



## Why Accurate Fishery Reporting is Important

**N**OAA Fisheries needs accurate fishery reporting data for the conservation and management of marine fishery resources in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The data reported is used to develop, implement, and monitor fishery management strategies and for a variety of other uses.

Determining fishery removals, both landings and discards, requires information about the total catch by area, gear type, and mesh size. In the Greater Atlantic Region, dealer transaction reports are primarily used for determining total landed catch by species and weight. This is because dealers typically use scales that provide actual weight, while hail weights (estimates) are reported on the fishing vessel trip reports.

On the other hand, dealer transaction reports do not provide details about where the fish were caught or with what type of gear. For these important pieces of information, we use the vessel trip reports. So, in order to get an accurate estimate of how much fish has been removed from each stock, both dealer transaction reports and vessel trip reports must be complete, accurate, and timely.

When data is correctly reported, we can allocate the catch to the statistical area where the fish was caught and identify the gear type used to harvest the fish. This information is used to monitor catch, and to ensure that the annual catch limits set by each fishery management plan are not exceeded. In several fisheries, catch is monitored at the vessel level, and is counted toward specific allocations to fishing sectors or vessels.

The information is also used by stock assessment analysts, who then apply the age and length sample data collected by port agents and fishery observers to estimate the number and age of fish removed from the population. All data plays a role – the dealer transaction reports, vessel trip reports, vessel monitoring system data, observer data, port samples, and more. Our ability to ensure that catch limits are attained, but not exceeded, and our ability to understand a fish stock's status are both directly related to the level of detail and accuracy of available catch data.

Providing this information is time-consuming for fishermen and dealers, but it is absolutely critical to good management and good science. These data are used to support stock assessments and analyses of vessel fishing activity over time, which can impact fishery allocations. Inaccurate or incomplete data can be very costly because management and scientific uncertainty usually increase when decisions have to be made with such data. Higher uncertainty generally leads to more restrictive catches than might be allowed otherwise.

### Reporting Compliance

Strong reporting compliance is the foundation for sound and sustainable management of our fisheries and is a high priority for NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement. There is always room for improvement in compliance with reporting requirements.

Here are examples of common compliance concerns and mistakes:

- Failure to properly declare fishing activity codes

through VMS

- Failure to complete and send Pre-trip Notifications
- Failure to complete and send Pre-landing Notifications
- Non-reporting or misreporting of Trip End Hails
- Non-reporting or misreporting of Daily Catch Reports

A vessel fishes in multiple statistical areas but reports only one statistical area on its vessel trip report. The vessel may actually have been fishing on several stocks of fish but because only a single area is reported on the vessel trip report, all of the landings are attributed to one stock. In this case, the catch is overestimated for one stock and underestimated for the others.

Miscoding for a specialized gear type. Example: VTR lists otter trawl (OTF) when actually using the Ruhle trawl (OTR) or haddock separator trawl (OHS). Specialized gears have different catch/discard rates, so it's important to list the correct specialized gear code if you are using it.

While Law Enforcement focuses its efforts on raising compliance rates with education and compliance assistance, serious or continuous offenses of non-reporting may be subject to enforcement action. Most commercial fisheries data are self-reported, and the quality and integrity of the data are controlled by those who report it – dealers and vessel owners and operators. Although scientists and analysts can make informed estimates about where catch has come from if they have to, it is much better to get that information from those who harvested and purchased the fish. Fishermen and dealers can reduce uncertainty in assessments and monitoring of in-season quotas by submitting timely, accurate, complete vessel trip and dealer transaction reports.

For more information, contact Natalie Berthiaume, OLE, at (978) 281-9321 or e-mail her at <natalie.berthiaume@noaa.gov> .

## New Lobster Trap Transfer Program

**T**he American lobster fishery is managed cooperatively by the Atlantic coastal states, from Maine to North Carolina, and by NOAA Fisheries through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (the Commission) Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster. Under this plan, states manage lobster in their waters from 0-3 nautical miles from shore, while NOAA Fisheries is responsible for lobster management and regulations in Federal waters (from 3-200 nautical miles from shore). We collaborate with the states through the Commission process to implement regulations consistent with the Commission's Lobster Plan.

The Commission recently recommended that the states and NOAA Fisheries implement a program to allow trap transfers in Lobster Management Areas 2, 3, and the Outer Cape. This program would enable permit holders to buy and sell all or part of a permit's trap allocation for these three areas, subject to certain Commission-recommended restrictions.

