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**NORTHEAST SEAFOOD COALITION APPLAUDS HARBOR PORPOISE TAKE REDUCTION TEAM AND NOAA FISHERIES FOR AMENDING HARBOR PORPOISE TAKE REDUCTION PLAN**

**October 8, 2013—Gloucester, Mass.** The Northeast Seafood Coalition (NSC) expresses sincere appreciation to the Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Team (TRT) and NOAA Fisheries for taking the necessary action to amend the Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan (Plan) by eliminating the consequence closure strategy that was implemented in 2010. The Plan was altered to prevent the continued improper triggering of a consequence closure caused by inaccurate data. Contrary to prior reports, harbor porpoise population trends are higher and more stable than previously thought and bycatch has been significantly reduced below the stock's Potential Biological Removal (PBR) level.

Last year, gillnet fishermen were facing a consequence closure in a large portion of the Gulf of Maine for October and November due to analysis conducted by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) that indicated harbor porpoise bycatch exceeded the scientifically allowable limit based on the estimated population size. NSC, along with other members of the fishing industry, questioned the calculations underlining the trigger.

NSC also worked closely with affected gillnetters, sector managers and the Northeast Sector Service Network to conduct a thorough review of Northeast Fishery Science Center data and to submit an industry proposal to NOAA Fisheries that not only better reflected the current Northeast groundfish fishery, but also prompted a data review of harbor porpoise takes and fishing behavior. NSC identified the "Other Special Measures Provision" in the Plan that allowed regulatory flexibility to modify the consequence closure in Fishing Year 2012 from the fall months to February and March 2013. The modification was an industry trade-off to conserve harbor porpoise with less financial impact to the fishery.

In NSC's public comments for the proposed rule to amend the Plan, NSC executive director Jackie Odell wrote, "Data now reveals the trigger is misaligned with the true realities of the current fishery and is essentially disconnected... Although these facts would have been useful prior to enactment of the existing closure, perpetuating the Coastal Gulf of Maine Consequence Closure Area and/or triggering additional consequence closures under these facts and circumstances would be wrong."

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NSC remains committed to protecting harbor porpoise and minimizing unnecessary impacts on small groundfish businesses. NSC executive director Jackie Odell, Northeast Fishery Sector III manager Rob Banks, and Northeast Fishery Sectors XI and XII manager Dr. Joshua Wiersma joined the Take Reduction Team in 2012 to work alongside various stakeholders to bring an educated industry voice to the TRT that reflects the realities of today's Northeast groundfish fishery, which includes the sector system with increased monitoring and reporting, community-based management, and decreased commercial landings.

Furthermore, industry has been proactive and under the leadership of the Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund with Gear Conservation Engineering Network (GEARNET), Coastal Economic Development Corporation and Regional Economic Development Center of Southern New Hampshire to replace antiquated pingers with new LED pinger technology through an affordable swap program.

NSC looks forward to continuing to work with fishermen, sectors, the Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund, the TRT, NOAA Fisheries, Congressional allies, and other vested partners to continue to reduce harbor porpoise interactions and sustain small fishing business operations.

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**About the Northeast Seafood Coalition:**

The Northeast Seafood Coalition is a non-profit organization representing over 361 commercial fishing entities, which hold over 500 limited access groundfish permits, in the northeast United States on political and policy issues affecting their interests as participants in the groundfish fishery and the Sector program in the Northeast multispecies groundfish fishery. NSC members are small, independent, entrepreneurial businesses that fish for—and support fishing for—cod, haddock, flounders, and other groundfish species along the northeast coast. NSC's fishing business members fish from small and large ports all along the northeast coast. They fish small, medium, and large vessels, and they employ all groundfish gear types.

NSC works for rules that embody real solutions to complex fishery problems.