



The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

Help Recover Sea Turtles

Depending on where and when you fish, you may see sea turtles in the Greater Atlantic Region fairly commonly to rarely. They come here to feed on jellies, crabs, seagrass, and mollusks during the spring, summer, and fall. While some turtles migrate as far north as Canadian waters, they are more commonly found south of Massachusetts. You might see any one of four species: leatherback, loggerhead, Kemp's ridley or green turtles. All sea turtles that occur in U.S. waters are at risk of extinction and are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Given this, NOAA's sea turtle program prioritizes actions that will help recover the species to the point where they can be removed from the ESA list.

Threats to sea turtles are varied. They include, but are not limited to, cold-stunning, predation, habitat destruction, vessel strikes, marine debris, channel dredging, and fishing interactions. We actively work to address both natural and man-made threats, focusing on those that have the greatest impact on the populations. We coordinate a stranding network that responds to hundreds of sick, injured, and dead sea turtles each year. Each fall, sea turtles experience cold stunning when they are exposed to cold water for an extended period of time. They become lethargic, inactive, and wash ashore. Through the stranding network, many animals that would have died are rescued, rehabilitated, and later released back to the wild. Many threats are man-made. The two most relevant to the fishing community are interactions with fishing gear and vessel strikes.

Many types of fishing gear, including dredges, gillnets, hook and line gear, longlines, pot/traps, pound nets, trawls, and weirs, are known to capture

or entangle sea turtles. For some of these gear types, reports generally come from those on the water who see an entangled or injured turtle. For example, 272 entanglements in vertical lines were reported between 2010 and 2019 to the Northeast Sea Turtle Disentanglement Network. We know that this is an underestimate as this is what was reported to the network and many interactions likely go unreported. For other fishing gear, we have estimates based on data collected by fisheries observers. On average each year, bottom trawl gear is estimated to interact with 135 turtles, gillnet gear with 198 turtles, and scallop dredge gear with 155 loggerheads. Interactions with fishing gear vary in severity, and we have estimated the likelihood of mortality by gear type. Approximately 60 percent of vertical line, 47 percent of trawl, 65 percent of gillnet, and 28 percent of scallop dredge interactions result in the animal dying.

In addition to interactions with fishing gear, sea turtles may be struck by many types of vessels. In an assessment of the impacts of federal fisheries on protected species, we anticipated that 15 sea turtles will be struck and killed by vessels operating in the federal fisheries over a five-year period. While relatively few interactions are expected to occur with fishing vessels, please keep an eye out for jellies or turtles in the water and navigate carefully around to avoid interactions.

Help us recover sea turtles

While we work to recover these populations, we could use your help. This can include providing ideas for preventing or reducing the severity of interactions, participating in gear research, sending comments on potential management measures,

safely handling captured sea turtles, and reporting interactions.

Get involved in research

Ideally, with the help of fishermen, we will be able to design gears that prevent or minimize the severity of turtle interactions and retain catch. Colleagues at NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) work closely with the commercial fishing industry to conduct research on interactions between protected species and fishing gear. A fisherman and scientist discuss our work on low profile nets, designed to reduce interactions with sea turtles in gillnet gear, in the video "Going Low to Reduce Sea Turtle Bycatch" on the NEFSC's gear research webpage. NEFSC gear specialists are also evaluating data loggers to monitor trawl tow durations, on-demand fishing technologies for trap/pot gear, and turtle excluder devices to allow sea turtles to escape trawl nets. Together with fishermen, they strive to develop safe and feasible methods to reduce impacts of fishing on these species while retaining target catch. Check out the NEFSC's gear research program online, and let us know if you would like to work with us!

Provide input on management measures

We welcome all ideas and suggestions to reduce the threat that fishing gear poses to sea turtles and recognize that often the most effective solutions come from those who know fishing operations the best. Most recently, we have been gathering information on potential future measures to reduce bycatch in trawl fisheries, with a focus on the Atlantic croaker, weakfish, longfin squid, and summer flounder fisheries. We are considering turtle excluder devices and limited tow durations, as well as any other measures suggested through public feedback. While the comment period just ended, we welcome feedback on potential management measures at any time. Your feedback can be sent to <nmfs.gar.turtletrawl@noaa.gov>.

Handle sea turtles safely and, when necessary, perform resuscitation

Interactions with fishing gear can lead to injury and death. You can help increase the likelihood that a turtle will survive an interaction with safe handling and, if necessary, resuscitation. All fishermen are responsible for the proper handling and resuscitation of sea turtles. These requirements are found <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-10/Sea%20turtle%20HR_October%2025%202021%20%282%29.pdf>. Your actions can make a difference between life and death for a turtle.

