Scoping for modifications to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan: Phase 2

ASMFC Meeting

September 2021

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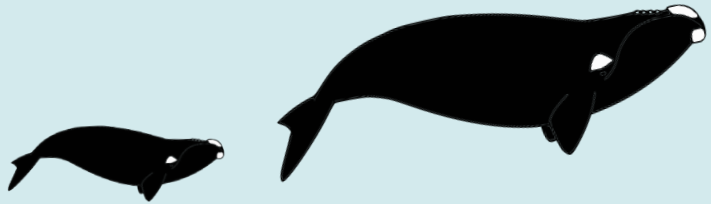

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Website

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Background

ALWTRP & Right Whale Population Decline

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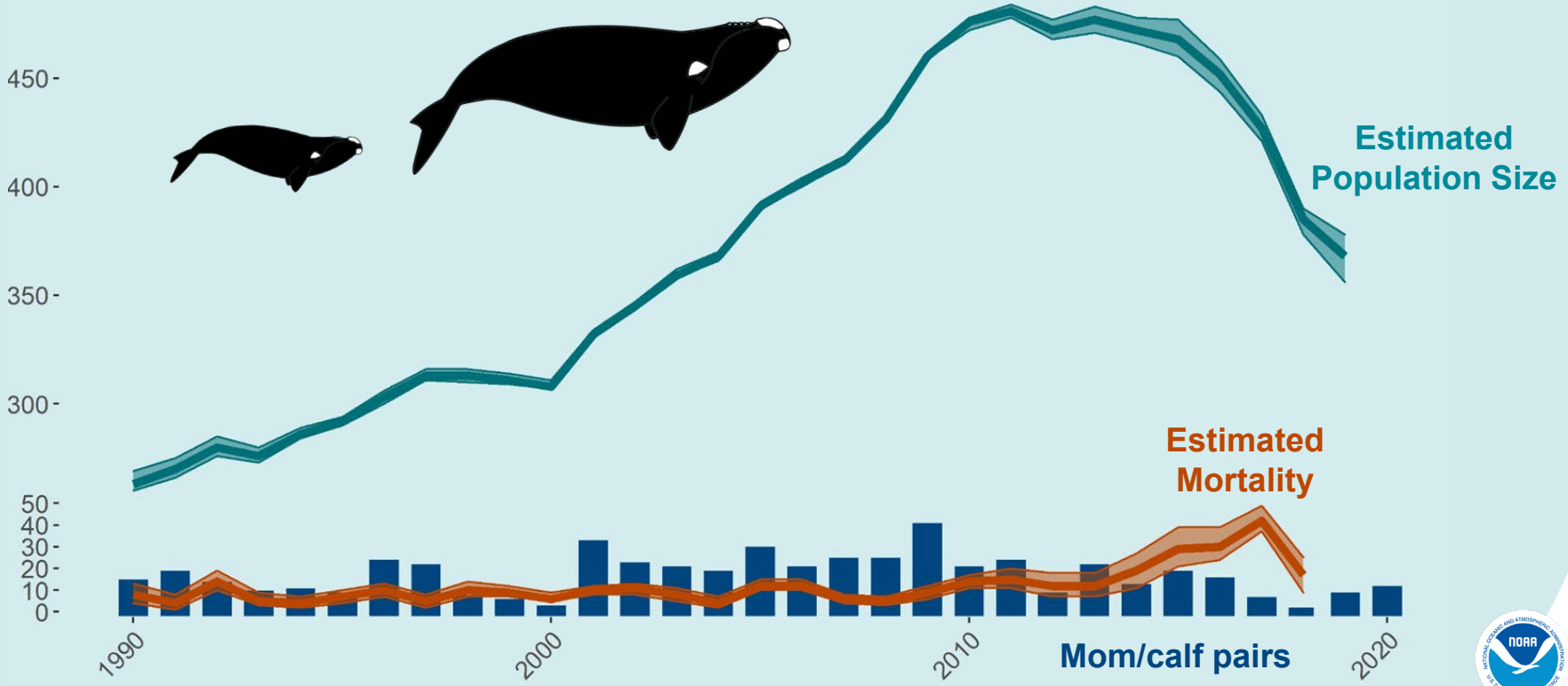
North Atlantic Right Whale Population in Decline Since 2010

Data from: Pace 2021, New England Aquarium, Florida Fish & Wildlife



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Unusual Mortality Event: 2017 - present

~368
TOTAL WHALES IN 2019

<100
POTENTIAL MOTHERS

52
KNOWN MORTALITIES AND SERIOUS INJURIES

40
MOM/CALF PAIRS SINCE WINTER OF 2016/2017

5
SERIOUS INJURIES AVOIDED VIA DISENTANGLEMENT

MORTALITIES

34 Known mortalities (9 US, 24 CN)
- **9** entanglements (4 US, 5 CN)
- **11** vessel strikes (3 US, 8 CN)
- **13** cause undetermined (2 US, 11 CN)
- **1** perinatal mortality

SERIOUS INJURIES

18 Known Seriously Injured (11 US, 4 CN)
- **14** entanglements (9 US, 5 CN)
- **2** vessel strikes (2 US)
- **2** cause undetermined (2 US)

Country apportioned according to the confirmed country or country where the incident was first sighted.
Note: *the data here include 2 undetermined cases not included in the Unusual Mortality Event*

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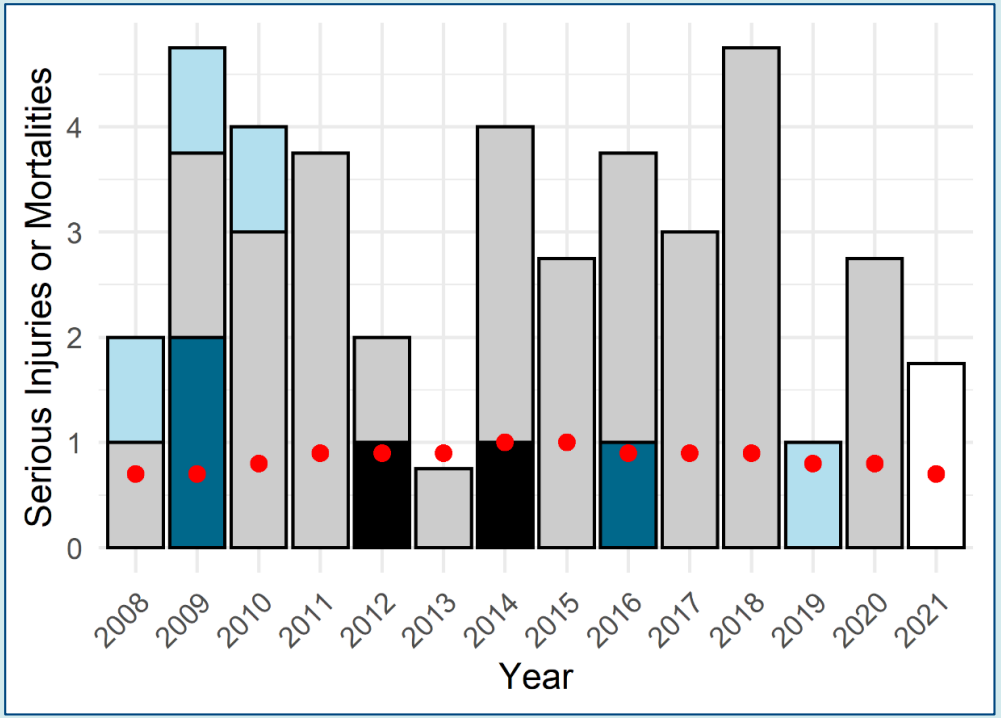
Right whale mortality and serious injury in U.S. exceeds PBR

