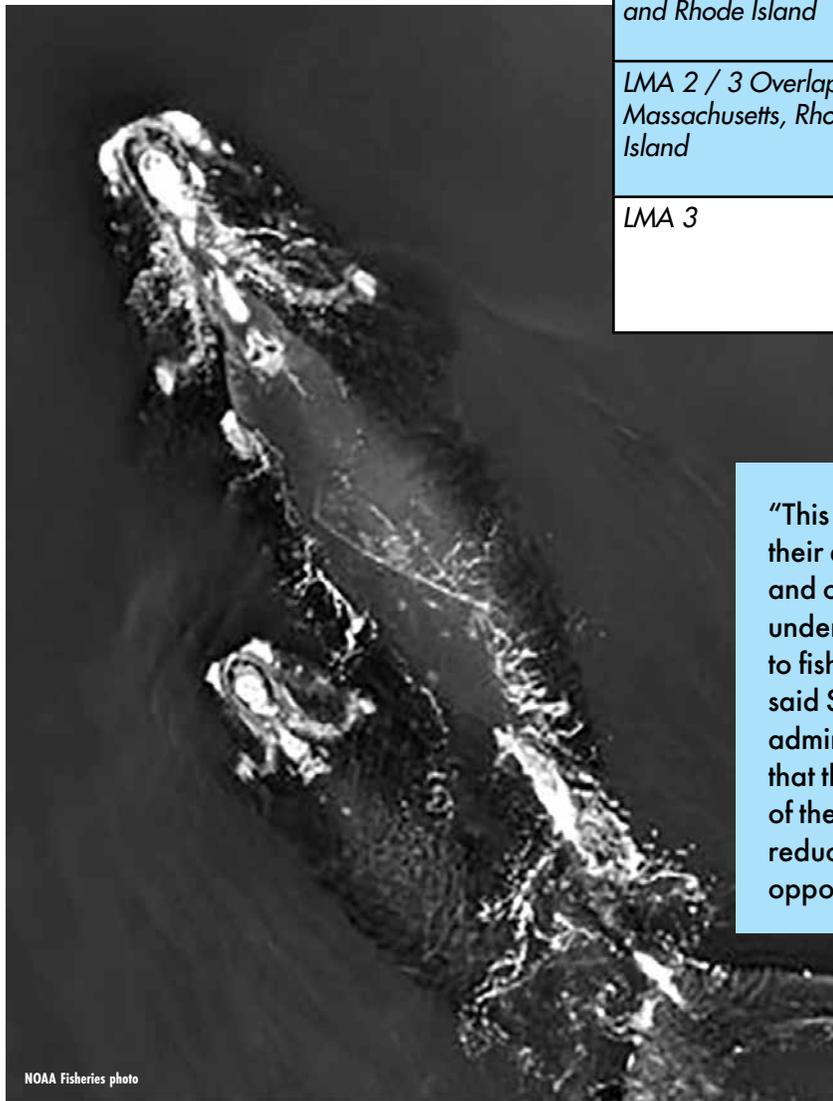


Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team Reaches Nearly Unanimous Consensus on Right Whale Survival Measures

On April 23, a group of approximately 60 fishermen, scientists, conservationists, and state and federal officials gathered in Providence, Rhode Island. After days of intense discussion, on Friday April 26, the group, known as the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team, reached nearly unanimous consensus on measures that would achieve at least a 60 percent reduction in the risk of mortality and serious injuries of North Atlantic right whales in trap/pot fisheries in New England.

The North Atlantic right whale population, already critically endangered, has been significantly declining since 2010. Entanglement in trap/pot gear has been identified as one of the main threats. According to the Marine Mammal Stock Assessment Report, the number of animals being killed each year are far exceeding the number allowed by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

Given the declining North Atlantic right whale population, NOAA Fisheries made it clear that



NOAA Fisheries photo

Near Consensus Take Reduction Recommendations			
State/Jurisdiction	Vertical Line Reduction	Gear Modification	Est. % Risk Reduction
Maine permitted vessels through LMA 1	50% vertical line reduction through LMA 1 (50% risk reduction)	LMA 1 - Weak rope. Outside of 3 miles: weak rope on 3/4 length of buoy line (toppers) (11.6% risk reduction)	61.6%
NH LMA 1	30% vertical line reduction (30% risk reduction)	1700lb breaking strength or sleeves (28.5 % risk reduction)	58.5%
Massachusetts LMA 1 and Outer Cape	Mass Bay Restricted Area Closure (24% risk reduction)	Sleeves or 1700lb breaking strength or equivalent (11% risk reduction)	60%
	30% vertical line reduction, not including MBRA fishermen (-5%) (25% risk reduction)		
LMA 2 - Massachusetts and Rhode Island	18% (2018 - 2020) vertical line reduction (18% risk reduction)	1700 lb or equivalent (42% risk reduction)	60%
LMA 2 / 3 Overlap – Massachusetts, Rhode Island	Trawling up to 30 traps (from 20) (30% risk reduction for that area)		
LMA 3	Accelerate planned line reduction 18% by 2020	Rapid research on alternatives to introduce weak rope or weak link elements in to offshore line	18% + TBD Commitment to 60%