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 lines may be wrapped many times around multiple body parts.

See *SEA TURTLES*, next page

Help Recover Sea Turtle Populations



PROPERLY HANDLE AND RESUSCITATE SEA TURTLES CAUGHT IN YOUR GEAR



CALL 1-866-755-NOAA (6622) FOR SEA TURTLES ENTANGLED IN VERTICAL LINES



GET INVOLVED IN GEAR RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT

THIS SUPPLEMENT PROVIDED BY NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE'S GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL OFFICE

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The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

Slow Down for Right Whales

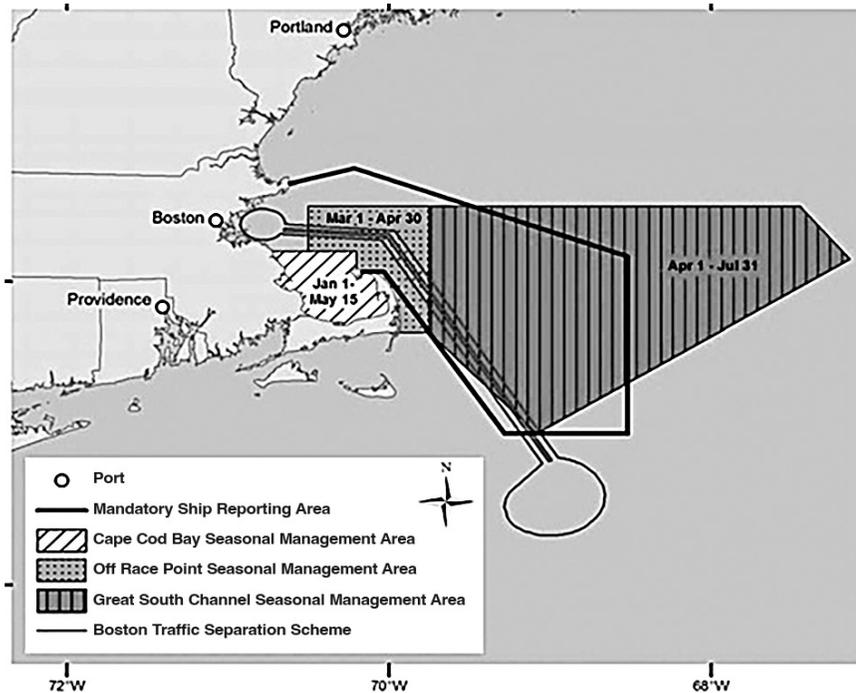
Endangered North Atlantic right whales are found along the U.S. Atlantic coast during much of the year. Along with entanglement in fishing gear, collisions with vessels are one of the biggest barriers to the species' recovery. Collisions such as these are also dangerous for the vessels involved. Stay safe and help protect right whales by slowing down where right whales are found.

Seasonal Management Areas

Areas where high abundances of right whales are known to occur on an annual basis.

Vessels 65 feet and larger in length are required to slow to 10 knots or less in these areas.

All mariners are strongly recommended to avoid areas or slow speeds to 10 knots or less.



Please note: There are regulatory requirements for vessels of all sizes in certain Massachusetts state waters.

Right Whale Slow Zones

Areas where right whales have been recently seen or heard.

Mariners are encouraged to reduce speeds to 10 knots or less while transiting through these areas, which are in effect for 15 days. Better yet, if you can avoid these areas you are helping conserve the endangered whale.

You can sign up for email notifications on our webpage (search online for GARFO) and select "Right Whale Slow Zones" under the Regional New England/Mid-Atlantic subscription topics. You can also follow us on Facebook (@NOAAFisheriesNEMA) and Twitter (@NOAAFish_GARFO)

for announcements. Information on seasonal right whale speed regulations can also be found at <<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/endangered-species-conservation/reducing-vessel-strikes-north-atlantic-right-whales>>.

The Draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy Public Comment Period is Open

In May, NOAA Fisheries announced a first-ever draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy, which is open for public comment through August 19. We are planning a robust outreach effort around this strategy to hear directly from people across the nation. This outreach strategy includes a series of webinars in June and July. The dates and times for those webinars are listed here: <<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/noaa-fisheries-invites-public-comment-new-draft-equity-and-environmental-justice>>.

