

NORTHEAST SEAFOOD COALITION

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GILLNET FISHERMEN COMMITTED TO REDUCE HARBOR PORPOISE INTERACTION

Gloucester, Mass.—November 20, 2012—Gillnet fishermen in the Northeast region of the U.S. are making strident efforts to reduce harbor porpoise interactions and preliminary data shows a low number of takes in the month of October. A closure for gillnet fishermen that was set to take place in a large portion of inshore Gulf of Maine fishing grounds during October and November 2012 was changed to February and March 2013 due to analysis conducted by NOAA Fisheries based on an industry proposal submitted by the Northeast Seafood Coalition (NSC). This proposal showed more harbor porpoise would be protected by the closing the winter months rather than maintaining a fall closure. Gillnet fishers have been and are continuing to make concerted, proactive choices to benefit harbor porpoise and their industry.



A fisherman aboard gillnetter F/V Heidi & Elisabeth prepares a harbor porpoise pinger for use. Photo Credit: Jamie Hayward

In October, fishing cooperatives, commonly referred to as “sectors,” with active gillnet vessels that operate in the inshore Gulf of Maine are moving forward with their commitment to minimize harbor porpoise interactions.

Northeast Fishery Sectors with active gillnet fishermen have urged their members to deploy twice the amount of required “pinger” coverage in all management areas during October, with the intent of making sure the correct number of working pingers are deployed on the gear. Harbor porpoise pingers are acoustic alarm devices that emit a 10 kHz frequency to deter the marine mammals from swimming into gillnets. Many fishermen are working together to ensure they have more than enough pingers deployed. In New Hampshire, for example, fishermen who are not currently gillnetting offered their pingers to fishermen who needed extras.

In addition to urging fishermen to use more than the required amount of pingers, under the leadership of the Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund (GFCPF), industry is also coordinating to replace current technology pingers with new light emitting diode (LED) pinger technology. The LED will enable fishermen and regulatory authorities who test pinger functionality to easily confirm if the devices are operating correctly simply by observing if the pingers are “blinking”. GFCPF received the first wave of LED pingers last week and fishermen began testing the new pingers over the weekend with the intent of providing feedback to the GFCPF and the manufacturer. Anticipating positive results from the testing, GFCPF is prepared to organize an all-out effort to swap out existing pingers throughout the Northeast



Photo Credit: Jamie Hayward

Fishing Sectors with the new technology. GFCPF will seek financial partners to complete the regional program.

Furthermore, multiple Northeast Fishery Sectors are collaborating with the Gulf of Maine Research Institute and the Northeast Cooperative Research Program to develop an industry-based “hotspot” reporting tool that will help provide fishermen with real-time information about harbor porpoise sightings and interactions. This tool will allow the gillnet fleet the ability to effectively share information in order to influence decisions about fishing behavior. Industry began working on this tool earlier this year, and it will be available for wide-spread industry use beginning in early 2013.

NSC and its members share a full commitment with scientists, environmentalists and concerned citizens to conserve harbor porpoise.

Gillnet fishermen are acutely aware of the need to protect harbor porpoise and other marine mammals and continually make rigorous efforts to do so. Now, more than ever, gillnet fishermen are collaborating to reduce harbor porpoise interactions—as is already evident from the low number of takes in October.

NSC looks forward to partnering with individual fishermen, Northeast Fishery Sectors, the Northeast Sector Service Network, NOAA Fisheries, the Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Team, the Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund, Future Oceans, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, and all vested parties to ensure the gillnet industry achieves an unprecedented low number of harbor porpoise takes while continuing to provide healthy and sustainable seafood for the world.

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About the Northeast Seafood Coalition:

The Northeast Seafood Coalition is a non-profit organization representing over 250 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.