regulations to reduce entanglements in trap/pot gear to the MMPA target are forthcoming and would be drafted in the months ahead. NOAA Fisheries challenged the Take Reduction Team to consider the April meeting their best opportunity to have a direct influence on creating the necessary take reduction measures.

“This is hard work. The Team members brought not only their expertise, but also their passion for the people and communities they represent to the table. Everyone understands that there are real and difficult consequences to fishermen as a result of the choices made in this room,” said Sam Rauch, NOAA Fisheries deputy assistant administrator for regulatory programs. **“I am confident that the meaningful measures supported by the majority of the Team today present a substantial opportunity to reduce the impacts of U.S. fisheries on right whales and an opportunity to support the recovery of this species.”**

After analyzing data, working with modelers, and brainstorming a variety of potential options, the Team recommended two general risk reduction approaches:

reductions in the number of vertical buoy lines to reduce the whales’ exposure to potential entanglement threats, and gear modifications to reduce the breaking strength of fishing lines to allow entangled whales to more easily break free of gear.

See WHALE TAKE REDUCTION, page 4

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

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How to Participate in the Federal Skate Bait and Barndoor Fisheries

Fishing in the Skate Bait Fishery

Q. How can I fish in the federal skate bait fishery?

A. You can participate in the federal skate bait fishery if you have been issued and have onboard a federal skate vessel permit AND a skate bait Letter of Authorization (LOA).

Q. What does the LOA exemption do?

A. The LOA only exempts a vessel from the lower possession limits of the wing fishery. Unless a skate bait vessel is fishing in one of the skate exemption areas in Southern New England or the Mid-Atlantic, it must fish under a Northeast multispecies, monkfish, or scallop Days-at-Sea.

Q. How do I obtain a skate bait LOA?

A. To obtain a skate bait LOA, log in to Fish Online or contact our Permits Office at (978) 282-8438 or NMFS.GAR.Permits@noaa.gov. You may also contact your local Port Agent.

Q. What does the LOA allow?

A. When fishing under a skate bait LOA, you MAY:

- Possess or land no more than 25,000 pounds of whole skates per trip for use as bait during Season 1 (May 1 – July 31) and Season 2 (August 1 – October 31).
- Possess or land no more than 12,000 pounds of whole skates per trip for use as bait during Season 3 (November 1 – April 30).
- Transfer bait catch to another vessel at sea.

Q. What does the LOA restrict?

A. When fishing under a skate bait LOA, you MAY NOT:

- Possess or land skate wings.
- Possess or land whole skates greater than 23 inches long.
- Retain, possess, or land barndoor skates.

Q. Are there new possession limits in the skate bait fishery?

Reminder of Proportional Barndoor Skate Possession Limits

Type of Trip	Season	Trip Limit (lb)			
		Skate Wings	Whole Skates	Barndoor Skate Wings	Whole Barndoor Skates
Northeast (NE) Multispecies A, Scallop, or Monkfish DAS*	May 1 – August 31	2,600	5,902	650	1,476
	September 1 – April 30	4,100	9,307	1,025	2,327

A. Yes, as of March 18, 2018 with Framework Adjustment 4, from November 1 until April 30, the trip limit is 12,000 pounds. However, when 80% of the annual bait skate quota is projected to be harvested, the trip limit will drop to 8,000 pounds for the remainder of the period.

Q. Can I still land skate for bait in the wing fishery without an LOA?

A. Yes, as long as your total catch is within the wing possession and landing limits.



Barndoor skate.

Fishing for Barndoor Skate

Q. When can I possess and land barndoor skate?

A. You can possess and land barndoor skate only if you:

- Fish in the directed wingfishery.
- Possess or land no more than the possession and landing limit for barndoor skate.
- Count the barndoor skate as a portion of your overall skate catch.

Q. When can I NOT possess and land barndoor skate?

A. You cannot possess and land barndoor skate when you are fishing:

- Under a Northeast Multispecies Category B Days-at-Sea.
- When not fishing on a DAS.
- In the skate bait fishery under the skate bait LOA.