Documented Mortality and Serious Injury* of NARWs

*Known US entanglements and those first seen in US***



Data from: Henry et al 2020, Henry et al 2015, Henry et al 2010, NMFS

** Data from 2020 and 2021 are preliminary*

*** Graph does not include known Canadian entanglements or those first seen in Canada*

* *Five year rolling average PBR*

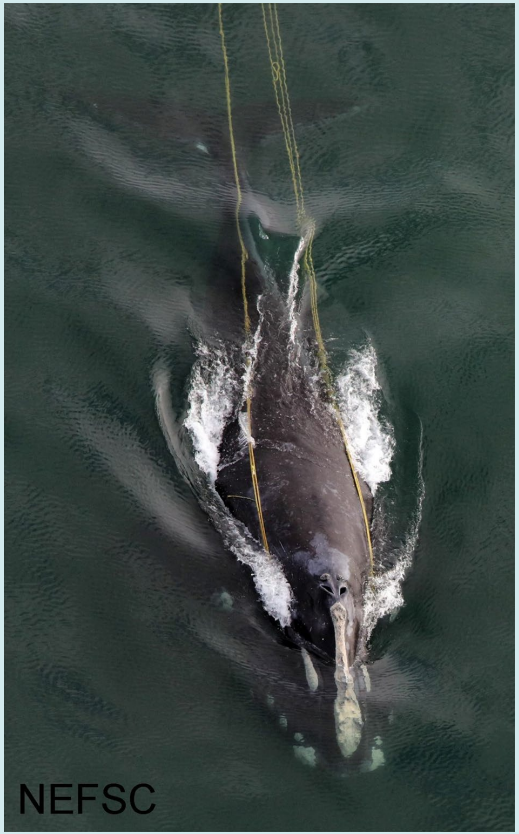
Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan

Required by MMPA if incidental mortality and serious injury in U.S. commercial fisheries exceeds Potential Biological Removal (PBR)

- Develop and recommend measures to reduce mortality and serious injury
- Consensus-based
- NMFS ultimately responsible for taking action

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team

- 60 member team including 23 fishermen
- Right, humpback, and fin whales



Phase 1 Summary

Rulemaking to reduce risk in Northeast lobster and Jonah crab trap/pot

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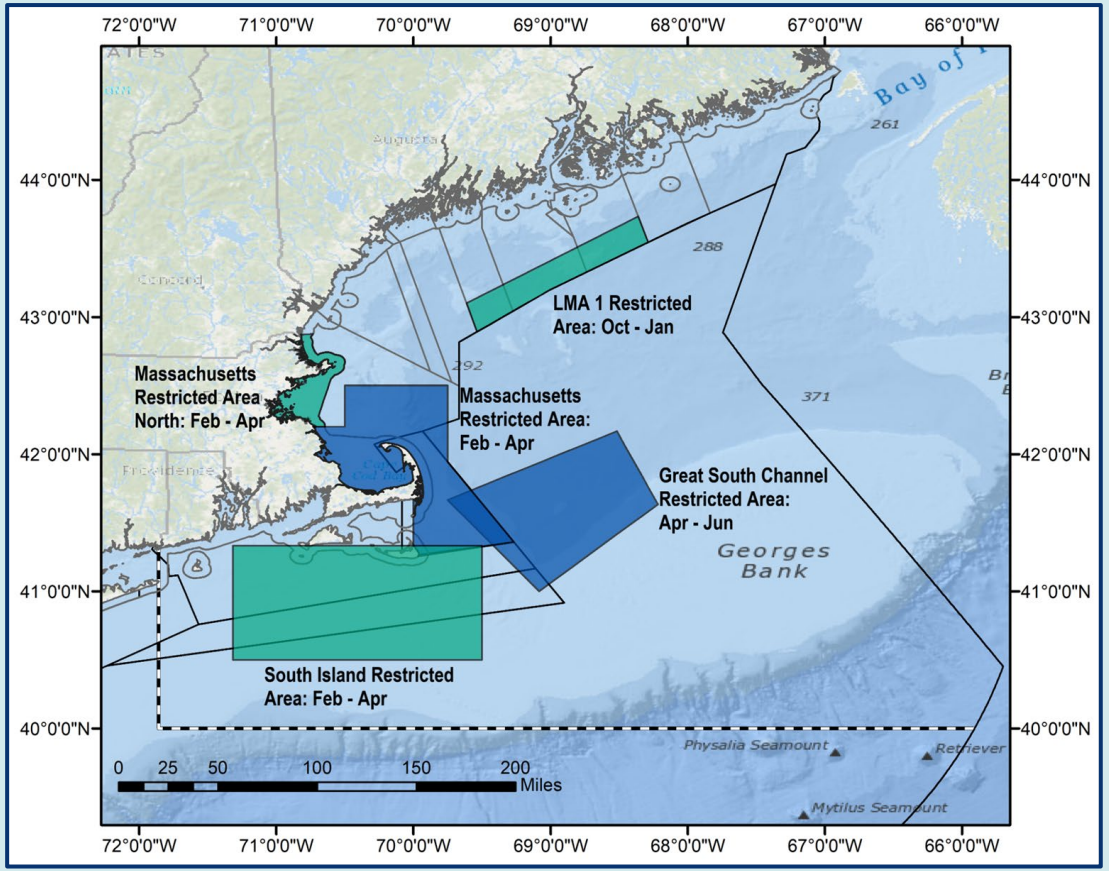
Reducing Spatial Overlap of Right Whales and Gear



- Three new areas in green:
  - Expansion of the Massachusetts Restricted Area north
  - Two new restricted areas (LMA 1 and SIRA)
- All areas open to ropeless fishing with permits

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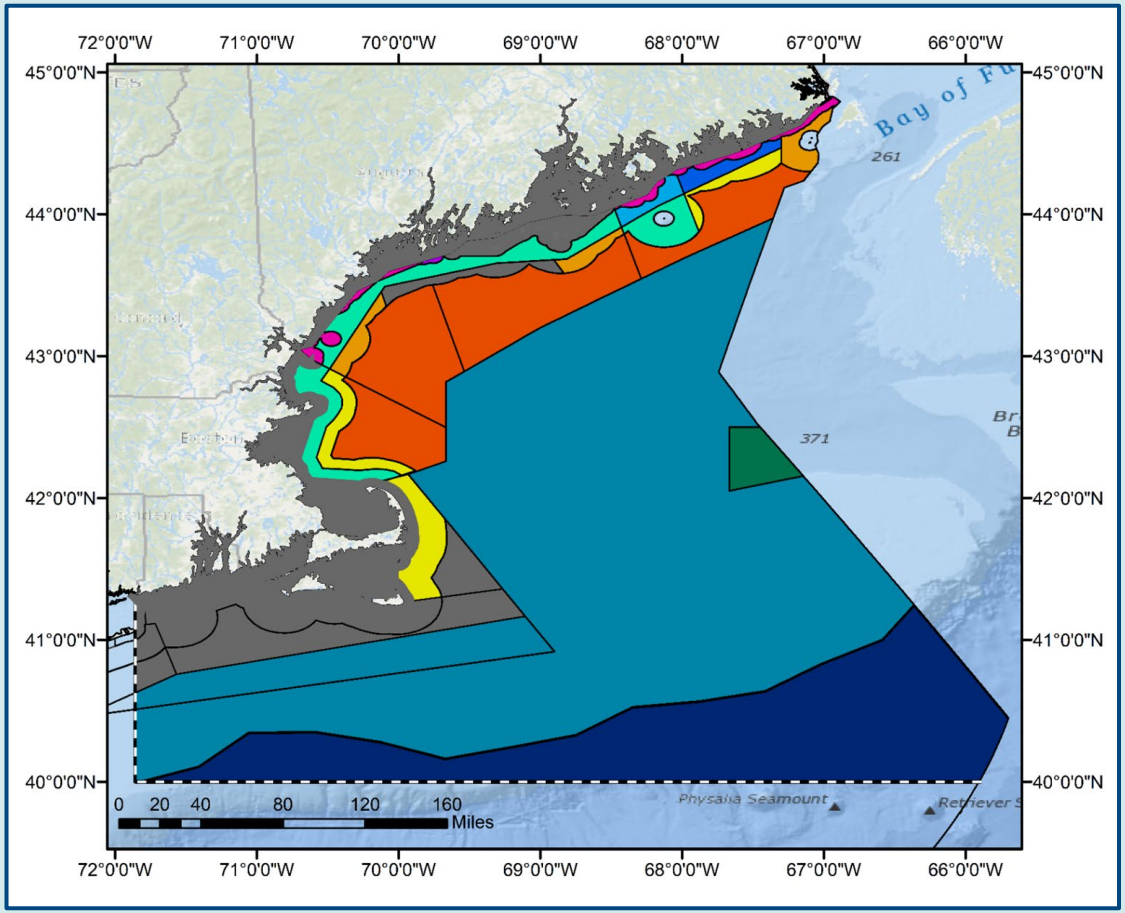
Reducing the Number of Buoy Lines in the Region