In response, we published a final rule (79 FR 19015) on April 7, 2014, establishing a Trap Transfer Program. Under the Federal regulations of the program, qualified Federal permit holders are allowed to sell portions of their trap allocation to other Federal lobster permit holders. Buyers can purchase traps up to an area's trap cap, with 10% of the transferred allocation retired from the fishery as a conservation tax. The program offers buyers and sellers the opportunity to scale their

Effective Fishing Year (Date of Trap Reduction)	Percent Trap Reductions	
	Area 2	Area 3
2015	None	None
2016	25%	5%
2017	5%	5%
2018	5%	5%
2019	5%	5%
2020	5%	5%
2021	5%	None

businesses according to their needs. You can get more information about the program online at: <<http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/regs/2014/April/14lobfr.pdf>>.

The states and NOAA Fisheries will rely on a centralized trap transfer tracking database to track transfers and determine trap allocations. The database was not complete when we published the final rule, so we deferred the start of the transfer program until all of the necessary data was in place. The database project is a significant undertaking, but through ongoing collaborations with state marine fisheries agencies, NOAA Fisheries, and the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program, we are optimistic that applications for trap transfers can be accepted and processed later

See *LOBSTER TRAPS*, page 3

## You Can Now Submit IVR Reports Online

**A**s an alternative to the current interactive voice response (IVR) telephone system, you can now submit reports for monkfish trips, herring trips, exempted fishing permits, and research set-asides through a new online system, which is also optimized for mobile devices.

To access this simple system, log in to Fish Online and click the 'IVR Reporting' link in the left side menu.

Fish Online can be found at: [www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/apps](http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/apps).

You will need a PIN number to log in. If you do not have one or have technical issues with the IVR system, contact Alison Ferguson, NOAA Fisheries, at (978)-281-9209 or email her at <[Alison.Ferguson@noaa.gov](mailto:Alison.Ferguson@noaa.gov)>.

Please note that this new online alternative applies to IVR reporting only.

The telephone IVR system will continue to operate as usual, and you can still submit reports through the phone.

**THIS SUPPLEMENT PROVIDED BY NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE'S NORTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE**

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## The Northeast Cooperative Research Program Helps Provide Data for Better Management

For more than 15 years, the NOAA Fisheries Northeast Cooperative Research Program (NCRP) has been supporting projects to improve the data available for making fishery management decisions. Though not all projects are designed to address fish stock assessments, contributing data to improve fishery management in the region is an important goal of the NCRP, which is also NOAA Fisheries' largest cooperative research program. In this two part series, we will explore how current cooperative research projects inform the regulatory decision-making process.

Projects are funded in a variety of ways, including contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements – a kind of grant in which the federal government remains significantly involved in conducting the work. The Greater Atlantic Region also has a unique type of research grant called Research Set-Asides (RSA), which were established by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (Councils). Managed by the NCRP, RSAs fund cooperative research through the sale of fish harvested under a specified amount of quota that was set aside by the Councils for conducting research on specific species (scallops, monkfish, Atlantic herring, and several species authorized by the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council)

The NCRP works closely with the New England Council's Research Steering Committee and the Mid-Atlantic Council's Research Set-Aside Committee to establish research priorities aimed at providing the information needed to sustainably manage fisheries resources in the Greater Atlantic Region. Since 1999, many projects supported through the NCRP and RSAs have contributed to management actions.

### Research Set-Asides

According to a recent review conducted by Erin Adams for a Master's thesis at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, (*Measuring the Performance of the Northeastern United States Research Set Aside Programs*, UMass –Dartmouth Department of Fisheries Oceanography, January, 2015), the results from more than 32 projects funded through the Sea Scallop RSA program were applied to the management of this fishery, primarily through fishing gear conservation engineering work and industry-based resource surveys. Scallop RSA-supported research conducted by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science was used in Amendment 10 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to set the minimum ring size needed to conserve small scallops. In addition, RSA support enabled the Coonamessett Farm Foundation to develop gear modifications that reduced the number and severity of encounters between sea turtles and scallop dredges. These were approved and adopted for use in the fishery through Framework 23 to the Scallop FMP.

