



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary
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61st SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL (SAC) MEETING
Virtual GoToWebinar
Wednesday, February 10th, 2021 8:30 am – 12:30 pm
MINUTES of MEETING

Present:

Bill Adler	Primary: Fixed Gear Commercial Fishing
Michelle Bachman	Federal: New England Fishery Management Council
James Bailey	Alternate: At Large
Terri Birkeland	Alternate: At Large
Kevin Blinkoff	Primary: Recreational Fishing
Andrea Bogomolni	Primary: At Large
Tim Brady	Alternate: Recreational Fishing
Jonathan Brink	Alternate: Whale Watch
Shelley Brown	At Large: Alternate
Todd Callaghan	State: MA Coastal Zone Management (Chair)
Tracey Dalton	Primary: Research
Rich Delaney	Primary: Education
Tim Donovan	Federal: NOAA Office of Law Enforcement
Susan Farady	Primary: Education (Vice Chair)
John Galluzzo	Primary: Maritime Heritage
Allen Hale	Primary: Youth
Laura Howes	Primary: Whale Watch (Secretary)
Moira Kelly	Federal: NOAA GARFO
Martin Klein	Alternate: Maritime Heritage
Heather Knowles	Primary: Diving
Laura Lilly	Alternate: Education
Randall Lyons	Alternate: Business Industry
Dan Martino	Primary: At Large
Chris McGuire	Primary: Conservation
Conor McManus	Alternate: Research
Frank Mirarchi	Alternate: Mobile Gear Commercial Fishing
Iben Munck	Primary: Conservation
Kimberley Pearson	Alternate: Conservation
Monica Pepe	Alternate: Education
Kevin Powers	Primary: At Large
CDR Clayton Preble	Federal: US Coast Guard
Dawn Stancavish	Alternate: Marine Transportation
Carol Voigt	Primary: Marine Transportation
Mason Weinrich	Primary: Research
Kelly Whitmore	State: MA Division of Marine Fisheries



Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS) Staff:

Pete DeCola	Anne-Marie Runfola	Elizabeth Stokes	Mike Thompson
Ben Haskell	Tammy Silva	Anne Smrcina	Alice Stratton
Dave Wiley	Hannah MacDonald (Intern)		

Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) Staff:

John Armor, Director
Matt Brookhart, Eastern Region Director
Ed Lindelof, Policy and Planning Division
Jonelle Dilley, NOAA Legal Counsel

I. State of Sanctuaries Presentation – John Armor, Director, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and Matt Brookhart, Eastern Region Director

John Armor and Matt Brookhart welcomed SAC members. They both expressed their appreciation for the SAC’s contributions and hard work toward keeping the sanctuary relevant and moving forward with its important work during the COVID pandemic. They briefed the SAC on the ONMS program’s operations and budget, and talked about how the sanctuary program will manage the transition to the new Biden administration. John explained how it has been difficult to manage the Program over the last several years with a reduced budget. But both he and Matt stressed that the focus remains on important tasks during these challenging and exciting times. There are so many things going on with the Program and the expansion of the sanctuary system is important. Mallows Bay is the newest NMS in the Chesapeake Bay. Flower Gardens has completed its expansion adding new banks to its system. The proposed designation of Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast NMS is going forward and is close to being approved. The proposal to expand Monitor NMS to include more historic shipwrecks is also moving forward. There are new challenges that come along with adding new sites, so we need to continue to think creatively and innovatively to meet our goals. It’s important that ONMS leadership and others tell the story about the sanctuary system and reach out to local, regional and national communities. We are prioritizing telling our story and the value added, and while we have work to do on this, we will continue down this pathway and remain very confident that this will be a paradigm shift for us when we talk about resources and sanctuary budget.

II. SAC Business

1. Review of Draft 60th SAC Minutes (T. Callaghan)

SAC consensus to approve the 60th SAC Minutes as amended with Bill Adler’s proposed comments:

- a. Section III. SAC Business, subsection v., SAC Work Plan Review, SAC Related Events and Activities: New England Boat Show date reads Feb 2020; it is corrected to read Feb 2019.
- b. Kelly Whitmore, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF), provided Bill Adler with clarification regarding his question on the sand lance update she provided in the 60th SAC, MA DMF Agency Report.

