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Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Update

Conservation measures to address entanglement risks associated with groundlines and vertical lines (buoy lines) from commercial trap/pot and gillnet fishing gear

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Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office**

May 6, 2015



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Two Pronged Approach to Address Large Whale Entanglements

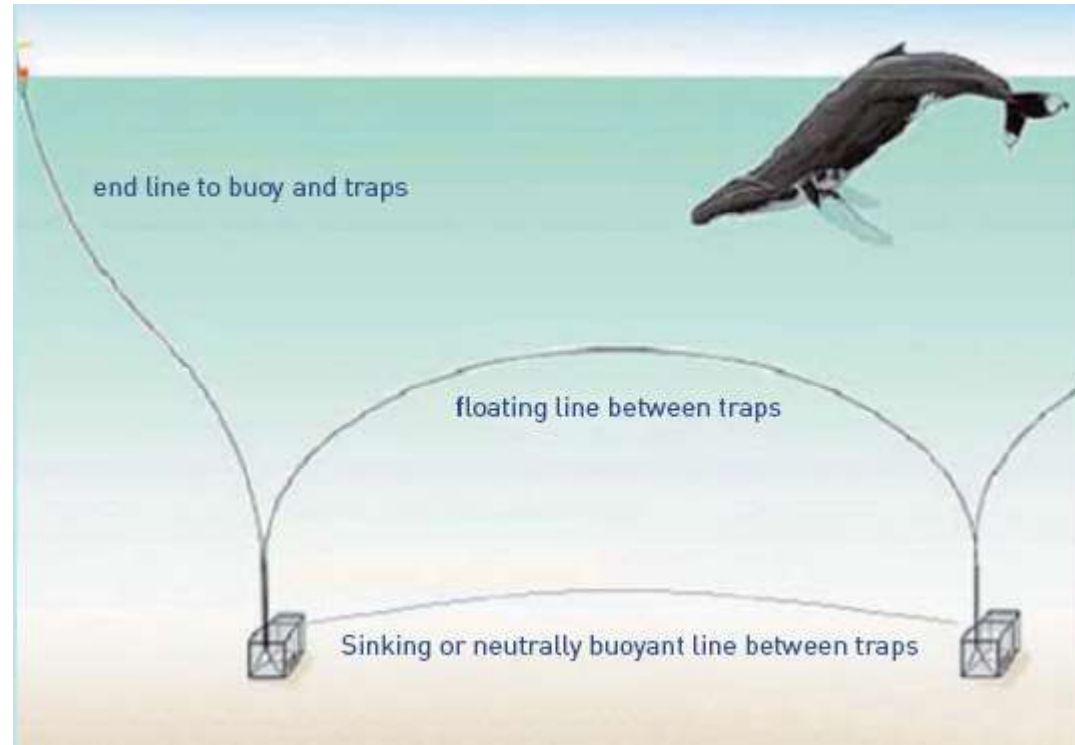
- At the 2003 Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (Team) meeting, by consensus, the Team agreed to two overarching principles associated with reducing large whale entanglement risks:
 - Reducing entanglement risks associated with groundlines in commercial trap/pot gear; and
 - Reducing entanglement risks associated with vertical lines (endlines or buoy lines) in commercial trap/pot and gillnet gear.
- The Team agreed to focus first on addressing the groundline entanglement risk.
- NMFS embarked on a rather lengthy rule development process that ultimately led to the implementation of a sinking groundline requirements for all trap/pot fisheries throughout the entire east coast.
 - This requirement was approved in October 2007 and became effective in April 2009.
- NMFS and the Team then focused on addressing the vertical line entanglement risk



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Management Objectives





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Development of Vertical Line Rule

Objectives:

- Use a different approach than how the sinking groundline rule was developed.
- The approach for the vertical line rule addresses the data limitations encountered during the development of the sinking groundline rule and focuses the vertical line management scheme to smaller, high impact areas versus wide-scale, broad management.