Industry-based surveys supported through the Scallop RSA have been a cornerstone of the Council's successful scallop area management program. Dredge, video, and digital image surveys conducted by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, and Arnie's Fisheries, Inc., respectively, have consistently provided robust and timely resource survey data that has provided fine scale information to support these management decisions.

At least eleven Mid-Atlantic RSA projects have also contributed to fisheries management. The long-running University of Rhode Island scup trap/pot

survey was first awarded a Mid-Atlantic RSA grant in 2004. A comprehensive peer review of the survey was conducted in 2011, and suitable data was included in the 2012 scup stock assessment.

A number of other Mid-Atlantic RSA-funded projects focusing on fishing gear have also aided management decisions. Studies on black sea bass and scup trap vent sizes and shapes led to new requirements for escape vents. One project conducted by Cornell Cooperative Extension verified estimates of summer flounder discard mortality. Additionally, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation used these results to develop regulations that allow for an overall, rather than weekly, quota limit, which allows the fishery much more flexibility to manage catches.

Monkfish RSA-funded research has focused primarily on life history, and on tagging studies to examine stock structure and verify aging methods. These projects have produced valuable information that has furthered our understanding of this data limited species. Information from these projects has led to improvements in the stock assessment for monkfish, which has helped better inform management decisions.

For more information about these projects, contact Carolyn Woodhead, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, at 978-281-9197 or email her at [carolyn.woodhead@noaa.gov](mailto:carolyn.woodhead@noaa.gov). This article will be continued in the next edition of the NOAA Fisheries Navigator in the July issue of CFN.

## Removal of Plymco Dam Underway in Plymouth, Massachusetts

Partnering closely with NOAA Fisheries Habitat Restoration Center, the Town of Plymouth, MA continues its efforts to restore fisheries and habitat in historic Town Brook. The Pilgrims on the Mayflower settled in Plymouth after a month of searching Cape Cod Bay, likely due to both the sheltered harbor and the fresh water supply at Town Brook. Diadromous fish runs supported the early colonists, but by 1636 with the construction of the Jenny Grist Mill, barriers to migratory fish were installed in the brook to harness energy for grinding corn and to divert water for agriculture, making Town Brook one of the earliest US waterways impacted by European colonists.

During this past winter, Town Brook's Plymco Dam was removed and the stream was restored in time for the return of thousands of anadromous river herring (both alewife and blueback herring) this spring. This dam was the farthest upstream barrier hindering river herring from reaching more than 269 acres of spawning habitat. We believe that this project increases the potential of this restored herring run to more than 500,000 of this important forage fish.

In recent years, the Town Brook herring run has included roughly 150,000 river herring, largely sustained

by the efforts of MA Division of Marine Fisheries staff, trucking the fish around this and other dams on Town Brook. Since 2002, the Town of Plymouth, NOAA, and many other project partners have been steadily reducing barriers to migratory fish along the brook. The Off-Billington Street dam was removed in 2014, and NOAA is currently supporting the design and permitting for the removal of the Holmes Dam, the last significant barrier on Town Brook. The Town of Plymouth hopes to complete the restoration of Town Brook in time for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims in 1620.

Restoration of this herring run is a project that commercial and recreational fishermen, fishery managers, and environmentalists alike can support. River herring provide important forage for bluefish, striped bass, bluefin tuna and other species of commercial and recreational importance. Some fisheries biologists believe that the lack of resilience in cod and other groundfish stocks is due in part to the drastic reductions in anadromous forage fish populations.

Throughout their range between Florida and the Canadian Maritime Provinces, river herring populations are partially limited due to the lack of

access to quality spawning habitat. Juvenile river herring that hatch in the spring will migrate back to marine waters during the summer and early fall months. Adult herring will spend between 3–4 years feeding and growing in coastal waters before returning to spawn. Unlike many West Coast salmon, adult river herring are repeat spawners, and will return in future years.

To celebrate the restoration of this historic herring run, the Plymouth Plantation is sponsoring the second annual Town Brook River Herring Festival on April 25th. Town Brook should be filled with migrating herring swimming upstream to spawn. Kids of all ages can observe herring moving upstream, participate in fish counts, and join in other family-friendly activities. As part of the morning activities, there will also be a formal dedication event to commemorate the removal of the Plymco dam and the return of herring. The public is encouraged to attend and participate. Come join us and learn how to monitor an historic herring run! For more information, call or e-mail Eric Hutchins at the NOAA Restoration Center at (978) 281-9313 / [eric.hutchins@noaa.gov](mailto:eric.hutchins@noaa.gov).