2. SAC Recruitment, Office Elections, SAC Hours, Reports (A.M. Runfola)

The next SAC Recruitment will take place in June 2021 and Youth Seat recruitment in November 2021. SAC members whose terms will expire were notified and should contact Anne-Marie Runfola if they plan to reapply for their seat.

Next Officer Election: Secretary at next Full SAC Meeting (May - to be determined). Laura Howes is eligible to serve again but will need to be re-nominated. Others can also be nominated.

Please send nominations to Anne-Marie in advance of the meeting. Nominations can also be accepted from the floor before the election.

SAC Hours – We're trying quarterly reporting for SAC hours this year. It's a very simple form. SAC members are asked to submit their hours for the first quarter of fiscal year 21 (Oct – Dec 2020), here: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd7ornz0tYgrLBbKpUHxuzCIJTokX93QiLwsNpWjQmVzO3_Aw/viewform?usp=sf_link

3. SAC Work Plan Review (T. Callaghan):

Todd Callaghan, SAC Chair, presented a summary of accomplishments under the 2020 SAC work plan. The SAC annual work plan was organized by four topics associated with the Sanctuary's management plan. Under the topic of Capacity Building, several subcommittees and working groups, on which many SAC members participated, met in 2020 and forwarded recommendations to SBNMS staff on how to update the Management Plan. Under Education and Outreach, there was a virtual event with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) to coordinate on acoustic buoys and other technologies that can be used to monitor for North Atlantic right whale presence. A maritime heritage telepresence project was conducted. Water quality continued to be supported by SAC members participating in the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) Outfall Monitoring Science Advisory Panel which approved changes to the MWRA marine monitoring program. Under the topic of External Support for SBNMS, a collaboration with the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism in Plymouth was revised because of COVID-19 related travel/meeting issues. Under the topic of SAC-related activities, the work plan was implemented, the national SAC chair call was attended, and the Get Into Your Sanctuary/Boat Show participation occurred in 2020 (just before the state shutdown).

III. Sanctuary Business

1. SBNMS Management Plan Review (MPR) (A. Stratton, B. Haskell):

At the October 2020 SAC meeting, the SAC subcommittees (Education & Outreach, Research & Monitoring, Interagency Coordination) and the Maritime Heritage Working Group presented their recommendations for priority strategies and activities to be addressed in the management plan revision. Since that time staff have been working hard to draft full action plans. Staff first consolidated all the input to create a single set of draft action plans, then revised those action plans to include tasks identified by staff and modified strategies as needed to reduce redundancy across all action plans. We considered several organizational options and are now using a structure that reflects the ONMS Strategic Plan. We reconvened each of

the subcommittee/working groups in late January/early February to review the full draft Action Plans so they could provide feedback on how we incorporated their input and to identify any remaining gaps. In the next week we will provide the draft Action Plans to ONMS for policy, regional, and legal review. We are currently working to develop a prioritization scheme so we can rank the strategies, and we are developing performance indicators for each action plan. We expect to be able to present the full draft action plans to the full SAC review sometime in March, at which point we will review with you all at a special SAC meeting. We are concurrently drafting the Environmental Assessment which will accompany the draft Management Plan. We anticipate publishing the draft Management Plan and Environmental Assessment in late May, at which point it will be available for public comment. Over the summer we will analyze comments and revise the documents as needed, and will provide a report to you all again at the October 2021 SAC meeting.

2. MPR Vision/Mission Working Group (S. Farady):

The Mission/Vision Working Group was developed to provide SAC input on the Mission and Vision Statements developed by the Sanctuary staff and presented to the SAC last May:

“Mission:

Our mission is to conserve, protect and enhance the biological diversity, ecosystem services and cultural legacy of the sanctuary while facilitating uses that are compatible with resource protection. Innovation, partnerships, public engagement, and applied science guide our work.”

“Vision:

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary is a model for sustainable use. It is a unique place defined by a diversity and abundance of marine life which thrive in clean ocean waters. Humans are an integral component of the sanctuary and their activities are compatible with protecting its natural and cultural attributes.”

The members were:

Susan Farady, Chair

Iben Munck

John Galluzzo

Terri Birkeland

Frank Mirarchi

Les Kaufman

Moira Kelly

Michelle Bachman

Tracy Dalton

Laura Howes

SBNMS Staff support: Ben Haskell and Hannah MacDonald

The group began its work in November 2020, met twice and completed its work in February following online voting to determine the group’s final recommendations. The group used the following information in considering the Mission and Vision statements for SBNMS:

Mission & Vision guidance document and charge:

- “Unpacking” document explaining the key phrases in the staff Mission & Vision statements.