This draft national strategy describes the path that NOAA Fisheries will take to incorporate equity and environmental justice into the vital services we provide to all stakeholders. Our goals under the strategy are: (1) prioritize identification, equitable treatment, and meaningful involvement of underserved communities; (2) provide equitable delivery of services; and (3) prioritize equity and environmental justice in our mandated and mission work.

We plan to accomplish our goals by providing an empowering environment within the agency to support multiple equity and environmental justice approaches; incorporating equity and environmental justice in agency policies and plans; achieving equity in research and researching equity; increasing engagement; distributing benefits equitably; and promoting inclusive governance. By focusing on these goals and objectives, NOAA Fisheries will provide more equitable stewardship of the nation's ocean resources and their habitat.

This national strategy is the result of guidance from recent Executive Orders, the White House

Environmental Justice Advisory Council, the Department of Commerce's Equity Action Plan, NOAA's Climate Council and agency leadership, enthusiastic staff participation, and a clear and growing need indicated by underserved communities. The strategy also builds on our previous equity and environmental justice efforts to provide guidance for incorporating and prioritizing EEJ in ongoing and future activities in support of our mission.

How you can help!

NOAA Fisheries' science, conservation, and management activities serve a diverse array of communities across the United States and territories. However, not all communities have equal opportunities and access to agency-led services. Through this call for public comment, we seek assistance in several areas, including help to identify:

- Who the agency's underserved communities are
- How the agency can reduce barriers to underserved communities
- How the agency can better incorporate equity and environmental justice into our daily activities
- How we can improve equity in our programs and policies now, with our current resources, and in the future
- Help evaluating whether the draft recommendations for action are on target

Please visit <<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/noaa-fisheries-invites-public-comment-new-draft-equity-and-environmental-justice>> for more information.

Sea Turtles

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To ensure survival, entangled turtles must be handled carefully so that disentanglement efforts cause no further injury. All gear must also be removed before release as even a small amount of gear can eventually lead to serious injury or death. Due to the complexity of these cases and the potential danger of handling large, powerful animals (leatherbacks can weigh over 1000 lbs), we ask you to immediately report these cases to the Sea Turtle Disentanglement Network via our hotline **1-866-755-NOAA(6622)**. Once you make that report, please stand by the turtle at a safe distance until receiving further instructions. Standing by is crucial because it ensures that network responders can easily relocate the turtle. Network members respond quickly to assess the condition, completely and safely disentangle, and provide medical care, if necessary, for the turtle. Our network is ready to assist you and the turtle at any time.

Please report on your VTR

If you are submitting a vessel trip report to GARFO, you are required to report any sea turtles that are captured. While reporting interactions will not help the individual sea turtle, it does provide us with more information on interactions. Better information allows us to better protect sea turtles going forward. Learn more about reporting protected species interactions by visiting our handling and reporting website.

For additional information, contact Ellen Keane at (978) 282-8476 or email <ellen.keane@noaa.gov>.

Safe Tuna Fishing Means Avoiding Whales

Beginning in May and through November, you may catch a glimpse of humpback whales feeding in the waters off New England, particularly in Stellwagen Bank. These whales gather in large groups as they compete for herring and sand lance, blowing underwater bubble nets to corral their small prey, and feasting by lunging through the water's surface with immense concentration and power.

The annual humpback return to feed coincides with a return of other large pelagic species, including multiple tuna species. While tuna are also feeding on dense aggregations of herring and sand lance, they steer clear of the hungry humpback's bubble clouds. That's why experienced tuna fishermen also steer clear of feeding whales, because tuna won't make the mistake of getting caught up in a humpback bubble cloud. Savvy fishermen (commercial, charter, and recreational) recognize that getting too close to these massive animals puts too much at stake— not just for the whales, but also for themselves.

Why we're talking to the tuna fleet

While we know all boats navigating waters overlapping areas where whales can be found pose a risk to whales, NOAA Fisheries annually receives reports of tuna fishermen trolling gear too closely to, or even through areas of high whale concentration or group feeding activity. While the more experienced tuna operator understands the risks of getting too close to these animals, sometimes individuals can be caught off guard when whales dive and re-emerge in an unexpected location. Others may specifically target feeding whales, not fully understanding the dangers they are putting themselves or the animals in, or that the tuna they are seeking are likely on the outskirts of these areas instead. We are asking that the tuna fleet help us spread the word that these kinds of behaviors are just not worth the liability. We are hoping that by spreading the word, we can reduce the number of reports we receive, and proactively prevent any tragedies from occurring.