# Q+A: New Critical Habitat Proposed for North Atlantic Right Whales

**Q: What is Critical Habitat?**

**A:** Under the Endangered Species Act, critical habitat is defined as the specific areas within the geographic area occupied by an endangered species at the time of its listing, that contains *physical or biological features* that are essential to the conservation of the species and that may require special management considerations or protection. Critical habitat may also include areas outside the geographic area occupied by the species at the time it is listed, if those habitats are deemed essential for the species survival.

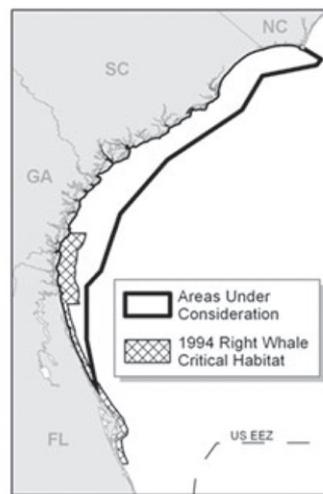
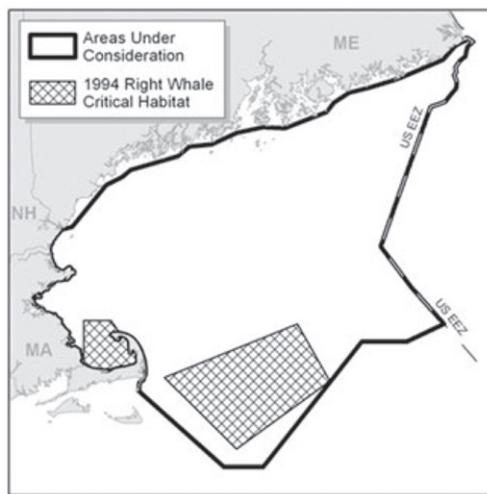
**Q: Does the proposed revision to right whale critical habitat regulate fishing?**

**A:** No. The proposed revision to right whale critical habitat does not regulate commercial or recreational fishing.

**Q: Why is NOAA proposing to revise critical habitat for right whales?**

**A:** We have new information on the nature and distribution of features of feeding and calving habitat for the North Atlantic right whale. North Atlantic and North Pacific right whales were originally listed as “northern right whales” in their original endangered species listing (1970). In 1994, NOAA designated feeding critical habitat off the coast of Massachusetts (including Cape Cod Bay, Stellwagen Bank, and Great South Channel) as well as calving habitat off the coasts of Georgia and east Florida. Since critical habitat was designated for right whales in the Atlantic in 1994, our understanding of right whale ecology and habitat needs have increased. Our decision to revise the current critical habitat designation is based on this improved knowledge which came from a variety of studies, internal analysis, surveys, and the evaluation of new information collected since the 1994 designation.

It should also be noted that in 2003, we denied a petition to revise the right whale critical habitat that we designated in 1994, but committed to continuing to analyze data to support such a revision. Based on genetic information, in 2008 we determined that North Atlantic and North Pacific right whales were distinct species that



features that create these dense concentrations. This proposal also includes areas that are essential to the life history of these copepods (i.e. deep water basins where they overwinter in high numbers).

**Q: How can I provide my comments on the proposed North Atlantic right whale critical habitats?**

**A:** The comment period for this proposed rule is open until April 21, 2015. You may submit comments electronically or by mail.

Electronic Submissions:

Submit all electronic public comments by going to: [www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2014-0085](http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2014-0085) click the “Comment Now” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

Mail: Assistant Regional Administrator, Protected Resources Division, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930.

should be listed separately. With this new designation, we began the process of re-evaluating the 1994 critical habitat designation and in 2009 we also received another petition to revise critical habitat for North Atlantic right whales.