- The Sanctuary's designation document and key provisions of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.
- The Sanctuary's authority to regulate uses such as fishing.

Some key words, phrases and ideas emerged from the group's discussions, such as clean waters, diversity, sustainable use, compatibility and how to incorporate human uses. The group moved away from the staff phrase of "sustainable use" since while it's well-understood within the UN sustainable development goals, it is one of many policies in the NMSA. The group also strived to develop M & V statements that were succinct, meaningful, and supportive of the recommendations of the other working groups contributing to the MPR.

The group came to consensus fairly quickly around a Mission statement:

"We conserve, protect, and enhance the biological diversity, ecosystem services, and cultural legacy of the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Science, innovation, partnerships, and public engagement guide our work."

The Vision statement took longer. The group voted on 3 proposed statements:

1. We strive for a sanctuary that respects human activity while protecting nature's diversity and bounty. (received 12.5% votes).
2. We advance ocean stewardship and strive for scientific excellence, presenting the sanctuary as a working model for addressing the challenges of sustainable use. (received 12.5% votes).
3. *"We strive for a productive sanctuary that protects nature's diversity and bounty, respects sustainable human activities, and advances ocean stewardship."* (received 75% votes)

The group presents their Mission statement and Vision statement #3 to the SAC for their review, input and if approved, to the SBNMS staff for their consideration as part of the MPR process.

Motion: Submit the mission statement and vision statement submitted by the Vision and Mission Subcommittee for consideration by the sanctuary staff in the Management Plan revision process.

The SAC approved the motion by consensus.

The Chair thanks all group members for their thorough and thoughtful input and to the esteemed SBNMS staff for their exceptional support and organization of our work.

3. ONMS Strategic Plan Update (AM Runfola):

ONMS has embarked on its next five-year strategic planning process. We're in Phase 1, the information gathering stage. Staff members from around the system are facilitating internal focus groups on topical areas like Resource Protection, Education and Outreach and Climate Change, and focus groups organized by sanctuary regions. The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is organizing an external roundtable to receive stakeholder input, as well. Anne-Marie Runfola is a facilitator for the Education and Outreach and the Eastern Regional Focus

Groups, and Pete DeCola and Tammy Silva are participating in several of the focus groups to provide feedback on 20-year and 5-year visions, opportunities and challenges, and recommended edits or new Goals and Objectives, and the accompanying Strategies and Tactics, or the “How,” we’ll achieve our goals. ONMS’s current strategic plan can be found here: <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/about/five-year-strategy-2017-2022.html>.

Please let Anne-Marie, Pete or any staff member know if you have suggestions for the new strategic plan or want more information.

4. SAC Chair Meeting Update (T. Callaghan):

Todd Callaghan attended the SAC Chair national call on November 23, 2020 as the SBNMS SAC representative. John Armor of the National Marine Sanctuary Office spoke about how to improve “visibility, credibility, effectiveness.” Some SAC Chair suggestions included using the energy of past Volunteers of the Year to help improve the visibility of sanctuaries and using Carnival Cruises to stream video loops highlighting the sanctuaries. There was much discussion under Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion about including Native American members onto SACs and incorporating indigenous people’s perspectives in scientific exploration in sanctuaries. On the subject of Managing Resources, there was a presentation from the Thunder Bay, MI sanctuary about how they used monitoring to determine that marking historical wrecks with buoys decreased the amount of fishing gear that was getting hung up on the structures. They also found that for-hire fishing operations like the buoys because they help identify the orientation of the wrecks (bow and stern) so that fishers lose less gear.

