PLTRT Webinar Summary
March 30, 2015

Background:

The National Marine Fisheries Service convened a webinar of the Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Team on March 30, 2015 to achieve the following objectives:

- Provide updates on bycatch data, fishery trends, and research activity
- Address Team questions and comments and consider implications for plan implementation
- Begin planning for December in-person meeting

Participation and Meeting Materials:

The following 13 of the Team's 22 members (or alternates) participated in the call: Damon Gannon, David Kerstetter, Tim Werner, Brendan Cummings, Sharon Young, Beth Lowell, Terri Beideman, Glenn Delaney, David Laist, Dewey Hemilright, Fentress "Red" Munden, Jeff Oden, and Laura Engleby.

Staff from NMFS Southeast Regional Office and the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center also participated in the call, as did staff from NMFS headquarters, Office of General Counsel, Highly Migratory Species and the Pacific Islands Regional Office. Scott McCreary with CONCUR and Bennett Brooks with the Consensus Building Institute facilitated the meeting. One researcher joined the call.

The agency provided an agenda prior to the call. All other materials were presented during the call itself. Copies of meeting materials can be obtained by contacting Erin Fougères at 727-824-5323 or via email at erin.fougeres@noaa.gov.

Key Outcomes

E. Fougeres welcomed participants to the call, noting the importance of taking stock of progress six years after PLTRP implementation and to begin considering potential changes to current strategies or additional strategies to reduce mortalities and serious injuries. S. McCreary and B. Brooks reviewed the agenda and meeting protocols.

General Updates:

The call included several general updates relevant to the PLTRT. These included the following:

- Additional fishery representatives are being sought from the northern mid-Atlantic Bight Region

- L. Engleby provided a brief update on the non-lethal deterrence workshop that occurred in February 2015 in Seattle, WA. Additional information in the form of a meeting summary/technical memorandum will be forthcoming.

Recent Data and Fishery Trends

Lance Garrison with the SEFSC provided a detailed update on short-finned pilot whale stock assessment reports and serious injury and mortality (SI&M) estimates, as well as an update on trends in mainline length usage by the fleet.

L. Garrison noted that the draft 2014 SARS were out for public comment until the end of April 2015. The 2014 SARS assign all observed pelagic longline SI&M to short finned pilot whales and all trawl SI&M to long finned pilot whales. The 2015 SARS have been drafted and are currently in review. The 5 year average SI&M in the 2015 SARS includes the years 2009 through 2013. The 2016 draft SARS will undergo agency review in early 2016.

Key points from the presentation:

- Most observed takes in the PLL fishery are pilot whales and occur between Cape Hatteras, NC and the New York Bight. Interestingly, in 2014 there were several takes of pilot whales along the southern flank of George's Bank, which is unusual. This event may be due to unusually warm water which occurred during September – November 2014 in the northern MAB and along the southern flank of George's Bank.
- There was a high proportion of serious injuries in 2014 (20 of 24 pilot whales taken were seriously injured; 24 of 31 marine mammals (including pilot whales) taken were seriously injured).
- Serious injuries involve primarily mouth hookings and/or hooked animals released with extensive trailing gear.
- The 2016 draft SAR will not include the relatively low estimated SI&M during 2009 from the 5-year average. In addition, observed catch per unit effort and preliminary estimates of SI&M during 2014 are high relative to recent estimates likely making SI&M at or above PBR for short-finned pilot whales in the 2016 SARS. The preliminary projected 5-year average (2010-2014) SI&M for short-finned pilot whales is 197.4, which would exceed PBR of 159. This projection is based upon fishery effort levels reported in 2013, and therefore will change when 2014 fishery effort data becomes available.
- Generally, fishing effort in the MAB has trended upward over time since 2003.
- In 2013, there was a dramatic shift in mainline length, in both the reported and observed fishery effort. In the observer data, with just 14% of observed mainline lengths greater than 20 nm during 2013-2014 (during 2010-2012, 62% of mainline lengths were greater than 20 nm).

- However, in 2013 and 2014 catch per unit effort (CPUE) for pilot whales in sets greater than or equal to 20 nm is higher than in previous time periods. The exact cause of the higher CPUE is not known. L. Garrison noted that fishing practices appear to have changed, such that the number of days on a given observed trip with multiple sets jumped from an average of 4% from 1992-2012 to 42.4% during 2013 and 41.6% during 2014. These multiple sets occur within 1nm of each other.