**Q: Why are the proposed critical habitats so much larger than the 1994 designation?**

**A:** The area under consideration is roughly 29,945 square nautical miles and includes northeast feeding areas in the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank region and calving grounds from North Carolina to Florida. The original 1994 right whale critical habitat designation for these areas is approximately 4,536 square nautical miles. The proposed critical habitats focus on two areas: feeding and calving. These areas are expanded from the 1994 designations in order to better incorporate the “physical or biological features essential” to these critical behaviors. For example, the feeding critical habitat is meant to include and protect a plankton species (or *copepods*) that right whales depend on for their survival. When right whales feed, they will only do so when these tiny sea creatures are available in high densities. So the proposed critical habitat includes the areas where these animals are found in high densities and the oceanographic

## Lobster traps

*Continued from page 1*

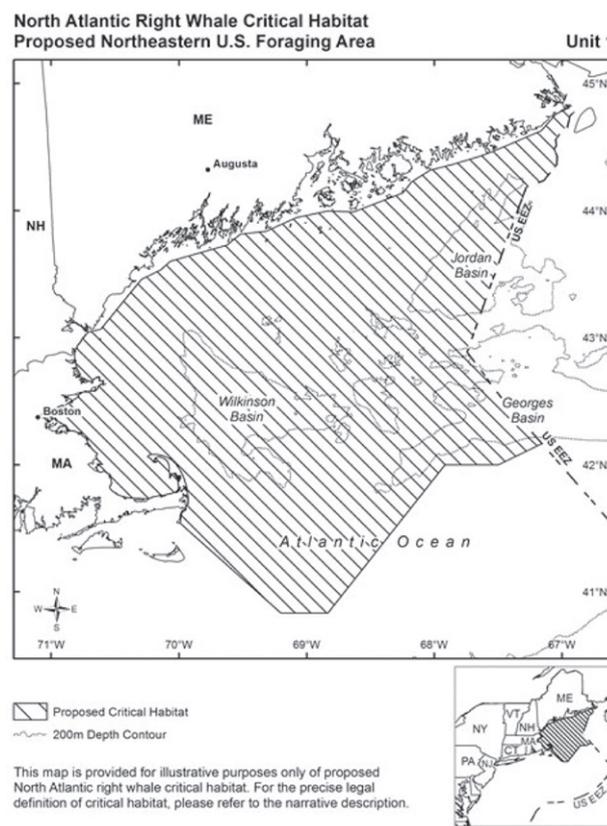
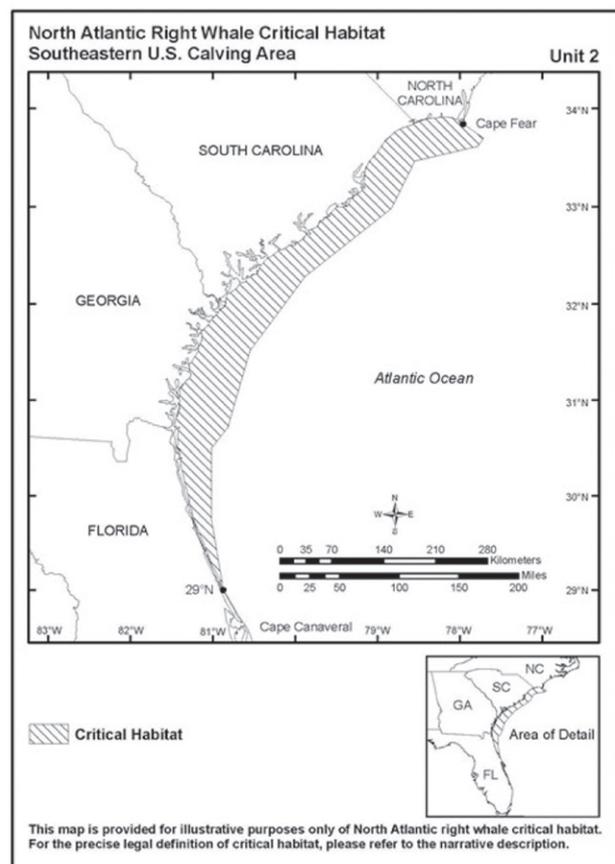
this summer. When the database is finalized, we will announce the availability of the Trap Transfer Program. We expect this will likely be in early summer. You can sign up for specific lobster-related announcements from us by visiting our website: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/index.html> and selecting the “Get E-mail Updates” tab. Any approved trap transfer will be effective for fishing year 2016 (May 1, 2016).

In addition to the Trap Transfer Program, the Commission recommended that the states and NOAA Fisheries implement a series of annual trap reductions for Areas 2 and 3. In response, we published a rule on January 15, 2015, (80 FR 2828) implementing the recommended trap reductions. These reductions begin with fishing year 2016 and continue for several years after following the schedule below.