5. SBNMS Visitor Center, Provincetown, Conceptual Design (AM Runfola):

Partner-Led Webinar Offers Opportunity for Public Feedback. Partners of the SBNMS Visitor Center organized a public webinar to kick off the second round of public feedback regarding the conceptual designs. Sanctuary Superintendent, Pete DeCola and Program Coordinator, Anne-Marie Runfola, joined partners from the Center for Coastal Studies, the Town of Provincetown, and Oudens Ello Architecture and the project’s Community Steering Committee, to present the final two designs, discuss opportunities and challenges, and receive feedback. 48 people from Provincetown and the Lower Cape region participated, offering overwhelming support for the project and asking thoughtful questions. The Center for Coastal Studies is providing a web page with project details (<https://coastalstudies.org/sbnmsvc/>) and is helping administer public surveys. There is still time to complete survey #2: Design to help inform the final design selection. The link is on the website listed above. Currently we are working with the community steering committee and project partners to prepare to present to the Town of Provincetown Select Board on March 8, 2021. Community members are preparing letters and statements of support to share with the Select Board. Contact Pete.DeCola@noaa.gov or Anne-Marie.Runfola@noaa.gov for more information or to share ideas.

IV. Agency/Governmental Reports

1. MA Coastal Zone Management (CZM) (T. Callaghan):

- CZM continues to work on its 5-year update of the MA ocean plan
 - Draft plan expected in June 2021
 - One management framework objective is to develop a matrix of compatible uses and vulnerabilities of various classes of benthic species to specific ocean construction techniques (cable laying, sand extraction, etc.).

- Cable industry commented that it would like to see the development of “presumably permissible” pathways north and south of SBNMS
- CZM continues to work with offshore wind developers
 - Routes and methods that will have minimize impacts
 - Research programs
 - Financial mitigation packages, esp. related to fisheries and sediment disturbances
- CZM, along with Division of Marine Fisheries, and Department of Environmental Protection staff, participated in the legislature’s Ocean Acidification Commission.
 - Recommendations include increased funding for monitoring and research associated with how changing ocean chemistry may affect industries of importance in MA
- CZM has learned that the Mass Maritime Academy is outfitting the schooner Ernestina to be used as a research vessel and educational platform.

2. Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) (K. Whitmore):

Right Whale Conservation

In December 2020, the MA Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) concluded public hearings/comment on a suite of proposed protected species regulations designed to reduce the potential risk of endangered right whales becoming entangled in buoy lines. Proposed measures included new and expanded fixed gear closures and new gear modifications for trap and gillnet fishing. The proposal and extensive public comment record may be found on DMF’s proposed regulations website, and recordings on DMF’s YouTube channel.

At their January 28, 2021 business meeting, the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) reviewed and approved final regulatory DMF recommendations affecting fixed gear fishing and right whale conservation; a summary may be found on the MFAC’s website. The new rules will become effective when filed and published with the Massachusetts Register.

Approved measures are described below:

- The seasonal commercial trap gear closure will be expanded in both space and time. The existing closure occurs from February 1 – April 30 in Cape Cod Bay, SBNMS, and the Outer Cape Cod Lobster Management Area. The closure will now extend to the New Hampshire maritime border. The closure duration will also be extended through May 15. However, during the May 1 – May 15 period, the closure will occur on a dynamic basis allowing DMF to lift the closure (or parts thereof) if whales no longer remain in state waters. The closure will not extend into certain southern state waters in Lobster Conservation Management Area 2 (Nantucket Sound, Vineyard Sound, Buzzards Bay).
- The January 1 – May 15 gillnet closure in Cape Cod Bay will be expanded geographically to include a discrete area along the South Shore between Plymouth and Scituate.
- Effective May 1, 2021, commercial trap fishermen will be required to fish buoy lines that break when exposed to 1,700 pounds of tension. This may be achieved by fishing buoy lines with a 1,700 pound breaking strength or by inserting NOAA Fisheries approved contrivances into the top 75% of the buoy line every 60’. At this time, the only approved contrivance is the so-called “South Shore Sleeve.”
- Commercial trap fishermen will be required to fish buoy lines with a maximum diameter of 3/8”.

- The recreational lobster and crab trap fishery will be subject to November 1 – May 15 haul-out period throughout all of state waters.
- Recreational lobster and crab trap fishermen will be required to fish buoy lines with a maximum diameter of 5/16”.

DMF recently announced a regional one-year scoping project to comprehensively evaluate challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of on-call, or ‘ropeless,’ fishing gear technology into New England fisheries. A first of its kind on an accelerated timeline, the project will interview fishermen, technologists, policy experts, and scientists to assess diverse perspectives across sectors, and analyze technical, legal & regulatory, and socioeconomic aspects of on-call fishing gear. The project is funded in part by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in partnership with NOAA. For background, see: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/ropeless-fishing-gear-feasibility-study>.

