

approval of this information collection; they also will become a matter of public record.

Dated: June 16, 2005.

**Gwellnar Banks,**

Management Analyst, Office of the Chief  
Information Officer.

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 060805C]

#### Atlantic Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Team Meeting

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries  
Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric Administration (NOAA),  
Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of establishment of an  
Atlantic Longline Take Reduction Team  
and meeting.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS is establishing a Take  
Reduction Team (TRT) and convening a  
TRT meeting to address the incidental  
mortality and serious injury of long-  
finned pilot whales (*Globicephala*  
*melas*) and short-finned pilot whales  
(*Globicephala macrorhynchus*) in the  
Atlantic region of the Atlantic pelagic  
longline fishery. The TRT will develop  
a Take Reduction Plan (TRP) as required  
in the Marine Mammal Protection Act  
(MMPA). NMFS will seek input from  
the Atlantic Pelagic Longline TRT on all  
scientific data related to stock structure,  
abundance, and human-caused  
mortality and serious injury of pilot  
whales. The TRT will focus on  
developing a plan to reduce incidental  
catch of pilot whales in the Atlantic  
pelagic longline fishery to a level  
approaching a zero mortality and  
serious injury rate within 5 years of  
implementation of the plan.

**DATES:** The meeting will be held on June  
29, 2005, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., and on  
June 30, 2005, from 8:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

**ADDRESSES:** The PLTRT meeting will be  
held at the Hyatt Regency, 7400  
Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD  
20814. Phone: (301) 657-1234, Fax:  
(301) 657-6453.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**  
Victoria Cornish: (727) 824-5312 or  
Kristy Long: (301) 713-2322.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The  
MMPA defines the Potential Biological  
Removal (PBR) level of a marine  
mammal stock as the maximum number  
of animals, not including natural  
mortalities, that may be removed from a

marine mammal stock while allowing  
that stock to reach or maintain its  
optimum sustainable population. The  
PBR level is the product of the following  
factors: the minimum population  
estimate of the stock; one-half the  
maximum theoretical or estimated net  
productivity rate of the stock at a small  
population size; and a recovery factor of  
between 0.1 and 1.0.

The Western North Atlantic stock of  
short-finned and long-finned pilot  
whales (*Globicephala* sp.) were  
designated as strategic in the 2003  
marine mammal stock assessment  
report. However, NMFS has revised the  
abundance estimates for pilot whales  
based on recent surveys conducted  
throughout their range. The 2005 draft  
stock assessment report now indicates  
that the PBR for the combined stock of  
long-finned and short-finned pilot  
whales (*Globicephala* sp.) is 247, and  
that total fishery-related mortality and  
serious injury is 201. Therefore, the  
status of this combined stock in the  
2005 draft stock assessment report will  
change from strategic to non-strategic  
because fishery-related serious injuries  
and mortalities are less than PBR.

For a non-strategic stock, a take  
reduction plan shall be completed  
within 11 months of the establishment  
of the team, and shall focus on reducing  
incidental mortalities and serious  
injuries of pilot whales to a level  
approaching a zero mortality and  
serious injury rate within 5 years of  
implementation of the plan.

Both species of pilot whales are  
known to interact with the pelagic  
longline fishery, which is classified on  
the MMPA List of Fisheries as a  
Category I fishery, or one that has  
frequent incidental mortalities or  
serious injuries of marine mammals.  
Most of the observed interactions of  
pilot whales with the pelagic longline  
fishery have occurred in the Mid-  
Atlantic Bight, where the ranges of the  
two species overlap. Other commercial  
fisheries known to occasionally cause  
incidental mortality and serious injury  
of short-finned and long-finned pilot  
whales include the southern New  
England and mid-Atlantic midwater and  
bottom trawl fisheries targeting squid,  
mackerel, butterfish, and herring. These  
fisheries are identified in the 2004 List  
of Fisheries (69 FR 48407, August 10,  
2004).