Approved trap transfers and scheduled trap reductions will both be effective on May 1, 2016. This means that Area 2 and 3 permit holders will have to base trap transfers on their reduced fishing year 2016 allocation. For example, if an Area 2 permit holder is allocated 800 traps in fishing year 2015; that allocation would be reduced to 600 traps starting in fishing year 2016. That Area 2 permit holder would need to use the allocation of 600 traps as a starting point for making trap transfers.

In early summer 2015, we will mail detailed information on the Trap Transfer Program to Federal permit holders. We will also send each permit holder a summary of their trap allocation information, including any scheduled trap reductions. Trap Transfer Program information and Trap Transfer Applications will be available on our website at: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/>.

For additional information on the Trap Transfer Program or scheduled trap reductions, please contact our Sustainable Fisheries Division at (978) 281-9180.





## Direct Financial Assistance Provided to Groundfish Permit Holders

**A**s many fishermen know, direct financial assistance has been awarded to fishermen in states affected by the groundfish fisheries resource disaster. State directors, working in conjunction with NOAA Fisheries, developed the eligibility requirements for distributing these funds. The objective was to get relief out as quickly as possible to the commercial fishermen and families most affected by the disaster.

The eligibility criteria included being a Northeast multispecies limited access permit holder, from one of the affected states, who landed at least 5,000 pounds of

regulated Northeast groundfish in any of the past four fishing years – beginning with fishing year 2010 (May 1, 2010–April 30, 2011) through fishing year 2013 (May 1, 2013–April 30, 2014). Some states imposed additional qualifying or eligibility standards before distributing any funds.

The consensus plan divides the available \$32.8 million allocated by Congress in 2014 to support those affected by the groundfish disaster into thirds (roughly \$11 million for each third):

One-third to be awarded as grants to affected states and used for direct assistance to eligible fishermen;

One-third to be awarded to the affected states as grants and used to assist groundfish communities (states are developing state-specific eligibility criteria for these funds and continue to work with NOAA Fisheries to complete their grant applications); and

One-third to be held in reserve for use to potentially develop either a buyout or buyback program (e.g., for permits or vessels or both).

For more information, contact Allison Ferreira, Regional Office, at (978) 281-9103 or -email her at <Allison.ferreira@noaa.gov>.

## Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan Management Reminder

### REMINDER:

The Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan (Plan) was implemented to reduce unintentional catch of harbor porpoise in gillnet fisheries from Maine to the North Carolina/South Carolina border. Management under the Plan includes pinger requirements, seasonal closure areas, and gear modifications.

We wanted to remind you about the Plan's upcoming spring large mesh gillnet closures in the Mid-Atlantic Mudhole North and Mudhole South Management areas. The Plan also still requires the use of pingers in several New England management areas through May 31. Please refer to the table below for a full list of Plan management areas and implementation dates.

For more information on all Plan requirements, including gear modifications, pinger specifications, and management area maps, please check our website at [www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/porptrp/](http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/porptrp/). You may also contact the Fisheries Liaison in your area:

New England:  
John Higgins (207) 677-2316  
Mid-Atlantic:  
Glenn Salvador (757) 414-0128.

### Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan

Northeast Gillnet Fisheries (All)		
Management Area	Dates	Closure or Gear Modifications
Northeast Closure Area	August 15- September 13	<b>CLOSED</b> to ALL gillnet fishing
Mid-Coast Management Area	September 15- May 31	Pingers Required
Massachusetts Bay Management Area	November 1- February 28/29	Pingers Required
	March 1-31	<b>CLOSED</b> to ALL gillnet fishing
	April 1- May 31	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	<b>CLOSED</b> to ALL gillnet fishing
Offshore Management Area	November 1- May 31	Pingers Required
Cashes Ledge Closure Area	February 1-28/29	<b>CLOSED</b> to ALL gillnet fishing

### Mid- Atlantic Gillnet Fisheries (Large and Small Mesh Requirements)

Area	Dates Gear Modifications Required	Dates of Gillnet Closure
LARGE MESH GILLNET (MESH SIZE 7-18 INCHES)		
Mudhole North Management Area	Jan. 1- Jan. 31; March 16-March 31; April 21- 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
Waters off New Jersey Management Area	Jan 1- Mar 31, April 21-30	April 1-April 20
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-Feb 14, March 16-31, April 21-30	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	-