Two new DMF job postings related to protected species: Protected Species Permit Specialist and a Fixed Gear Data Analyst. See MassCareers <https://massanf.taleo.net/careersection/ex/jobsearch.ftl> to apply.

Recreational Fishing

Draft regulations to implement new recreational fishing limits and gear regulations for 2021 for striped bass, Gulf of Maine cod, and Gulf of Maine haddock fishing are open for public comment through March 5. DMF’s draft rules are meant to complement the NEFMC’s recommendation for federal rulemaking to NOAA Fisheries. A virtual public hearing will be held on March 2 at 6PM; for more information see DMF’s <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/division-of-marine-fisheries>.

Offshore Aquaculture

DMF submitted comments to NOAA in response to a pre-application for Blue Water Fisheries’ proposed net-pen offshore finfish aquaculture project sited in federal waters off the mouth of the Merrimack River, citing concerns around permitting, cod spawning, cetaceans, commercial fishing, and water quality.

Project Follow-up

Two DMF project updates are available in the latest DMF newsletter (Q3/Q4) for items covered at the October SAC meeting, including the ghost gear removal project on the F/V Patriot and the Cape Cod Bay dissolved oxygen monitoring project.

DMF Seminar Series

DMF is holding live weekly seminars on Tuesdays @ 11AM. Interested individuals are welcome to attend. Please email Gary Nelson (gary.nelson@mass.gov) to be placed on the distribution list and receive Zoom links.

Climate Change

As the state’s fisheries management agency, DMF has identified guidance documents currently in place for managing resources through climate change, these include:

- Gov. Baker’s Executive Order (EO) "Establishing an Integrated Climate Change Strategy for the Commonwealth".

- Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Management, Policy and Science Strategies for Adapting Fisheries Management to Changes in Species.
- ASMFC State Climate Change Initiative Gaps and Recommendations.

3. New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) (M. Bachman):

The Council met during December 2020 and January 2021 to discuss current issues of interest and approve various fishery management plan adjustments. The Council selected final measures for annual catch limits and other measures in the sea scallop, large mesh groundfish, and whiting fisheries that will apply during the 2021 fishing years beginning in April and May. The Council is also working on a limited entry amendment in the skate fishery management plan. Actions approved last year (groundfish monitoring, scallop management adjustments including Northern Gulf of Maine measures) are being prepared for final submission to NOAA Fisheries.

The Council continues to track offshore wind and aquaculture issues via its Habitat Committee and has been closely following developments related to floating wind in the Gulf of Maine. Aquaculture and Submarine Cable policies, intended to help the Council comment on the effects of these activities, were approved in December. Work on outreach related to ecosystem-based fishery management approaches is ongoing. The Council is also closely tracking potential changes in protected resources management.

4. Enforcement Reports:

a. NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), Northeast Enforcement Division (NED) (T. Donovan)

A fishing vessel became disabled at sea in SBNMS and towed in by the US Coast Guard and boarded in Boston. Compliance assistance provided due to reporting requirement violation. The captain and fisheries observer were interviewed. We are investigating a report that the captain did not maintain a proper watch placing the observer and crew in danger.

OLE conducted a 6-hour vessel patrol in SBNMS. Focus on Highly Migratory Species and charter boat compliance. Four vessels were boarded. 1 violation - no Vessel Trip Report.

Two open investigations with a nexus to SBNMS and collaborating with the state on both.

The Investigative Support Team continues to assist SBNMS and the SBNMS Maritime Heritage Working group with analyzing scallop fishing activity around historic wreck sites.

Remote Operating Vehicle (ROV) efforts continue. A requisition package has been submitted for an ROV capable of inspecting fixed gear for compliance in SBNMS and throughout the NED.

NED patrol vessels are undergoing a maintenance and retrofit period at the US Customs facility in Saint Augustine FL. Retrofits include the addition of thermal imaging cameras. We are planning to patrol SBNMS this summer.