Goals:

- Develop management options to reduce the risk of vertical line entanglements in places where it will have the most impact rather than applying broad blanket reductions all along the entire East coast.
- To be fully informed as early on in the process as possible on the economic impacts associated with any vertical line management strategy.

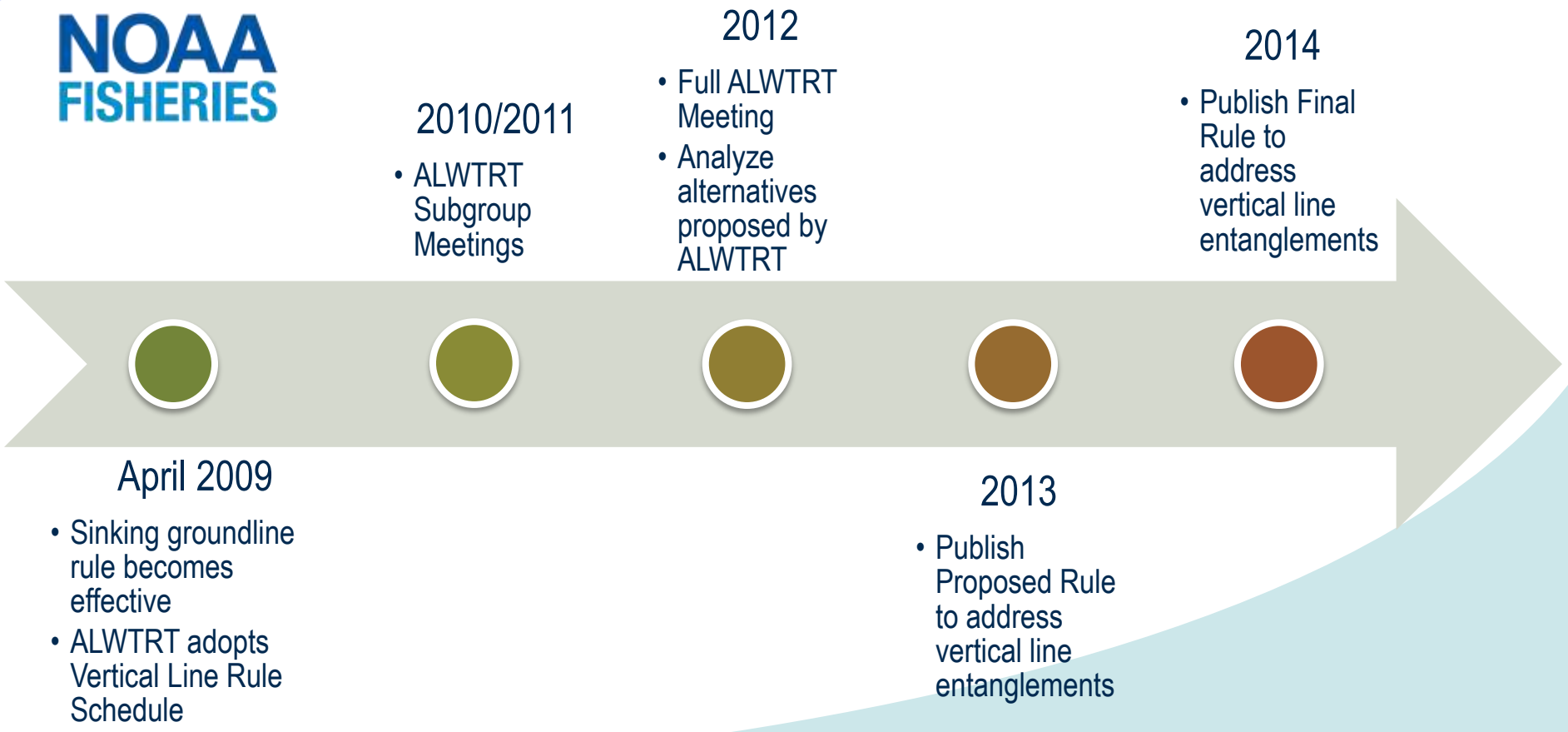
Analytical Approach:

- Sightings per unit effort overlaid on;
- Gear Characterization information;
- This approach allows the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team to consider several vertical line management strategies (gear density, whale density, co-occurrence).