Q. How much barndoor skate can I keep?

A. According to seasonal wing possession and landing limits, up to 25% of your total skate catch can be barndoor skates. For example, if the wing possession limit is 2,600 lb, 650 lb of your total skate catch can be barndoor and the remaining 1,950 lb other skate species. You may keep the full barndoor limit even if you don't catch the full wing possession limit.

Q. What are other requirements for catching barndoor skate?

A. There are a few other things to keep in mind when fishing for barndoor skate:

- You cannot discard any skate wings when you possess barndoor skate (no high grading).
- You must separate barndoor skate wings and carcasses from other fish species on board your vessel. All barndoor skates (whole or parts) must be readily available for inspection.

For more information, contact our Sustainable Fisheries Division at (978) 281-9315.

Reminder: Thorny Skates are still prohibited!

Meet Anna Mercer, our new Cooperative Research chief

Anna Mercer is all about diversity: in life, work, interests, and people. She is the new chief of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Cooperative Research Branch and arrives with an already impressive resume. It's filled not only with a range of marine science accomplishments, but also substantial experience in connecting science to the people to whom, and places where, sustainable fisheries matter.

"I come into this job with an open mind and some clarity on ways the program can improve. I have worked alongside people from this branch for years and look forward to being a part of it," says Mercer. "The hardest thing is to find ways to ensure that cooperative research results get used in a meaningful way. Building and maintaining sustainable fisheries is a lifelong effort, and I believe cooperative research is a big part of making that effort successful."

Cooperative research started to take shape as a formal program for NOAA Fisheries in the northeast during the 1990s. Disaster relief funding provided for northeast groundfish fishery failure was used in part to compensate groundfish businesses for participating in research that addressed the failure. The program is now a multi-million-dollar effort focused on a variety of fishery challenges, from bycatch to better and easier catch reporting to industry-based at sea data gathering and research that spans fisheries and topics.

Mercer earned a bachelor's degree in marine biology from the University of New Hampshire. Moving on to doctoral study at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography, she thought long and hard about how to focus her broad interests. Graduate school provided ample opportunity to spend time at sea on fishing vessels, collecting data and doing research. From close encounters with electric torpedo rays to figuring out what to do when the trawl brings up a 3,000-pound boulder that sea-anchors the boat, to getting her hand stuck in a monkfish's gullet, she has a load of interesting sea tales.

Since earning her doctoral degree in biological oceanography, Mercer has been immersed in cooperative and collaborative



Mercer has worked on at-sea monitoring of marine life and habitats, underutilized species market development, bay scallop research and management, ocean productivity surveys, intertidal and tropical ecology, coral reef fisheries, invasive species, and artisanal fishery development. More recently, Mercer has spearheaded research focused on enabling fishermen to collect quantitative biological and environmental data in an efficient and effective ways that pays off in valuable scientific data.

Mercer's appointment creates the first all-female leadership team within the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. She joins division chief Amanda McCarty and fellow branch chief Amy Martins, who manages the sprawling fisheries sampling branch, encompassing a variety of monitoring programs that collect data directly during fishing trips.

work with the fishing industry. "I have always been at my best when I work directly with the fishing community as well as other scientists" she says. "Where I get excited is when the problem needs a diverse scientific approach to make a difference."

For-hire Vessel Permitting and Reporting

For-hire Vessel Permitting

If you are a for-hire captain fishing in federal waters (3-200 miles offshore) for one of the species listed below, you must have a valid Greater Atlantic Region Vessel Charter/Party Permit. Vessel operators are also required to have a Federal Vessel Operator Permit.

Note, however, that if you have a Northeast Multispecies limited access permit, you do not need the Northeast Multispecies Charter/Party Permit to carry passengers for hire on Northeast Multispecies trips.

- **Summer Flounder**
- **Black Sea Bass**
- **Scup**
- **Bluefish**
- **Atlantic Mackerel**
- **Golden Tilefish (north of the NC/VA boarder)**
- **Blueline Tilefish (north of the NC/VA boarder)**
- **Atlantic Mackerel**

If you need to obtain these permits, contact our Permits Office at (978) 282-8438 or email NMFS.GAR.Permits@noaa.gov. All permits are free and will be issued within 30 days of receipt of your complete application.

For-hire Vessel Trip Reporting

Once you have a federal permit to carry passengers for hire, you must report your catch:

If you take a for-hire trip to fish for any species, you must electronically submit vessel trip reports within 48 hours of the end of your trip.

If you only have a Northeast multispecies permit and take for-hire trip, you must submit vessel trip reports within a week of the end of the trip, either electronically or by paper.