Funding has been transferred for a collaborative relationship between National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Ocean Service (NOS) and OLE. Efforts will focus on using innovative passive acoustic approaches to identify illegal vessel presence, timing and activity levels aimed at improving the effectiveness of enforcement within fishery closure areas. In order to evaluate the ability to improve data dissemination these novel methodologies need to be evaluated within less versus more urbanized acoustic environments. Here, we seek to understand the approach needed for detecting illegal fishing activity in two relatively near-shore US National Marine Sanctuaries with differing levels of background vessel activity: the quieter and deeper waters within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS), and more trafficked waters of SBNMS. Given the global pandemic, we are suggesting that we divide this project into two parts. Part 1 will start with SBNMS and if the results are promising, we will expand further to Part 2 in FKNMS. Our ultimate aim is to further improve these methodologies so that we can eventually use them for identifying and helping OLE target illegal activities in near real time.

Staffing update – We are in the process of hiring 3 Special Agents due to retirements and one Investigative Support/Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Technician. Once onboard we will be fully staffed at our funding levels.

b. US Coast Guard (CDR Clay Preble)

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many changes to the operational environment. Impact to the seafood market has resulted in a noticeable change in Commercial Fishing activity. VMS activity is trending higher than historical normal while landing activity is much lower. Coast Guard has noticed some select segments of boats that have taken advantage of relaxed landing observations posed by the pandemic. More notably we have noticed a shift in the fleet to conduct “Day Trips” and landing much less weight based on reduced demand. Additionally, recreational activity has significantly increased and is less predictable since the start of the pandemic likely due to increased flexibility in work schedules.

The Coast Guard has implemented safety protocols that exceed Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations to ensure the safety of our crews and the public during engagements on the water. It is more important now than ever to ensure we have a strong presence on the water to deter illegal activity and safeguard our fish stocks. We are over the adjustment period and surface and air activities align with our organizational goals and are on par with activities before the pandemic. Sector Boston has conducted 95 Living marine Resource boardings in the vicinity of the sanctuary since October 2020.

The First District is putting an increased emphasis on North Atlantic Right Whale Mandatory reporting. This past season there were 9 occasions where Sector Boston responded to vessels operating too close to whales. With increased recreational activity the push for boater education will be of primary focus.

Sector Boston is putting an increased emphasis on enforcement of High Migratory Species (HMS) and Bluefin Tuna. The majority of these violations happen within the sanctuary and are a result of operator/HMS permit violations.

Our 11 patrol boats in the First District are well past their service life and increasing casualties challenge our ability to maintain an active deterrence in the 24NM to 50NM zone. The First District has leaned on over 1,500 hours of support from our new and more capable Fast Response Cutters from District Five in support of the Living Marine Resource mission in the

First District. The First District will receive its first of six Fast Response Cutters in September of 2022. They will be centrally based out of Boston, MA and will provide significant upgrades in seakeeping and endurance that will support a more active presence on the water.

5. NOAA Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) (M. Kelly):

The proposed modifications to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan were released for public comment on December 31, 2020, with a 60-day comment period that ends March 1, 2021. The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team, composed of fishermen, scientists, conservationists, and state and federal officials from Maine to Florida, helps the agency monitor progress of the Plan and advise on needed improvements to the Plan based on evolving information about why whales become entangled and how fishing practices might be modified to reduce the risk of entanglement. In April 2019, all but one Team member agreed to recommendations of a framework of actions to achieve a 60-percent risk reduction. The proposed rule is not identical to that framework, but closely follows the principles of reduced risk throughout the northeast through a combination of weakened ropes (although not equivalent to the weak rope discussed by the Team) and a reduction in the number of buoy lines. The proposed rule also includes measures not recommended by the Team, particularly modifications to seasonal closure/restricted areas that would, instead of closing the area to all lobster or crab harvest, close the areas to buoy lines while allowing for ropeless fishing and the addition of up to two new seasonal restricted areas.

The draft Biological Opinion (Batched Fisheries Opinion) on various Federal fisheries management actions including the authorization of eight Federal fisheries management plans under the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and two interstate fishery management plans under the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, and the implementation of the Council's Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2 was also recently released. In assessing the impact of the various fisheries on the North Atlantic right whale through both the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team process under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and as part of this consultation under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service identified that mortality and serious injury of North Atlantic right whales in federal fisheries managed by the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office needs to be further reduced. Therefore, we developed the North Atlantic Right Whale Conservation Framework for Federal Fisheries in the Greater Atlantic Region (Conservation Framework), which is included in the proposed action for this consultation. We have preliminarily determined that the fisheries, as modified by the Conservation Framework, are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any ESA-listed species in the action area, including sea turtles, listed marine mammals, and listed fish and are not likely to result in the destruction or adverse modification of any designated critical habitat. In order to provide sufficient time to finalize the Batched Fisheries Opinion, feedback will be accepted through February 19, 2021.