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Timeline for Vertical Line Rule Development





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Vertical Line Rule

- **Final Rule Published in June 2014**
- **Combination of NMFS, States, Conservationist, and Scientist proposals:**
 - Increase the number of traps per trawl based on area fished and miles fished from shore [(0-3), (3-12), (12+)] and [(0-3), (3-6), (6-12)(12+)]
 - * Closure: Created the MA Bay Restricted Area to be closed February 1 – April 30 to trap/pot fisheries
 - Some exemptions to the minimum number of traps per trawl
 - ¼ mile buffer from shore around islands (Monhegan, Matinicus, Ragged Islands).
 - New Hampshire state waters
 - In SER require single pots/traps, weaker weak links and breaking strength of vertical lines
 - More robust gear marking program coast wide and monitoring in the Mid-Atlantic.

* Amended December 2014

Miles
0 12.525 50

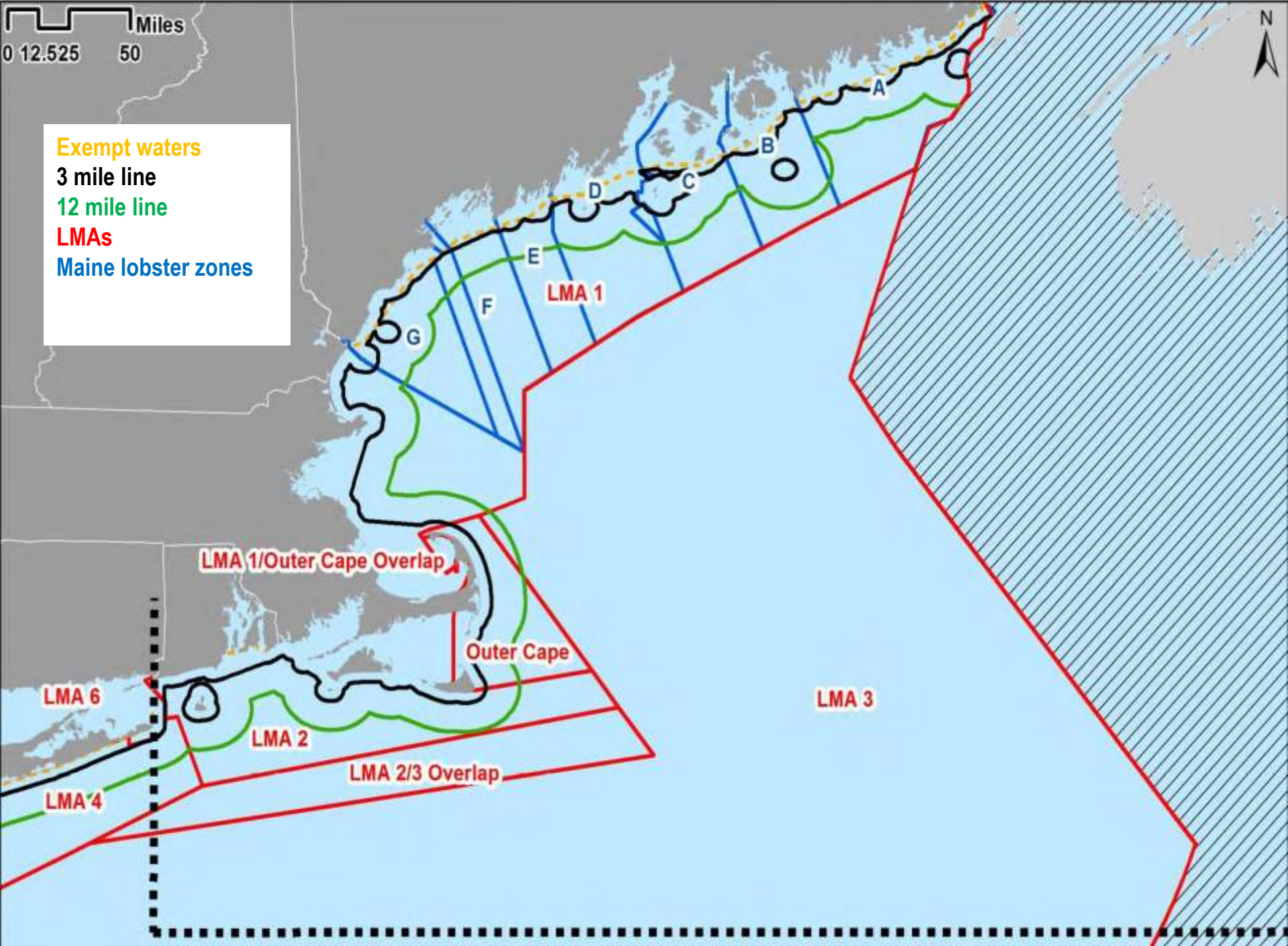
Exempt waters

3 mile line

12 mile line

LMA's

Maine lobster zones

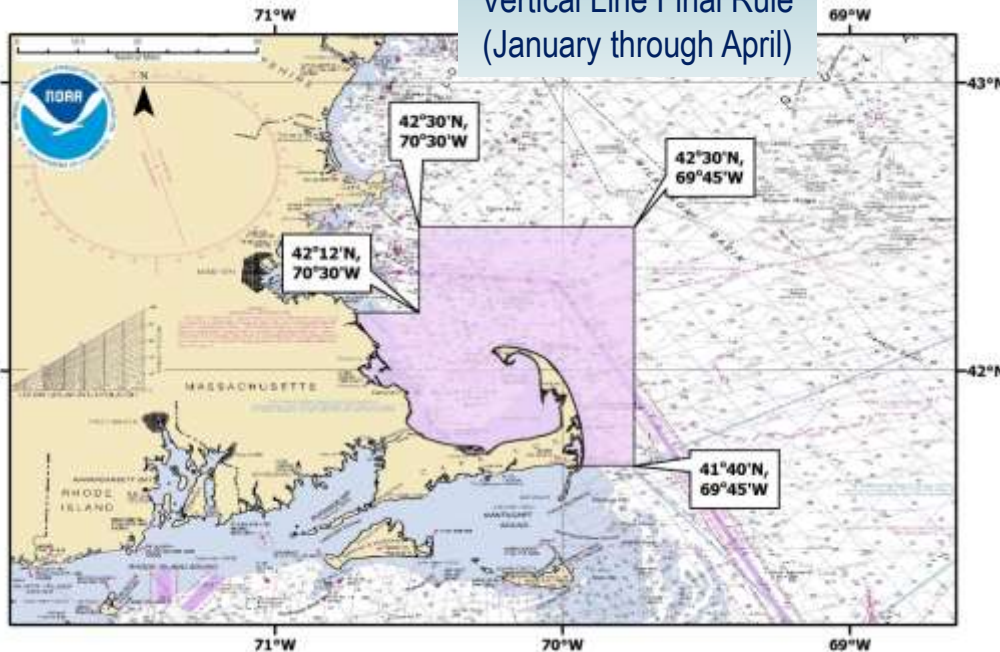




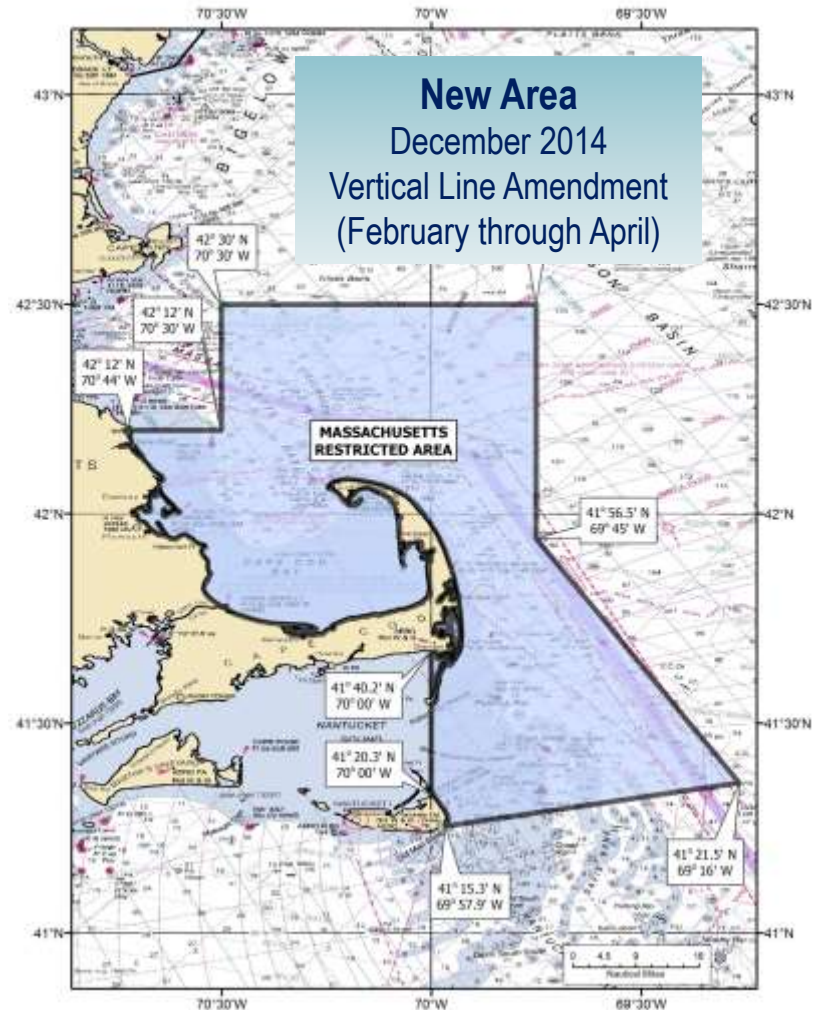
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Massachusetts Restricted Area (Closure)