Discussion
In addition to posing several clarifying questions to better understand the data presented, Team discussions included the following comments and observations:

- Strongly supporting attaching a high agency priority for additional data analysis to better understand the multiple sets:
    - Is it possible to compare CPUE for multiple sets (i.e. combine multiple sets into one large set and compare to a single set)
- There was an expressed need for further describing and analyzing effort and mortality patterns:
    - Is CPUE over time cyclical or has it been consistently increasing?
    - Where are the takes occurring and in which quarters?
    - Was there any difference in CPUE for target species related to the unusually warm waters in the northern MAB in 2014? Did the fishermen change the depth of the gear during that time?
    - Is it possible to look at takes within the MAB – have those shifted (L. Garrison noted that it would be possible to parse the data within the MAB for the PLTRT, but that in the SAR it would have to be reported for the MAB as a whole).
    - There will likely be a shift in fishing effort related to HMS Amendment 7 and the closure of Oregon Inlet by the Coast Guard – any effort shifts should be analyzed for the PLTRT in-person meeting in December.

Fishermen's Gear Workshop Update
E. Fougeres provided a summary of the fishermen's gear workshop held in Washington, NC on February 18, 2015. It was an informal workshop to engage fishermen and seek their input into possible changes to terminal tackle (and other ideas) to reduce mortalities and serious injuries of marine mammals in the pelagic longline fishery. The goal was to come up with key areas for additional gear research and testing.

Discussion
- T. Beideman stated that she would seek additional input/suggestions from fishermen at the Annual Meeting of the Blue Water Fishermen's Association to be held in New Jersey in April 2015.

- One fisherman recommended that the 48-hr call in requirement be removed for the Cape Hatteras Special Research Area.
- It was suggested that any changes to the current PLTRP go forward in one new rule package, potentially after the December meeting if new measures were agreed upon at that time.

Research Update

Danielle Waples of Duke University Marine Laboratory presented on the preliminary findings of a study testing dolphin interactive dissuasive (DiD) devices in the Atlantic pelagic longline fishery. These devices are triggered by echolocation (i.e. "interactive"). The goals of the study were to:

- Determine whether the DiDs can be used practically in the fishery;
- Test the efficacy of DiD devices in reducing depredation; and
- Assess the DiD's interactive feature

The study found that the DiDs did not affect fish catch, were robust and easy to attach to the gear; however, they were not effective at deterring depredation of either the bait or the catch. In addition the interactive feature did not function as expected and the DiDs appeared to trigger each other, staying on/turning on when there were no echolocating whales present.

Discussion

- It was noted that the cost of the DiDs could be prohibitive for 20 miles of mainline, given that they should be spaced ~1/3 mile apart; however, the key point of the presentation was that the DiDs were not an effective deterrent, thus cost is a non-issue.
- Although the DiDs do not hold much promise as an effective deterrent, there will be follow-up paired testing before completely ruling them out.
- The importance of collaborating with fishermen on these trials was noted.

Next Steps:

Based on the discussion, the call yielded the following next steps:

- Convene an in-person TRT meeting in December 2015 to discuss potential new strategies to reduce M&SI.
- There were several requests for data/analyses prior to the in-person meeting to enable/enhance in-person deliberations. These included:
    - Information on the types of hooks used in the fishery and whether different hooks had different catch/interaction rates
    - Habitat and density models for pilot whales (from the AMAPPS surveys)
    - Further investigation of the multiple sets

    - Summaries of weak hook research and any other research conducted to date (e.g. line cutter)
- There was a recognition that the team would need to come prepared in December to discuss changes to the current plan and that the meeting schedule and format should build appropriate caucus time into the agenda for those discussions.
- S. McCreary and B. Brooks are to draft a key outcomes memorandum summarizing Team deliberations and proposed next steps.

Any questions or comments regarding this meeting summary should be directed to Scott McCreary and Bennett Brooks or Erin Fougères with NMFS Southeast Region office. Scott and Bennett can be reached at 510-649-8008 and 212-678-0078, respectively; Erin can be contacted at 727-824-5323