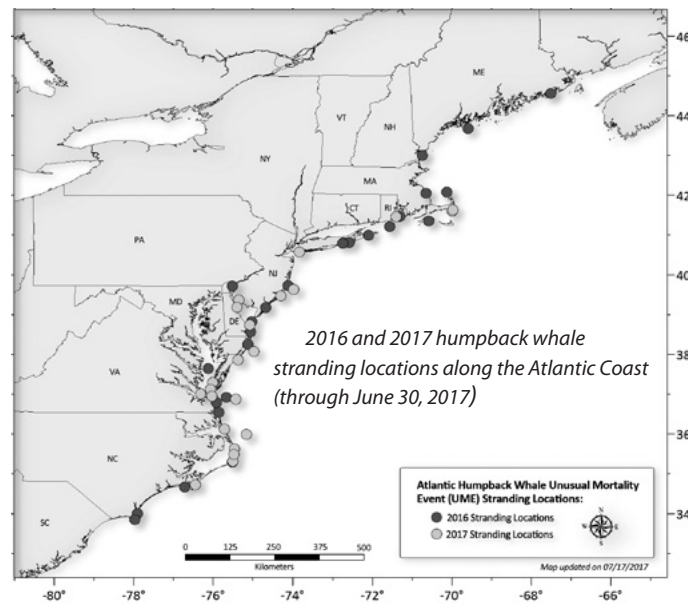
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examinations, also known as necropsies, when possible. Approximately half of the 50 cases have been examined by a complete or partial necropsy or collection of other samples. Of these examined cases, about 50% have evidence of vessel interactions. So network responders have documented that in at least 20% of these 50 humpback whale strandings, a vessel collision occurred and ultimately may have contributed to the whales' deaths.

Due to these significant findings and the drastic increase in stranded whales, we declared an Unusual Mortality Event for humpback whales along the eastern seaboard (from Maine through North Carolina) in April 2017. An Unusual Mortality Event declaration allows the MMRP to access additional resources and expertise to investigate the mortalities and to identify a cause for the increase in stranding events.

Even though a large portion of the necropsy findings indicate vessel interactions, network members also collect samples to look for indications of disease and harmful algal blooms when they investigate large scale marine mammal mortality event. To date, there have been no significant findings of infectious disease or harmful algal bloom toxicity related to the examined cases.

We will investigate additional environmental parameters, such as variable weather conditions and patterns, changes in whale and prey distribution, and co-occurrence of whale concentration and human activity. During the month of July 2017, reports of vessel



interactions with live whales increased off the coasts of Maine through Massachusetts, prompting us to remind recreational and commercial boaters of whale presence in

these areas and ways to minimize negative interactions.

This humpback whale Unusual Mortality Event investigation will continue as long as humpback whale mortality and stranding events are above the normal trend. If you see any dead floating or beached whale, or any live whale with observable injuries or behavioral changes, please report these sightings to the Regional Marine Animal Hotline: 866-755-NOAA (6622).

More information on this Humpback Whale Unusual Mortality Event can be found at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/mmume/2017humpbackatlanticume.html>.

Regional marine mammal viewing guidelines and boater tips can be found at:

<https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/Protected/mmp/viewing/guidelines/>.

Additionally, the public may donate to the [UME Contingency Fund](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/mmume/fund.html) using [Pay.gov](http://www.pay.gov) or at (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/mmume/fund.html>) for this or other Unusual Mortality Events to help support the important work of the Marine Mammal Stranding Network.

For more information, contact our Regional Marine Mammal Response Coordinator, Mendy Garron at 978-282-8478 or mendy.garron@noaa.gov.

Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan (HPTRP) - Your Efforts Are Working!

HPTRP regulations are intended to reduce the serious injury and mortality of harbor porpoises in Northeast sink gillnet and Mid-Atlantic gillnet fisheries from Maine through North Carolina. Conservation measures include pinger requirements, gear modifications, and time/area closures.

Due to industry participation, we have seen a decrease in bycatch of harbor porpoise as compliance with these regulations increases. As of 2016, compliance rates in New England were at 86% and in the Mid-Atlantic, 76%. With your continued help and dedication, we can keep this trend going!

See below for a summary reminder of seasonal restrictions. For more information, contact the HPTRP Coordinator, Kate Swails, at (978) 282-8481 or visit the HPTRP web page at www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/porptrp/. If you have questions about gear requirements, please contact the fishery liaison for your area: John Higgins (978) 711-3669 in New England, and Glenn Salvador (757) 414-0128 in the Mid-Atlantic.

Northeast Gillnet Fisheries (All)

Area	Dates	Restrictions
Northeast Closure Area	August 15- September 13	CLOSURE
Mid-Coast Management Area	September 15- May 31	Pingers Required
Massachusetts Bay Management Area	November 1- February 28/29 March 1-31 April 1- May 31	Pingers Required CLOSURE Pingers Required
Stellwagen Bank Management Area	November 1- May 31	Pingers Required
Southern New England Management Area	December 1- May 31	Pingers Required
Cape Cod South Closure Area	March 1-31	Closure
Offshore Management Area	November 1- May 31	Pingers Required
Cashes Ledge Closure Area	February 1-28/29	CLOSURE

Mid-Atlantic Gillnet Fisheries (Large & Small Mesh)

Area	Dates Gear Modifications Required	Dates Gillnet Closure
Large Mesh Gillnet (Mesh Size 7-18 inches)		
Waters off New Jersey Management Area	Jan. 1- March 31; April 21- April 30	April 1- April 20
Mudhole North Management Area	Jan. 1- April 30	Feb. 15- March 15; April 1-April 20
Mudhole South Management Area	Jan. 1- Jan. 31; March 16-March 31; April 21- April 30	Feb. 1- March 15; April 1-April 20
Southern Mid-Atlantic Management Area	Feb. 1- Feb. 14; March 16- April 30	Feb. 15-March 15

Small Mesh Gillnet (Mesh Size >5 inches to < 7 inches)

Waters off New Jersey Management Area	Jan. 1- April 30	
Mudhole North Management Area	Jan. 1- April 30	Feb. 15- March 15
Mudhole South Management Area	Jan. 1- Jan. 31; March 16-April 30	Feb. 1- March 15
Southern Mid-Atlantic Management Area	Feb. 1-April 30	