What can you do?

Go slow. If you see that whales are in the area, slow down to 10 knots or less. If you see one animal, others are likely around. Some whales can stay submerged for 20-30 minutes. Going slower gives whales more of a chance to get out of your way.

Stay back. Never approach humpback whales closer than 100-300 feet*. Give feeding whales even more space as they may resurface in unanticipated locations.

Be careful. Parallel your vessel's course to that of any traveling whale, being careful to not cross its path of travel.

BOATERS

PROTECT WHALES, SEA TURTLES, SEALS, STURGEON AND YOURSELF FROM PREVENTABLE BOAT COLLISIONS.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

GIVE SPACE
SAFE DISTANCES REDUCE RISKS OF ILLEGAL DISTURBANCE AND DANGEROUS COLLISIONS.

GO SLOW
SLOWER BOAT SPEEDS GIVE ANIMALS TIME TO GET OUT OF YOUR WAY.

REPORT
REPORT ENTANGLEMENTS AND INJURED ANIMALS TO 866-755-6622

STAY INFORMED
SIGN UP FOR NEWS AND NOTIFICATIONS:
[HTTPS://GO.USA.GOV/XFS6R](https://go.usa.gov/xfs6r)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

NOAA
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

NOAA FISHERIES

Report. If a whale is accidentally entangled in your lures or monofilament, is struck by your boat, or if you observe this happening, please report the incident to (866) 755-6622, or the US Coast Guard on VHF Channel 16.

Learn more. NOAA Fisheries and other regional partners have teamed up to create the See a Spout, Watch Out program. Visit the website to learn more about safe navigation in waters shared by whales: <www.seespout.org>. Questions? Call the protected resources office at: (978) 281-9300.

*Please note that the approach guidelines listed here apply to humpback, fin, and minke whales. Approaching North Atlantic right whales closer than 500 yards (1,500 feet or 5 football field lengths) is prohibited by federal and state law. If you cannot identify the whale species, stay back 500 yards until you can be sure it is safe, and legal, to approach closer. For information on how to identify whale species on the water, visit: <www.seespout.org>.

Whales can be injured

There is a misperception among some mariners that whales “know” to move out of the way of on-coming vessels. However, research indicates that this might not be so. With 1 in 10 humpbacks showing some evidence (i.e. scarring) indicating that they have been struck by a boat (Hill et al. 2017), it might be more accurate to assume that large whales may not recognize the threat boats pose. When inexperienced fishermen get too close to whales, especially whales preoccupied with feeding and other important behaviors, they take a very big risk of adding to the vessel-strike statistics. While some boat strikes may not be lethal, there is always the chance that they could be.

People can be injured

Navigating or fishing too closely to whales isn't just a safety concern for the whales, but also can be life-threatening for the individuals on board the vessel. These dangerous collisions have been documented along the entire eastern coast—with stories of capsized vessels, people thrown overboard, and sustaining physical injuries as a result. On top of the safety concerns, damage to the boats from whale collisions can range from thousands to millions of dollars—a hefty preventable cost.

Whales are protected by federal law

All whale species are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. This law recognizes the important role marine mammals play in the larger marine ecosystem, and prohibits human activities that could interfere with their important behaviors. Intentionally boating or fishing too closely to whales can result in fines or penalties issued under this law.

Proposal for Flexible Shortfin Mako Retention Limit

In April 2022, NOAA Fisheries published a proposed rule that would establish a flexible shortfin mako shark retention limit with a default limit of zero in commercial and recreational highly migratory species (HMS) fisheries. This proposed rule would implement the related 2021 International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) recommendation. Under the proposed measures, we could increase the shortfin mako shark retention limit from the default, or subsequently decrease the retention limit, for the

commercial fishery, the recreational fishery, or both, during the fishing year based on regulatory criteria and retention allowed by ICCAT. A full description of the proposed action can be found on our website.

To gather additional input from our stakeholders, we held a public webinar on April 27, 2022, and consulted with the HMS Advisory Panel at its Spring 2022 meeting in May. The final rule is expected to publish in June 2022. Please contact Carrie Soltanoff for additional information at (301) 427-8503.



The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

Frequently Asked Questions From Industry: Electronic Vessel Trip Reporting

Since November 10, 2021, Greater Atlantic Region permitted commercial and for-hire fishing vessels, with the exception of those vessels that only hold an American Lobster permit, have been required to submit Vessel Trip Reports (VTRs) electronically using a GARFO approved Electronic Vessel Trip Reporting (eVTR) application. To help you better comply with these rules, we are providing the following frequently asked questions.