Minimum number of traps per trawl

- No Change
- 2 Traps
- 3 Traps
- 5 Traps
- 8 Traps
- 10 Traps
- 15 Traps
- 20 Traps
- 25 Traps
- 35 Traps
- 45 Traps
- 50 Traps

* All areas with 5 or fewer traps per trawl must use only one buoy line

** **In Maine LMA 1 Federal Waters Only:** areas with 8 to 20 trap trawl minimums may use half of the minimum number of traps with only one buoy line

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Reducing line strength and improving gear identification

Reducing risk of severe injury: Buoy lines will have weak inserts or manufactured weak line so that whales may be able to break free if they get entangled

Improve information on where entanglements happen:

- more marks per line
- new state or area specific colors
- unique marks in federal waters

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Phase 2

Scoping for possible measures for NMFS to consider that will further reduce entanglement risk from U.S. commercial fisheries

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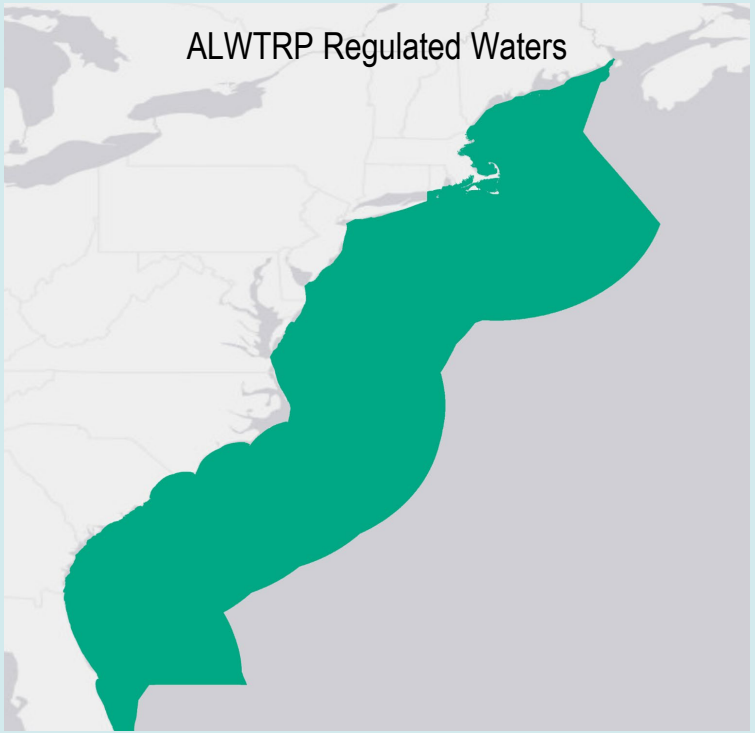
Phase 2: Overview

Need to reduce remaining risk coastwide

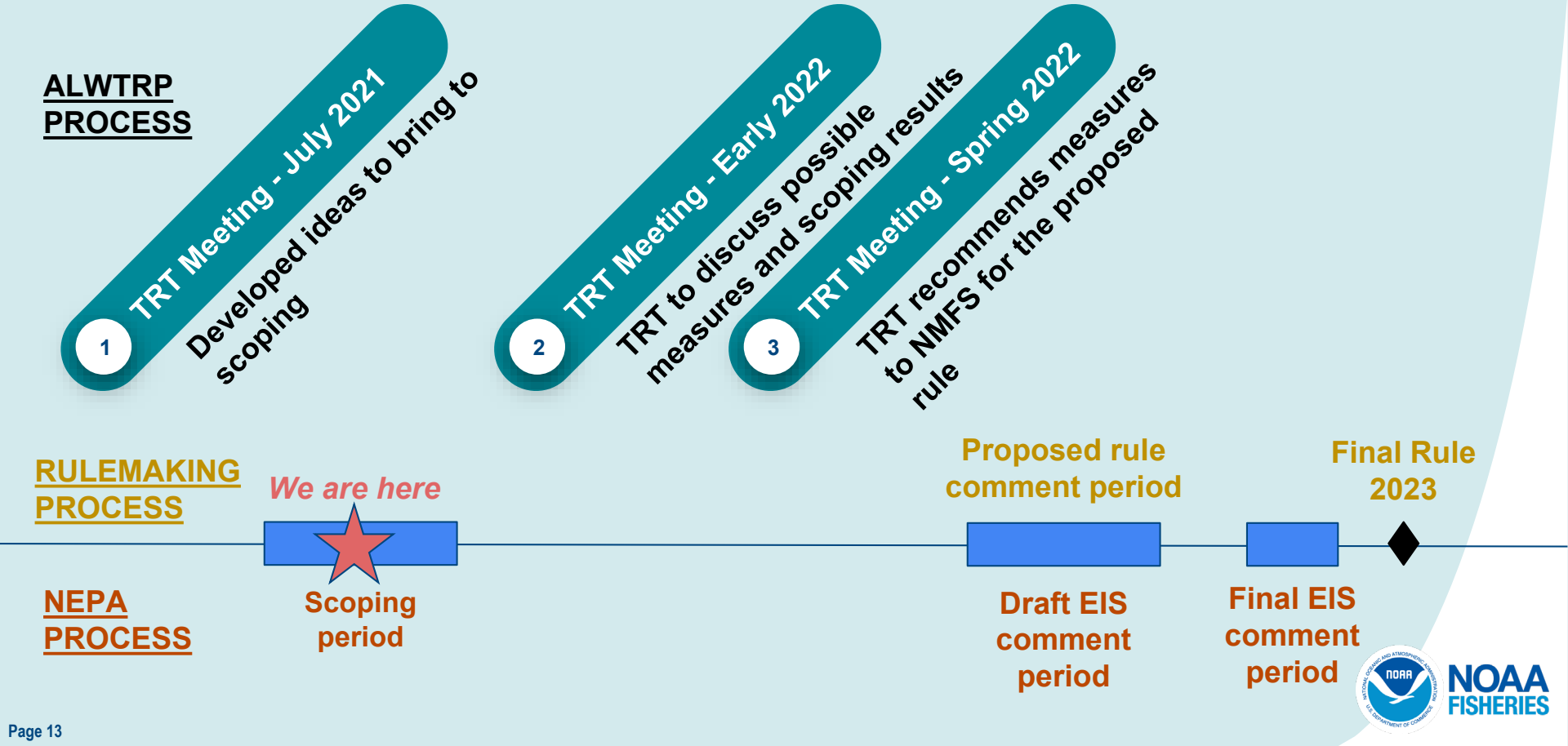
- Moving towards a risk reduction target that accounts for estimated mortality ~ 80%
- Currently re-assessing the target with new information and new PBR (0.7)

ALWTRT meetings began in spring of 2021

- Baseline distribution and risk
- Generated initial ideas (does not imply broad consensus for future team recommendations for rulemaking)