Original Area
June 2014
Vertical Line Final Rule
(January through April)



New Area
December 2014
Vertical Line Amendment
(February through April)





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Other Vertical Line Requirements

Gear Marking

- All trap/pot and gillnet buoy lines must be marked three times (top, middle, bottom) with three 12" marks. The current color requirements remain the same.

Southeast

- Using the current Southeast Restricted Area North, new gear setting requirements for buoy line breaking strength and a reduction of the weak link strength in trap/pot fisheries was established;
- Requirement that all buoy lines must be made of sinking rope and object free in trap/pot fisheries;
- Requirement that a single trap be used per buoy line; and
- In federal waters all trap/pot gear must be brought back to shore at the end of each trip.
- Increase in the size and frequency of the current gear marking scheme for both trap/pot and gillnet fisheries.



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Potential Future Modifications

Current Action

In March 2015, NMFS published a proposed rule to amend the Atlantic large Whale Take Reduction Plan. The rule proposes to:

- Change the minimum number of traps per trawl to allow fishing with a single trap in certain Massachusetts and Rhode Island state waters;
- Modify the requirement to use one endline on trawls within certain areas in Massachusetts state waters;
- Establish an additional 1/4 mile buffer in waters surrounding certain islands in Maine to allow fishing with a single trap; and
- Additional gear marking requirements for those waters allowing single traps as well as two new high use areas for right and humpback whales (Jeffreys Ledge and Jordans Basin).



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Next Steps

Monitoring/Future Plan Directions Work Group

- The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (Team) agreed to establish a Work Group to continue discussions related to future monitoring and Take Reduction Plan needs.
 - Gear characterization reporting
 - Gear marking

Vessel Exemption Criteria Work Group

- The Team agreed to establish a Work Group to help state partners explore the potential for developing targeted vessel exemption criteria.
 - State small vessel exemptions

Questions?