As required under section 118 (f)(8) of  
the MMPA, the TRT shall develop a  
draft TRP by consensus, and shall  
submit this draft TRP to NMFS not later  
than 11 months after the date of the  
establishment of the TRT. The Secretary  
shall then consider the TRP, and no  
later than 60 days after the submission

of the draft TRP, NMFS shall publish in  
the **Federal Register** the TRP and any  
implementing regulations proposed by  
the team for a public comment period  
not to exceed 90 days. Within 60 days  
of the close of the comment period,  
NMFS shall issue a final TRP and any  
implementing regulations.

*List of invited participants:* MMPA  
section 118 (f)(6)(C) requires that  
members of TRTs have expertise  
regarding the conservation or biology of  
the marine mammal species that the  
TRP will address, or the fishing  
practices that result in the incidental  
mortality or serious injury of such  
species. The MMPA further specifies  
that TRTs shall, to the maximum extent  
practicable, consist of an equitable  
balance among representatives of  
resource user and non-user interests.

NMFS has asked the following  
individuals to serve as members of the  
TRT, which will focus on reducing  
bycatch of long-finned and short-finned  
pilot whales in the Atlantic pelagic  
longline fishery:

Nelson Beidman, Blue Water  
Fishermen's Association; Jim Budi,  
Shoreside; Vicki Cornish, NMFS; Jean  
Cramer, Thunder Mountain Consulting;  
Brendan Cummings, Center for  
Biological Diversity; Damon Gannon,  
Mote Marine Laboratory; Charlotte  
Hudson Gray, Oceana; Gail Johnson,  
Fishing Vessel Seneca; David Kerstetter,  
Virginia Institute of Marine Science; Bill  
McLellan, University of North Carolina  
at Wilmington; Dan Mears, Fishing  
Vessel Monica; Tim Ragen, Marine  
Mammal Commission; Scott Rucky,  
Fishing Vessel Dakota; Rick Seagraves,  
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management  
Council; and Sharon Young, Humane  
Society of the United States.

Other individuals from NMFS and  
state and Federal agencies may be  
present as observers or for their  
scientific expertise. Members of TRTs  
serve without compensation, but may be  
reimbursed by NMFS, upon request, for  
reasonable travel costs and expenses  
incurred in performing their duties as  
members of the team. The TRT process  
will be facilitated by Scott McCreary  
and Eric Poncelet, CONCUR, Inc.,  
Berkeley, California. The TRT will hold  
its first meeting from June 29-30, 2005  
in Bethesda, Maryland (see **DATES** and  
**ADDRESSES**).

NMFS fully intends to conduct the  
TRT process in a way that provides for  
national consistency yet accommodates  
the unique regional characteristics of  
the fishery and marine mammal stocks  
involved. Take Reduction Teams are not  
subject to the Federal Advisory  
Committee Act (5 App. U.S.C.).  
Meetings are open to the public.

Dated: June 16, 2005.

**P. Michael Payne,**

*Acting Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.*  
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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 060804F]

#### Endangered Fish and Wildlife; National Environmental Policy Act; Right Whale Ship Strike Reduction Strategy Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Conduct Public Scoping

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of intent; request for written comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS intends to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze the potential impacts of implementing the operational measures in NOAA's Right Whale Ship Strike Reduction Strategy (Strategy). This notice describes the proposed action and possible alternatives intended to reduce the likelihood and threat of right whale deaths as a result of collisions with vessels.

**DATES:** Written or electronic comments must be received no later than 5 p.m., eastern standard time, on July 22, 2005. At this time there are no scheduled scoping meetings.

**ADDRESSES:** Written comments, or requests to be added to the mailing list for this project, should be submitted to: P. Michael Payne, Chief, Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Conservation Division, Attn: Right Whale Ship Strike EIS, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Comments may also be submitted via fax to (301) 427-2522, Attn: Right Whale Ship Strike EIS, or by e-mail to: [Shipstrike.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:Shipstrike.comments@noaa.gov). Include in the subject line the following identifier: I.D. 060804F.