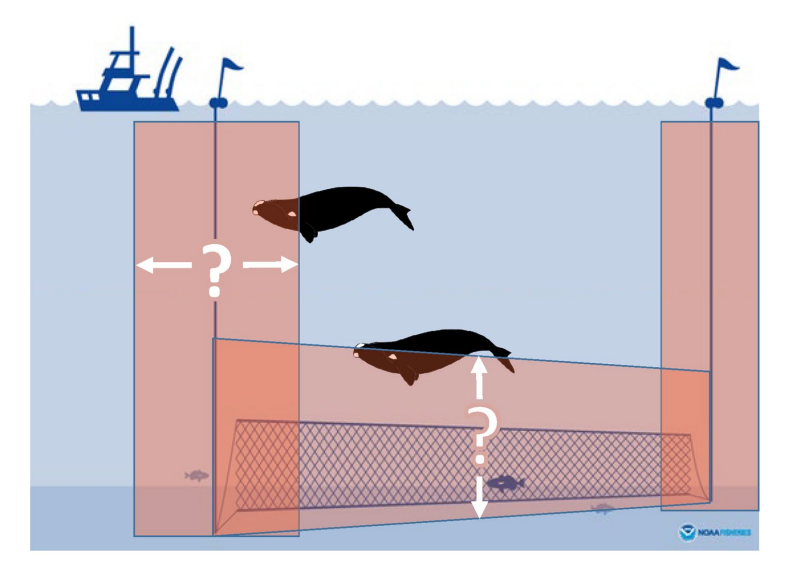


Phase 2 Modifications to the ALWTRP



Analysis of co-occurrence

- **Decision Support Tool (NEFSC)**
  - **Reviewed by the Center for Independent Experts**
- **Monthly co-occurrence = whale density x gear density**
  - **Right whale density:** predicted based on sightings and environmental data
  - **Gear density**: buoy lines and nets (including net height)



** More information on the Decision Support Tool can be found here and in this webinar.*

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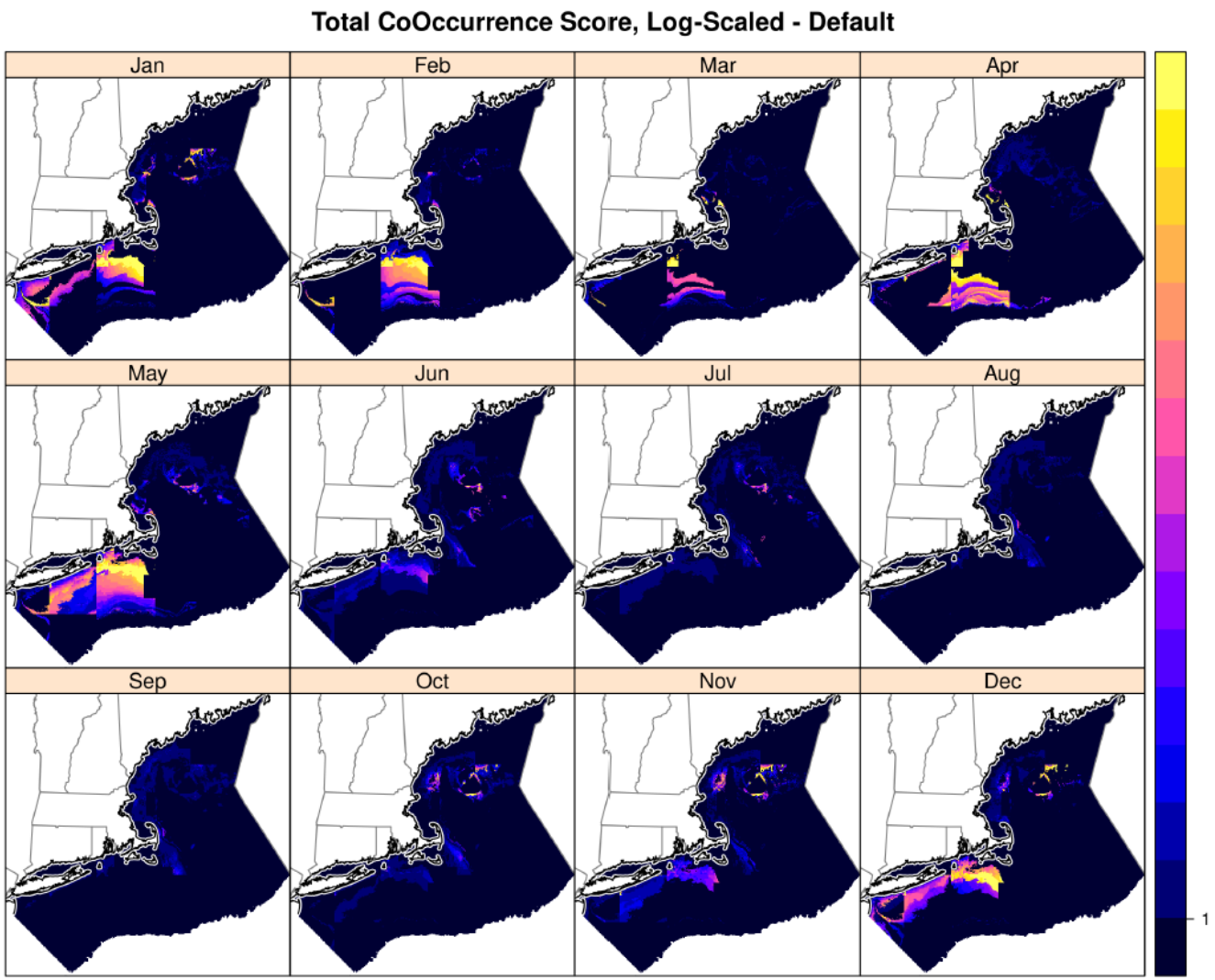
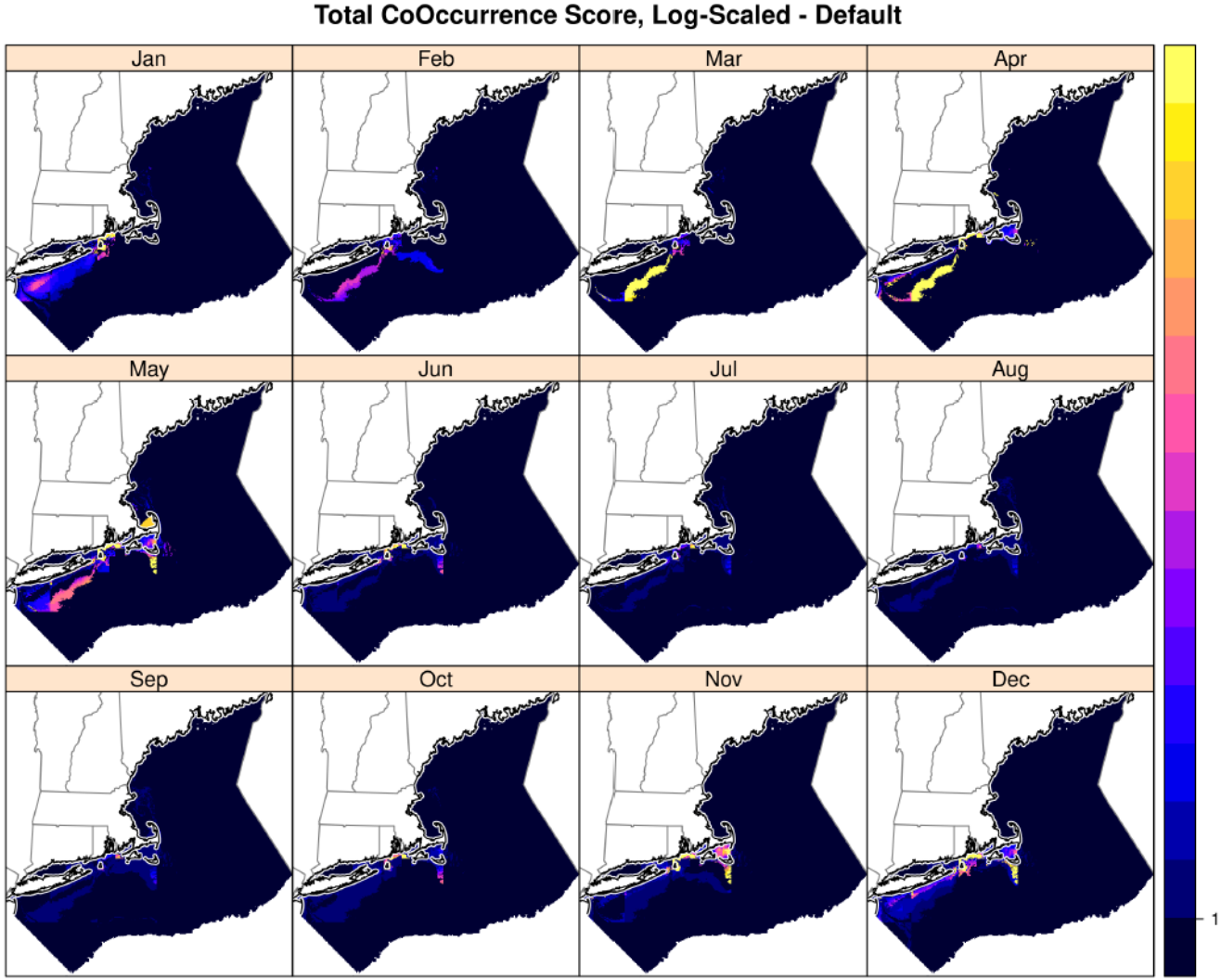
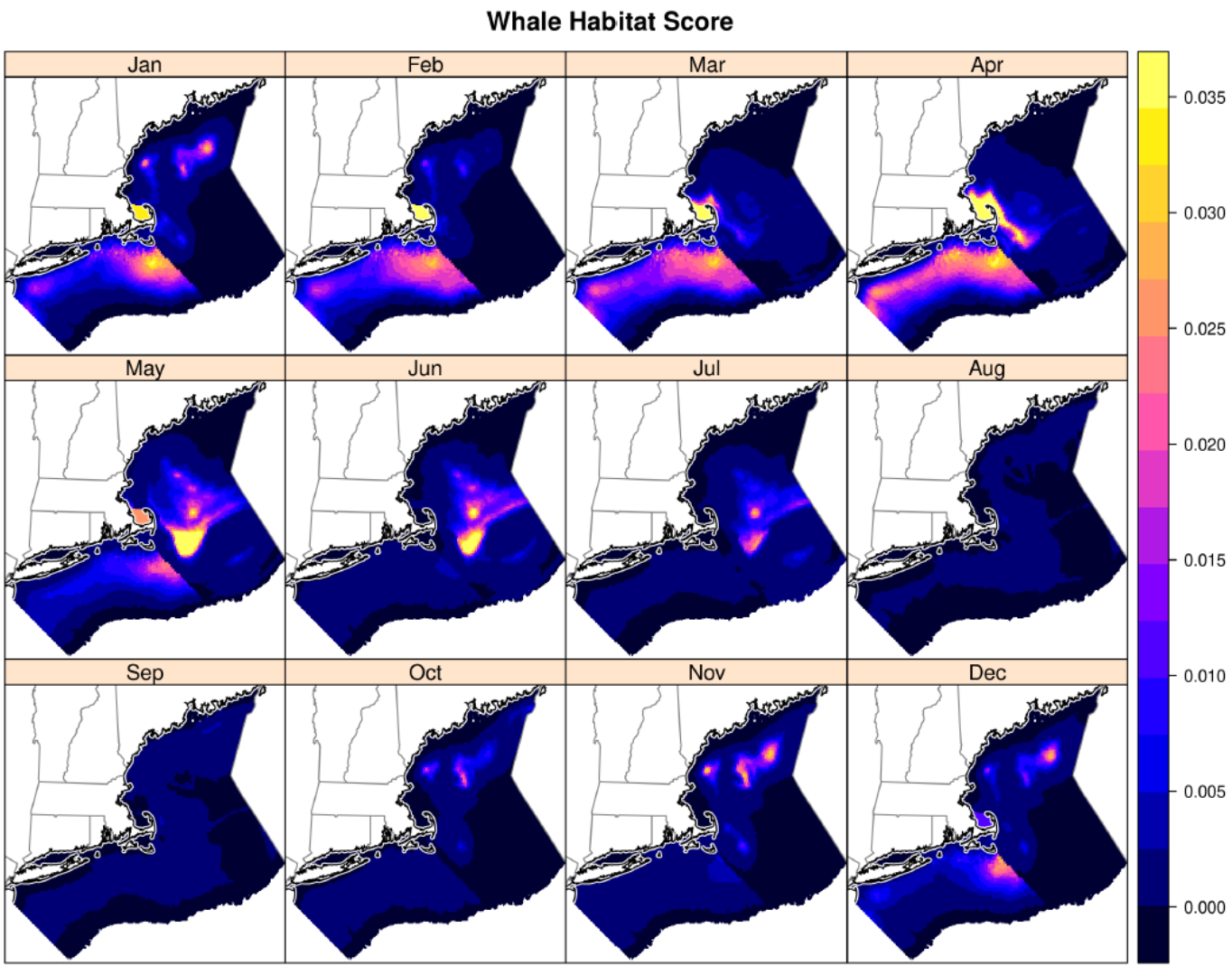
Gulf of Maine & S. New England Gillnet Co-occurrence