If you are fishing for highly migratory species or any species managed by the South

Atlantic Fishery Management Council, there may be additional requirements so be sure to check with those offices for more information.

If you need assistance with reporting your catch, contact our VTR Support Team at (978) 281-9246, or your local Port Agent.



Whale take *Continued from page 1*

The extent of recommended changes vary by location and jurisdiction.

Further recommendations on reporting, vessel monitoring, and an expansion of gear marking are also anticipated.

The near-consensus agreement demonstrates the commitment of the Take Reduction Team to balance the need to reduce impacts of trap/pot fisheries on right whales with the need to allow the continued operation of a healthy and viable lobster fishery and other trap pot fisheries.

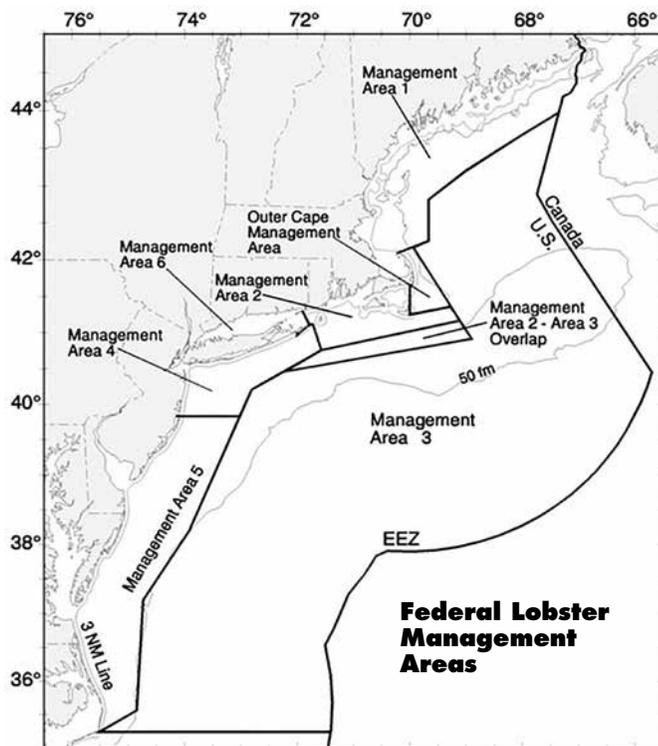
Next Steps:

New England states, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and NOAA Fisheries will work to determine how best to create the regulations needed to implement the Take Reduction Team's recommendations.

The need to get additional input from the lobster and other trap/pot fisheries is essential.

Public scoping meetings to discuss implementation of the Team's recommendations are anticipated during the late spring and early summer. Meetings will be announced by the States, the Commission, and NOAA Fisheries.

For more information, contact Colleen Coogan, Protected Resources Division, at 978-2819-9181 or email her at Colleen.Coogan@noaa.



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On your smart phone, our texts will identify us (the sender) as 468-311 NOAA Fisheries GAR. Texts will include a short message plus a link to more information.

You may also sign up by texting "468-311" and adding the keyword below for the topic that interests you. You can only subscribe by text for one topic at a time.

Questions? Contact Olivia Rugo, Stakeholder Engagement, at 978-675-2167 or email her at Olivia.Rugo@noaa.gov

Keywords:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| All | Crab |
| Lobster | Skate |
| Herring | Dogfish |
| Scallops | Flounder |
| Bluefish | Scup |
| Groundfish | Seabass |
| MSB (mackerel, squid, butterfish) | Clam |
| Monkfish | Quahog |
| Recreational | Tilefish |
| | Whiting |
| | Hake |

Apply for our regional federal fishing and research permits online

We now offer commercial and recreational vessel owners, operators, dealers, and researchers in our region the option to complete and submit a suite of permit forms and applications online.

Go to **Fish Online**, our web-based system for vessel permit holders, to complete and submit these forms electronically. Submissions via mail, email and fax remain options as well. To access these online applications, create or sign-in to your Fish Online account and click on 'Application Forms' in the left margin.

Questions?

For assistance with Fish Online, call our Help Desk at 978-281-9188.

For assistance with permits, call our Permit Office at 978-282-8438.

PERMIT APPLICATIONS

- Initial Dealer Permit
- Initial Vessel Permit
- Vessel Operator Permit
- Letter of Authorization

Gillnet tag and annual certification forms

Please note that renewal applications are not available online at this time.

RESEARCH PERMIT APPLICATIONS

- Letter of Acknowledgement (LOA)
- Temporary Possession Letter of Authorization
- Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP)
- Exempted Educational Activity Authorization (EEAA)
- Scallop Research Set-Aside Letter of Authorization (RSA LOA)
- Scientific Research permit (SRP)