Additional information including the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the economic analysis report used in the preparation of the EA are available on the NMFS website at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike/>.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Greg Silber, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver

Spring, MD 20910; telephone (301) 713-2322, e-mail [greg.silber@noaa.gov](mailto:greg.silber@noaa.gov); or Barb Zoodsma, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701; telephone (904) 321-2806, e-mail [barb.zoodsma@noaa.gov](mailto:barb.zoodsma@noaa.gov).

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

##### Background

The abundance of North Atlantic right whales is believed to be fewer than 300 individuals despite protection for half a century. The North Atlantic right whale is also considered one of the most endangered large whale populations in the world. Recent modeling exercises suggest that the loss of even an individual animal has measurable effects that may contribute to the extinction of the species (Caswell et al., 1999). The models also suggests that preventing the mortality of one adult female a year significantly alters the projected outcome.

The two most significant human-caused threats and sources of mortality to right whales are entanglements in fishing gear and collisions with ships (Knowlton and Kraus, 2001; Jensen and Silber, 2003). Collisions with ships (referred to as ship strikes) account for more confirmed right whale mortalities than any other human-related activity. Ship strikes are responsible for over 50 percent of known human-related right whale mortalities and are considered one of the principal causes for the lack of recovery in this population. Right whales are located in, or adjacent to, several major shipping corridors on the eastern U.S. and southeastern Canadian coasts.

NMFS has implemented conservation measures to reduce the likelihood of mortalities as a result of ship strikes. These activities include the use of aerial surveys to notify mariners of right whale sighting locations, interagency collaboration with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) which issues periodic notices to mariners regarding ship strikes, joint operation with the USCG of Mandatory Ship Reporting (MSR) systems to provide information to mariners entering right whale habitat, support of regional Right Whale Recovery Plan Implementation Teams, support of shipping industry liaisons, and consultations with other Federal agencies regarding the effects of their activities on right whales (under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act). However, right whales continue to sustain mortalities as a result of collisions with vessels despite the efforts of these programs.

NMFS recognizes that this complex problem requires the implementation of additional proactive measures to reduce or eliminate the threat of ship strikes to right whales. The goal of the Strategy is to reduce, to the extent practicable, the distributional overlap between ships and right whales. The Strategy allows for regional implementation and accommodates differences in oceanography, commercial ship traffic patterns, navigational concerns, and right whale use. Implementation of the Strategy will require proposed and final rulemaking to be taken.

##### Purpose of this Action

NEPA requires Federal agencies to conduct an environmental analysis of their proposed actions to determine if the actions may significantly affect the human environment. NMFS is considering a variety of measures, including regulatory and non-regulatory initiatives. NMFS may implement the operational measures of the Strategy through its rulemaking authority pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Under MMPA section 112(a) (16 U.S.C. 1382(a)), NMFS has authority, in consultation with other Federal agencies to the extent other agencies may be affected, to "prescribe such regulations as are necessary and appropriate to carry out the purposes of [the MMPA]." In addition, NMFS has authority under the Endangered Species Act to promote conservation, implement recovery measures, and enhance enforcement to protect right whales. NMFS is seeking public input on the scope of the required National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis, including the range of reasonable alternatives, associated impacts of any alternatives, and suitable mitigation measures.

On June 1, 2004, NMFS published an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) (69 FR 30857) and announced its intent to prepare a draft EA to address the potential impacts of implementing the Strategy. The EA considered the context and intensity of the factors identified in NOAA's NEPA guidelines and regulations, along with short- and long-term, and cumulative effects of a No Action Alternative and the proposed action (see **ADDRESSES**). The analysis concluded that the effects of the proposed action on the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. This finding was based on the controversial nature of the Strategy on the human environment and the possible cumulative effects of the proposed action on certain sectors within the maritime industry. The major controversy concerns the potential