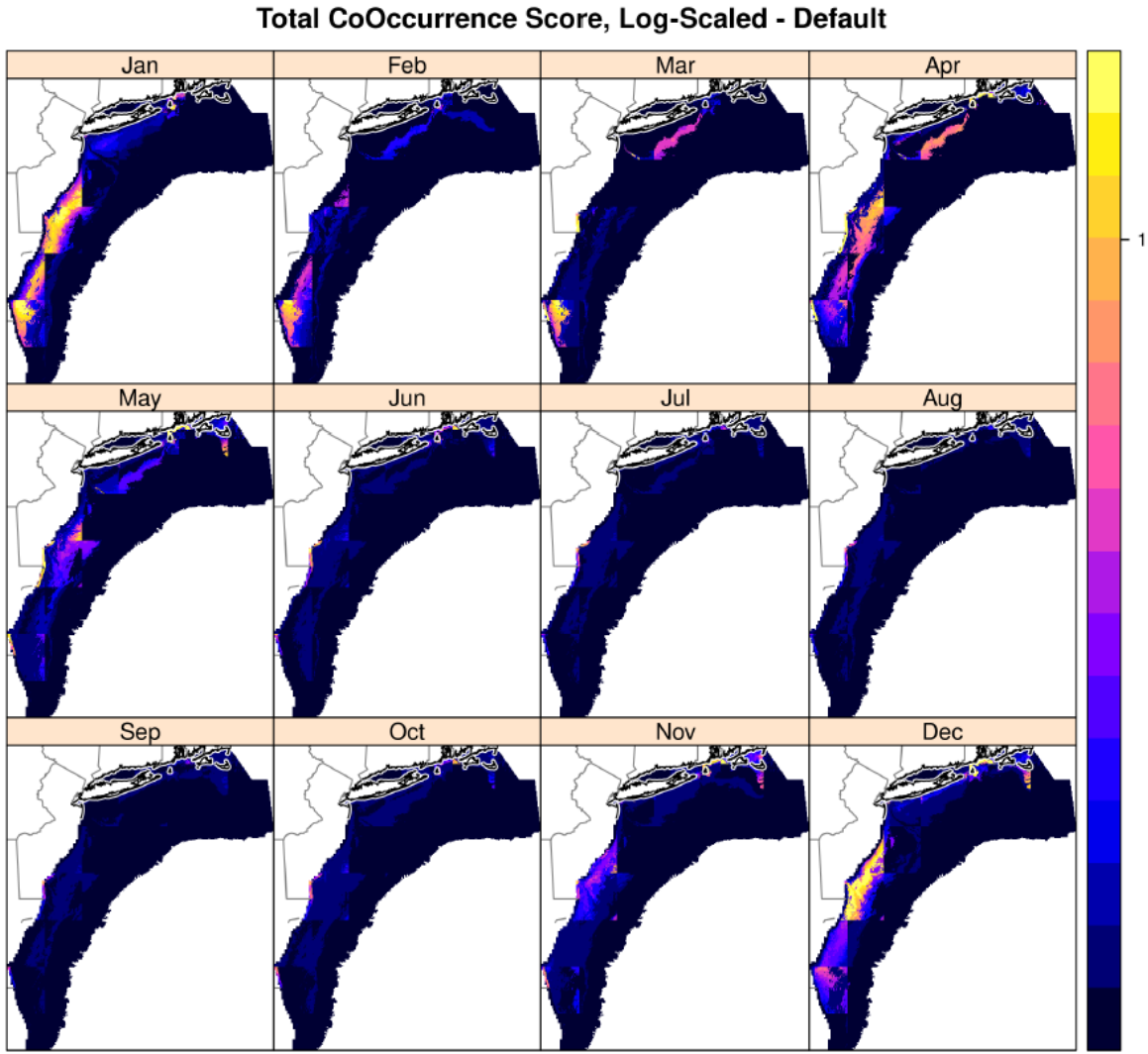
Gulf of Maine & S. New England Trap/Pot Co-occurrence