DAS trip that are seeking safe harbor, where they do not land or offload but lay behind the VMS demarcation line, should continue to report the initial eVTR upon continuance of the trip. If the vessel hits the dock, they then need to close the initial eVTR and report the catch as 4 - Retained for Future Sale in the dealer sections. When the vessel eventually leaves the dock, they should start a new eVTR.

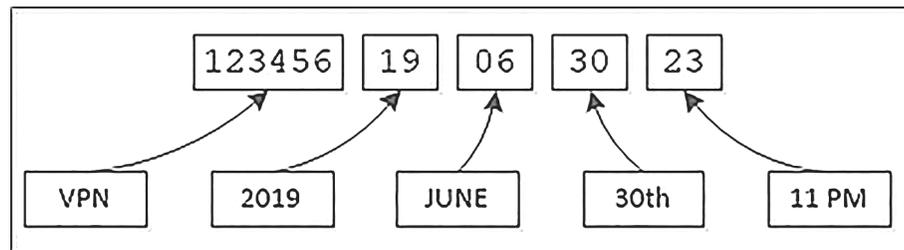
onboard the vessel during a trip. eVTRs should be filled out at sea, not after the vessel completes their trip. Prior to landing, vessels must record an estimate of weight for each species on board using their reporting device.

How is the eVTR reconciled with the dealer reporting?

At the time of sale, vessel operators must provide the 14-digit eVTR trip number to the dealer. GARFO matches dealer reports and eVTRs to identify any major discrepancies. Catch weights reported on eVTRs should be estimated hail weights that are reasonably close to the weights reported by dealers.

Do I need a reporting device onboard the vessel?

Vessels MUST have their eVTR reporting device



What if a trip ends before fishing is started due to a breakdown, weather, etc.?

You can submit a No Effort trip. For more information, see the Electronic Vessel Trip Reporting (eVTR) Instructions on our website.

For more information, instructions, and instructional videos about eVTR reporting, please visit the eVTR informational page. For further assistance please call the Vessel Reporting Help Desk at (978) 281-9188 or contact your local Port Agent.

Now that there is no dealer copy of the paper eVTR, what do fishermen provide the dealer when they sell their catch?

Fishermen are required to provide dealers with the eVTR trip number which replaces the traditional paper 8-digit VTR number. The eVTR Trip number has 14 characters and is formatted based on vessel permit number, year, month, date, and hour in which the eVTR was created. For a representation of the 14-character format, refer to the graphic below.

Fishermen should provide their dealer with the eVTR trip number that was automatically generated within their eVTR app when they created the trip report. Federal dealers **MUST** enter **that entire 14 digit number** in the VTR section of the dealer report.

What happens when a boat comes in and doesn't offload in 48 hours? How do I get the weight information from the dealer?

You are submitting hail weights (estimate of catch) and not dealer weights on eVTRs. You do not need to wait for the exact information from your dealer(s). The exact weights will be submitted by the dealer(s) you sell your catch to and matched to your trip.

What is the procedure for scallop vessels laying behind the line with product onboard that then need to start a new eVTR once the trip resumes?

Limited access scallop vessels on an open area

Join the Study Fleet!

The Cooperative Research Branch is seeking to recruit new vessels to join our Study Fleet.

What is the Study Fleet?

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Cooperative Research Branch manages the data collected aboard approximately 50 fishing vessels in the Northeast. The Study Fleet began in 2006 as a way to engage fishermen in collecting high-resolution catch, effort, and environmental data to address science and management needs. The Study Fleet captains and crews use specialized software, automated oceanographic sensors, and real-time data transmission to collect detailed data. Study Fleet vessels receive training and compensation for their participation.

Who are we looking for?

We are recruiting new Study Fleet vessels to participate in the longfin squid, shortfin squid, mackerel, butterfish, scup, black sea bass, summer flounder, whiting, haddock, and tilefish fisheries. These fisheries have been identified as our priority for the collection of long-term, tow-by-tow data using our Fisheries Logbook Data Recording Software (FLDRS), automated oceanographic sensors, and real-time data transmission.

Contracts will be awarded in August 2022 with a start date in September 2022.

For more information on how to participate contact: Katie Burchard, Operations Specialist, <katie.burchard@noaa.gov> (508) 299-9587.