Right Whale Calving: To date, there have been 14 new right whale calves sighted in the Southeast Region.

NOAA GARFO Right Whale Slow Zone:

Right Whale Slow Zones is a program that notifies vessel operators of areas where maintaining speeds of 10 knots or less can help protect right whales from vessel collisions. Under this program, NOAA Fisheries provides maps and coordinates to vessel operators indicating areas where right whales have been detected. Mariners are encouraged to avoid these areas or reduce speeds to 10 knots or less while transiting through these areas for 15 days.

Right Whale Slow Zones are established around areas where right whales have been recently seen or heard; these areas are identical to Dynamic Management Areas (DMA) when triggered by right whale visual sightings but, they will also be established when right whale detections are confirmed from acoustic receivers.

NOAA Fisheries announces Right Whale Slow Zones to mariners through its customary maritime communication media and displays any active zones below, with the most recent designation first.

All boaters, or interested parties, can sign up for email notifications and selecting "Right Whale Slow Zones" under the Regional New England/Mid-Atlantic subscription topics. You can also follow us on Facebook (@NOAAFisheriesNEMA) and Twitter (@NOAAFish_GARFO) for announcements.

You can check for Right Whale Slow Zones on our online right whale sightings map. Or, you can download the free Whale Alert app, which will automatically notify you when you enter one of these areas.

Title Link: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/help-endangered-whales-slow-down-slow-zones>

Email link: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USNOAAFISHERIES/subscriber/new>

Right Whale Sightings Map link: <https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/psb/surveys/MapperiframeWithText.html>

Whale Alert App: <http://www.whalealert.org/>

V. Round Robin

1. Laura Howes, Whale Watch Primary:

SBNMS Small Boat Interaction Working Group (SBI-WG) - With an increase of recreational boats anecdotally observed on the water due to COVID-19, the SBI-WG is looking for potential venues/outlets to share their "Safe Boating with Whales" Seminar - please contact Laura Howes if you have any ideas. Whale Watch Seat Members Laura Howes and Jon Brink also have discussed soliciting whale watch company owners to help donate funds for future seminars.

2. Randall Lyons, Business Industry Alternate:

The Massachusetts Marine Trades Association (MMTA) is heading into 2021 with 2 cancelled events. Our annual Business of Boating conference held in January was cancelled and transitioned into a new Business of Boating (BOB) webinar series where we are hosting 12 educational webinars for our members from January to April. The New England Boat Show has been cancelled and the new dates have been set for 2022 – February 12th to 20th. Although the association has had some setbacks the recreational boating industry has been doing very well as families take to the water to get away and safely socially distance while enjoying a great recreational activity. 2021 appears to be looking like another positive year within the industry. I had the opportunity to Co-Chair the EEA recreational boating re-opening task force last year, and hopefully this will not be needed in 2021, but I will participate again as needed. We continue to focus on our membership benefits and advocacy, workforce development working with state officials, job

seekers, schools and our members to help this continued issue within the industry. We have the jobs/careers which just don't have the people currently. For more information on job/career opportunities in our industry and scholarship funding please visit – www.massboatingcareers.com for more information on the MMTA please visit www.boatma.com. We recently connected with the MA office of Travel and Tourism and hope to continue to build this relationship to get more boating businesses connected in the future to help market the business economy and our members in MA. That is all for now. I am still looking at new webinar ideas, so if anyone has any thoughts, suggestions or questions please feel free to reach out Randall@boatma.com.

3. Jeff Rosen, Business Industry Primary:

Based on an in-depth analysis of the 25 years or so of outfall monitoring that Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) has engaged in for Massachusetts Bay, the Outfall Monitoring Science Advisory Panel recommended that the monitoring plan be modified to reduce or eliminate some of the monitoring required in the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. These changes include contaminant monitoring in sediments, sediment profile imaging and flounder monitoring. All of which have shown either no impact or improvements in the ecological conditions in Mass Bay including near the outfall pipe. The changes requested by MWRA and supported by the Outfall Monitoring Science Advisory Panel (OMSAP) were approved by the US Environmental Protection Agency on January 28, 2021.

VI. Old and New Business: None to report.

VII. Adjourn: 12 pm.