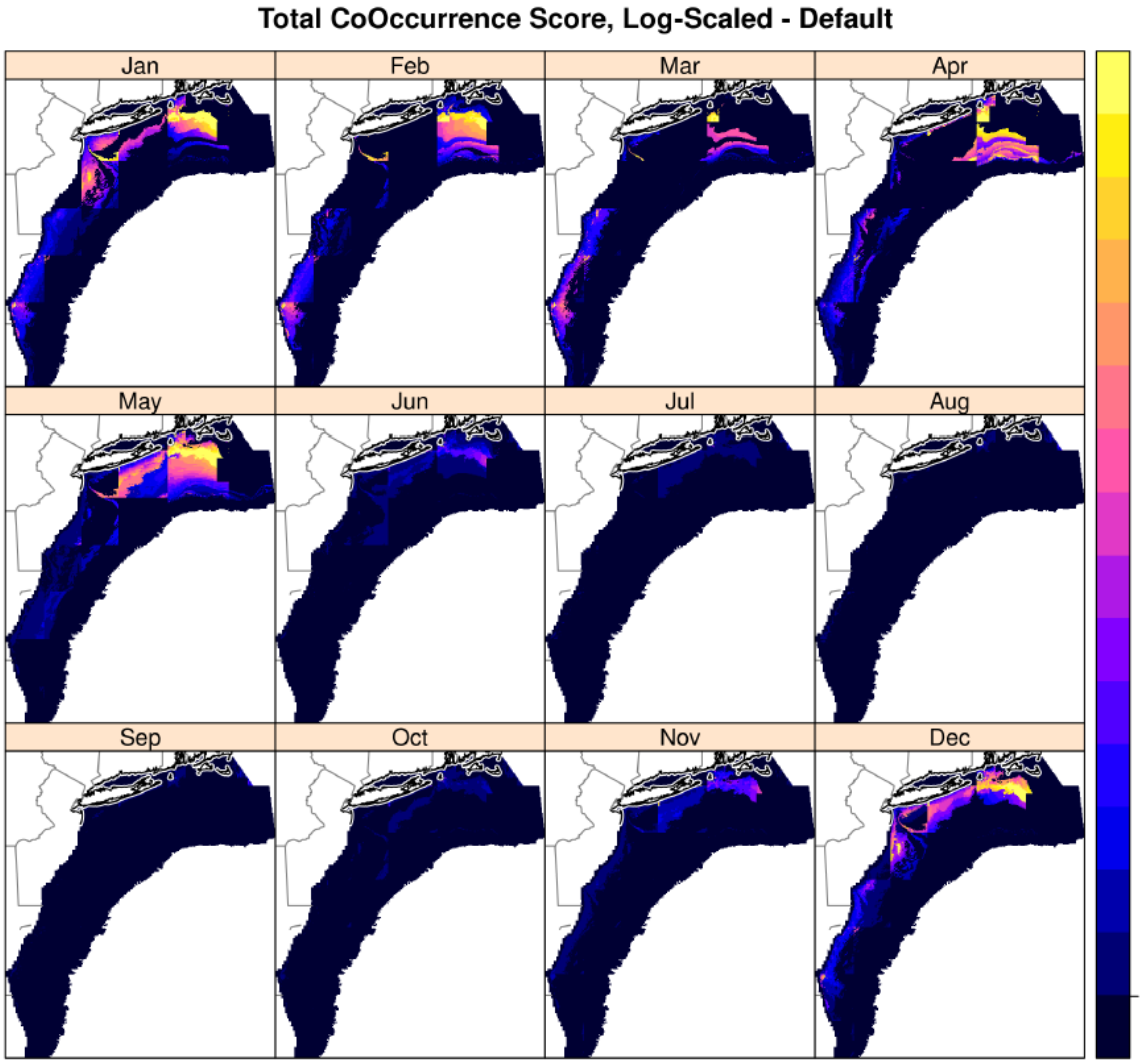
Gulf of Maine & S. New England Whale Habitat Density



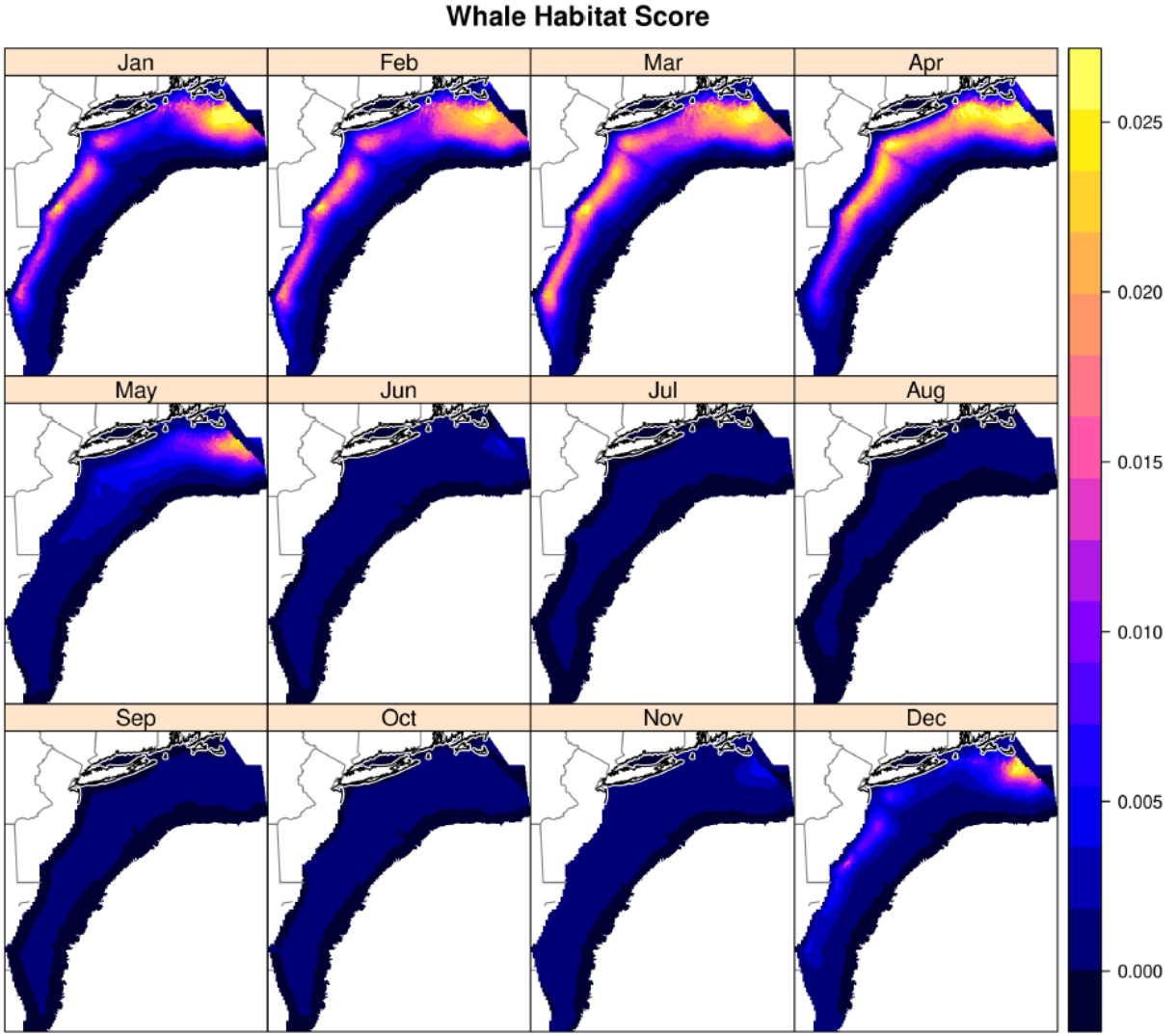
Mid-Atlantic & S. New England Trap/Pot Co-occurrence



