

Summary of False Killer Whale Take Reduction Team Conference Call

March 8, 2013

Participants

TRT Members/Alternates: Brendan Cummings, John La Grange, Sharon Young, Andy Read, Kristy Long, David Laist, Alecia Van Atta, Tory O'Connell, Ryan Steen, John Hall, Asuka Ishizaki, Alton Miyasaka

Note: Alton Miyasaka and Jo-Anne Kushima have been nominated by the State of Hawaii, Department of Land and Natural Resources, to serve on the TRT. Until NMFS makes appointments, they are serving as "acting" member and alternate, respectively.

NMFS/NOAA staff: Nancy Young, Jamie Marchetti, Amanda Bradford, Erin Oleson, Karin Forney, Russ Ito, Keith Bigelow, Adam Bailey, Take Tomson, Fred Tucher, Kamaile Nichols

Facilitators: Scott McCreary, Bennett Brooks

Others: Sarah McDonald (Duke University), Patrick Foster (NOAA General Counsel intern), Elia Herman (State of Hawaii), Sarah Courbis (State of Hawaii)

Meeting Materials (provided to the TRT by email)

1. Injury determination protocol and timeline for processing false killer whale interactions in accordance with the TRP
2. Injury description and determination for the 1/29/2013 false killer whale interaction
3. Small cetacean injury categories and criteria (excerpted from NMFS' Serious Injury policy)
4. Current marine mammal handling and release guidelines placard
5. Draft revised placard

Presentation/Discussion Summary

1. Summary of the observed interaction - N. Young presented a summary of the January 29, 2013 observed interaction with a false killer whale on a deep-set longline trip inside the U.S. EEZ around Hawaii.

Summary of questions/comments:

TRT member question: What type of hook was involved in the interaction, and did it comply with the requirements of the TRP?

NMFS response: The vessel was using a mix of hook types. Since the hook was not recovered from the whale, the hook type involved in the interaction is unknown. The vessel left the dock and the interaction occurred before the TRP's gear requirements went into effect.

TRT member comment: A substantial number of boats did not switch their gear early or by the deadline because the hook supply was not sufficient.

TRT member question: How was the branch line diameter determined? The reported diameter seems very small.

NMFS response: The observer used the calipers issued by the program, measured the length and diameters of three branch lines and recorded the average. The reported diameter of 1.6 mm is the average of the measured branch lines, and not specifically the line that was involved in the interaction.

TRT member question: There is uncertainty in the amount of line left on the animal. Why didn't the observer measure the amount of line that was left on the boat to help estimate the amount that remained on the animal?

NMFS response: Observers are instructed to measure the gear that is left on the boat, but the observer did not or was not able to do so in this case. The instruction will be re-emphasized with observers.

TRT member question: Was there an opportunity to de-hook the animal, since it surfaced very close to the vessel?

NMFS response: The animal only surfaced once before it broke the line, so there was no opportunity to attempt de-hooking.

TRT member question: The interaction happened before the gear requirements went into effect. Why does it count toward the Southern Exclusion Zone trigger?

NMFS response: This is consistent with the TRP. All of the TRP's regulations, except the gear requirements, went into effect on December 31, 2012. Any false killer whale serious injuries or mortalities in the deep-set fishery inside the EEZ since that date count toward the SEZ trigger. This is designed to allow the TRP to meet the MMPA's short-term goal of reducing take below PBR within six months of the TRP's implementation.

TRT member comment: The interaction occurred north of the islands; if it had resulted in closure of the SEZ, that could have pushed fishermen to the area where the interaction occurred, possibly resulting in more interactions.

NMFS response: While that shift is a possibility, this was considered when the SEZ was developed.

TRT member comment: There are no clear seasonal, temporal, or spatial patterns to false killer whale bycatch, but most of the interactions seem to have been concentrated in the closure area.

TRT member question: Was there any question about the species identification?

NMFS response: The observer described the animal and the identifying characteristics observed in the field. Based on the observer's description and sketches, and post-observation analysis, NMFS is satisfied that the animal was properly identified as a false killer whale. As part of a continuing process to ensure reliable identifications, starting the week of March 11 the observer program is providing additional training to current

observers on marine mammals, including a refresher focusing on species with similar appearances.

TRT member question: Was the animal within the range of the insular population?

NMFS response: No. The interaction occurred just inside the outer EEZ boundary, and is within the range of the Hawaii pelagic population.

2. Summary of the injury determination process - N. Young presented a summary of the injury determination process and final injury determination for the false killer whale, as well as a brief overview of the expedited process/protocol. N. Young noted that the expedited injury determination process/protocol can be discussed in more depth at the May TRT meeting.

Summary of questions/comments:

Comment: The length of time between the interaction and the final injury determination is too long, particularly when it appeared from the emailed description of the injury that this was a serious injury. It seems like even more time would elapse before closure of the SEZ if this interaction met the trigger.

TRT member question: How are captain-submitted narratives or comments considered during the injury determination process and analysis?

NMFS response: Although they are not required to do so, masters have the option of commenting on the observer data forms. If marine mammal identification is potentially a question, masters are encouraged to promptly notify the observer and they may choose to document their concerns on the observer data form. Any additional documentation of the interaction is helpful, including photos, sketches, diagrams, or other corroborating information. In addition, NMFS will consider the captain's comments on the MMAP mortality/injury reporting form to the extent such information is reasonably available and does not result in unnecessary delay. We will revise the injury determination protocol to make this clear.

TRT member question: The injury determination process/protocol document references outside experts. What outside experts are consulted in species identification?

NMFS response: We intended "outside" experts to refer to staff from outside of PIRO/PIFSC, such as marine mammal biologists at SWFSC. We will revise the protocol to clarify the point that only NOAA/NMFS experts will be consulted.

3. Summary of placard revisions - N. Young briefly described the draft changes to the marine mammal handling/release placard, and requested any comments be emailed to her by Friday, March 15.

Summary of questions/comments:

TRT member comment: Better pictures should be used if the placard is intended to be used for species identification.

NMFS response: The Protected Species Workshop discusses species identification in depth. The placard is not intended to be used for species identification, but we can find other pictures where the distinguishing characteristics are more apparent.

TRT member comment: If there are any more substantial revisions to the placard, please send back to the TRT for review before the document is finalized and reprinted.

Next Steps

- NMFS will prepare and distribute a call summary.
- TRT members should submit any comments on the draft placard to Nancy by March 15. If NMFS makes substantial revisions in response to the comments, NMFS will send a near-final draft to the TRT for review before finalizing and distributing it to the fleet.
- NMFS and Concur are finalizing logistical arrangements for the May in-person meeting and will email TRT members the information in the next few weeks.