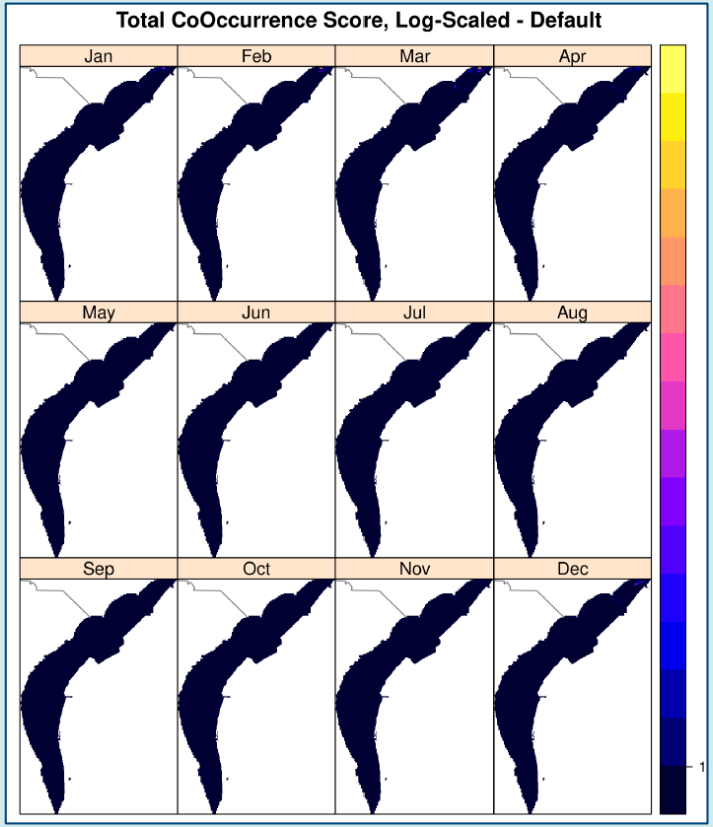
Mid-Atlantic & S. New England Gillnet Co-occurrence

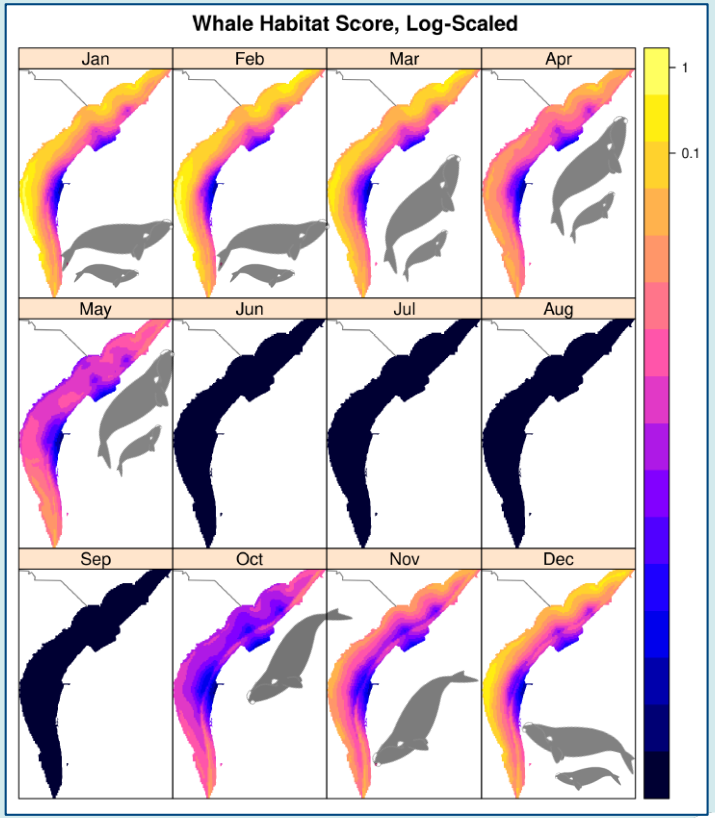


Mid-Atlantic & S. New England Whale Habitat Density



Southeast Whale Habitat Density





Initial ideas for new measures

Ideas from individual ALWTRT members to get the conversation started

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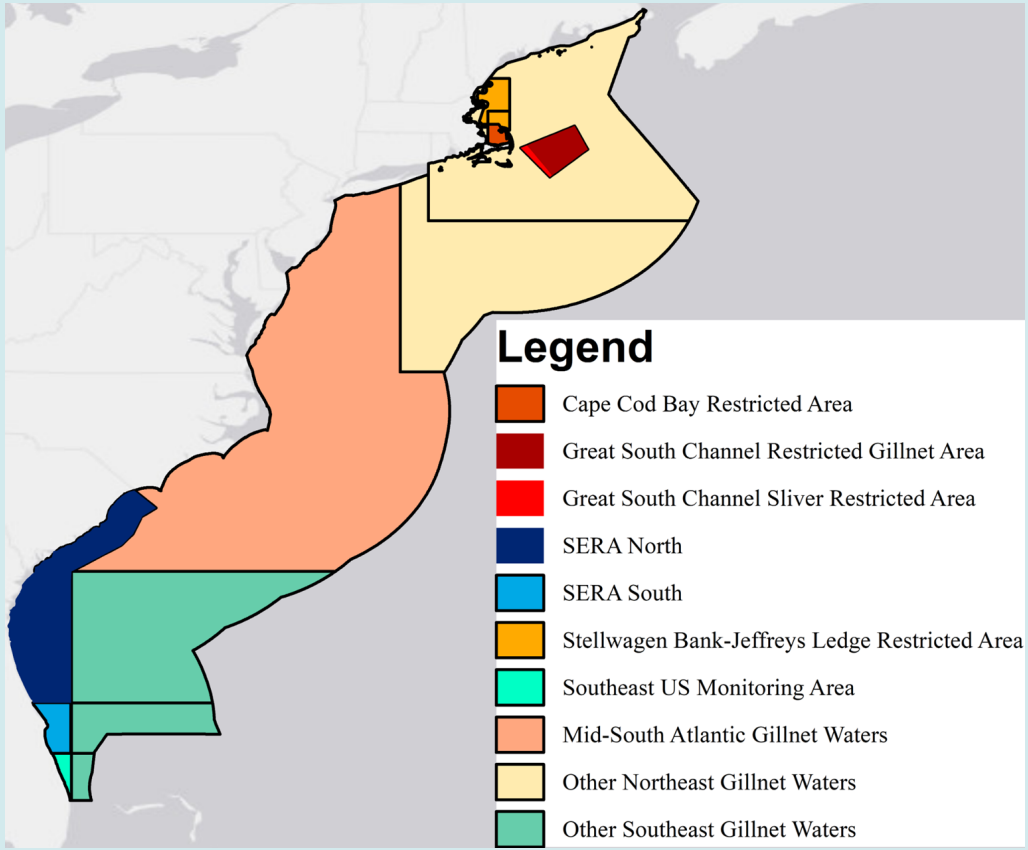
Reduce overlap between right whales and gillnet gear



Reduce soak times

Restrict overnight soaks

Minimum/maximum number of nets on a string

Evaluate the use of tie-downs

Hybrid ropeless gillnet

- E.g. one end ropeless, other end weak rope

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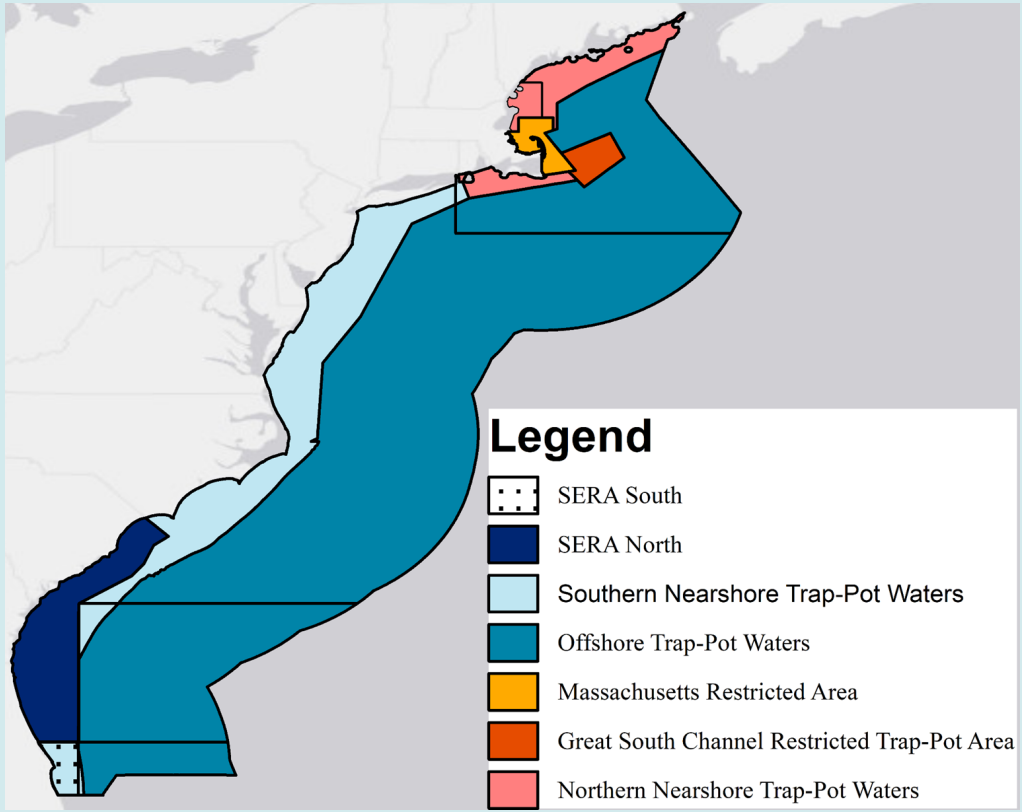
Reduce overlap between right whales and trap/pot gear



Change minimum traps/trawl

- Increase minimum traps/trawl (not in SE calving area)
- SE: Singles only with weaker gear

Trap caps

- Fish pots, blue crab, whelk
- Any fisheries with no cap

Extend Final Rule from Phase I to other trap/pot fisheries in NE

Phase 2: Scoping Topics for Restricted Area Risk Reduction

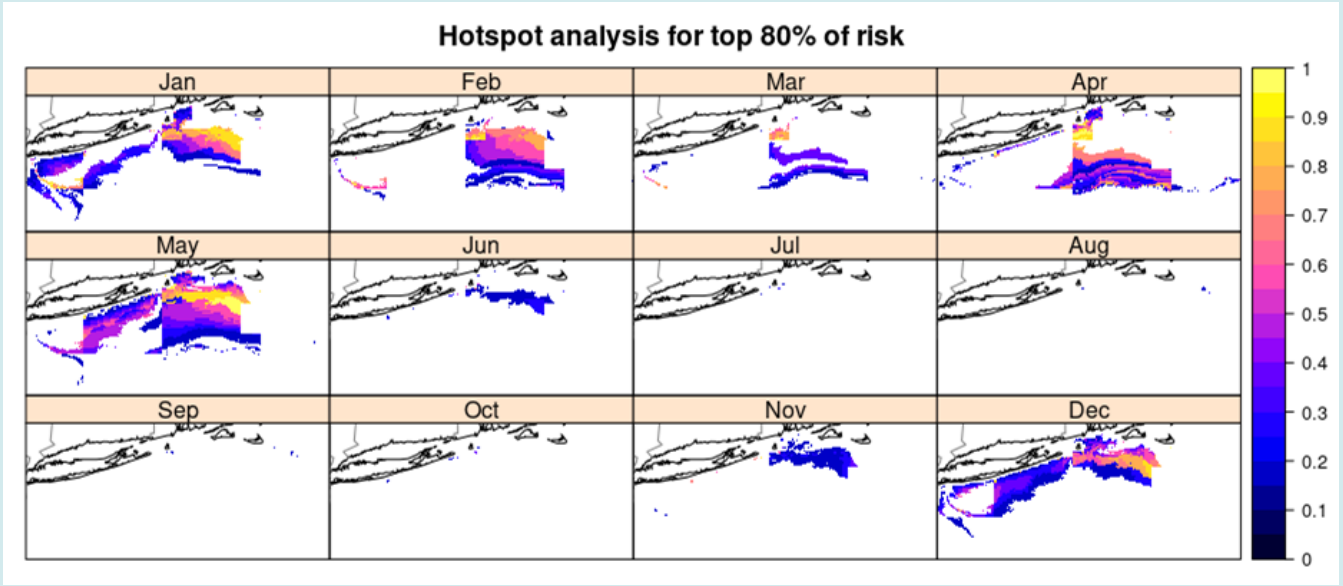
Re-evaluate existing restricted areas:

- Allow ropeless testing
- Re-evaluate boundaries or timing of existing closures
  - Cape Cod Bay RA
  - Great South Channel RA
  - Southeast RA North and South
- Include SE Black Sea Bass fishery management closures in the Plan

Scoping Topics for Restricted Area Risk Reduction

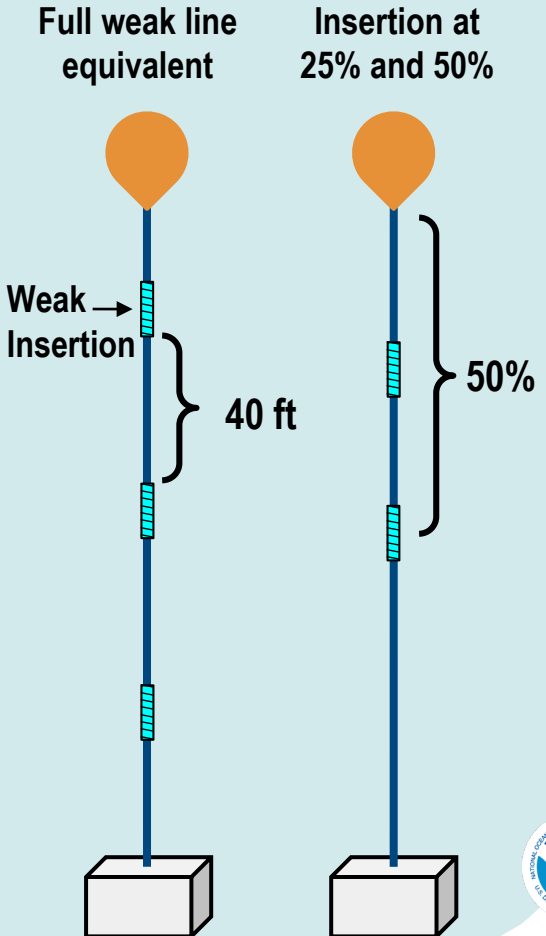
New areas based on hot spots:

- Rolling restricted areas or delayed fishing season up the coast in Mid-Atlantic with whale density
- Southern New England restricted area
- Dynamic management



Phase 2: Scoping Topics for Gear Strength

- Require maximum 1,700 lb breaking strength rope or regular inserts in buoy line (40-60 ft)
- Cap line diameter (½ or ⅝ in. max to differentiate from Canada)
- Expand gear modifications such as weak inserts in gillnets to year round in the mid- Atlantic
- Weaker weak inserts with a smaller anchor in gillnet panels



Scoping Topics for Gear Marking

Modify gear marking for greater visibility and greater resolution between:

- Different states
- State and Federal Waters
- U.S. vs Canada
- Gear type

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Phase 2: Scoping Topics Involving Fishing Effort Management

- Cap latent effort in gillnet fisheries
- Consider limited entry for open access fisheries, e.g. skate fishery
- Reduce soak times
- Implement minimum/maximum number of nets on a string
- Consider challenges determining effort and managing unmanaged fisheries (eg. striped mullet, blue catfish caught in gillnets)
- Develop consequences for documented take

Input needed:
How to reduce right whale entanglement risk

- Input on the possible measures presented today
- Additional measures NMFS should consider to reduce right whale entanglement risk
  - Gear or effort reduction
  - Restricted areas
  - Reducing gear strength or lethality
- Improving gear marking - better resolution of where incidents occur
- Current fishing practices

Questions

Written comments must be submitted by October 21, 2021 to nmfs.gar.alwtrt2021@noaa.gov