

**NOAA
FISHERIES**

Right Whale Update Mid Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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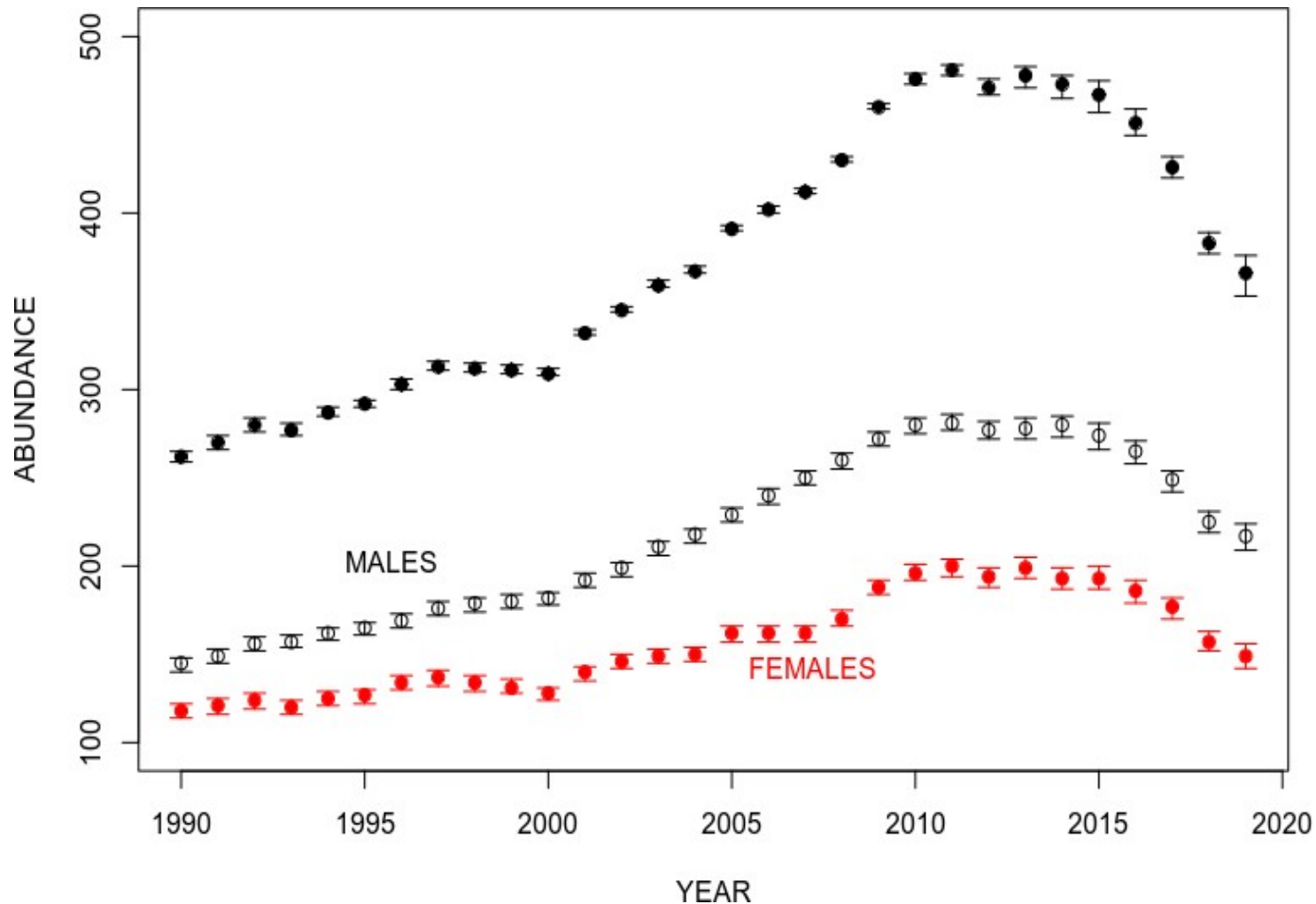


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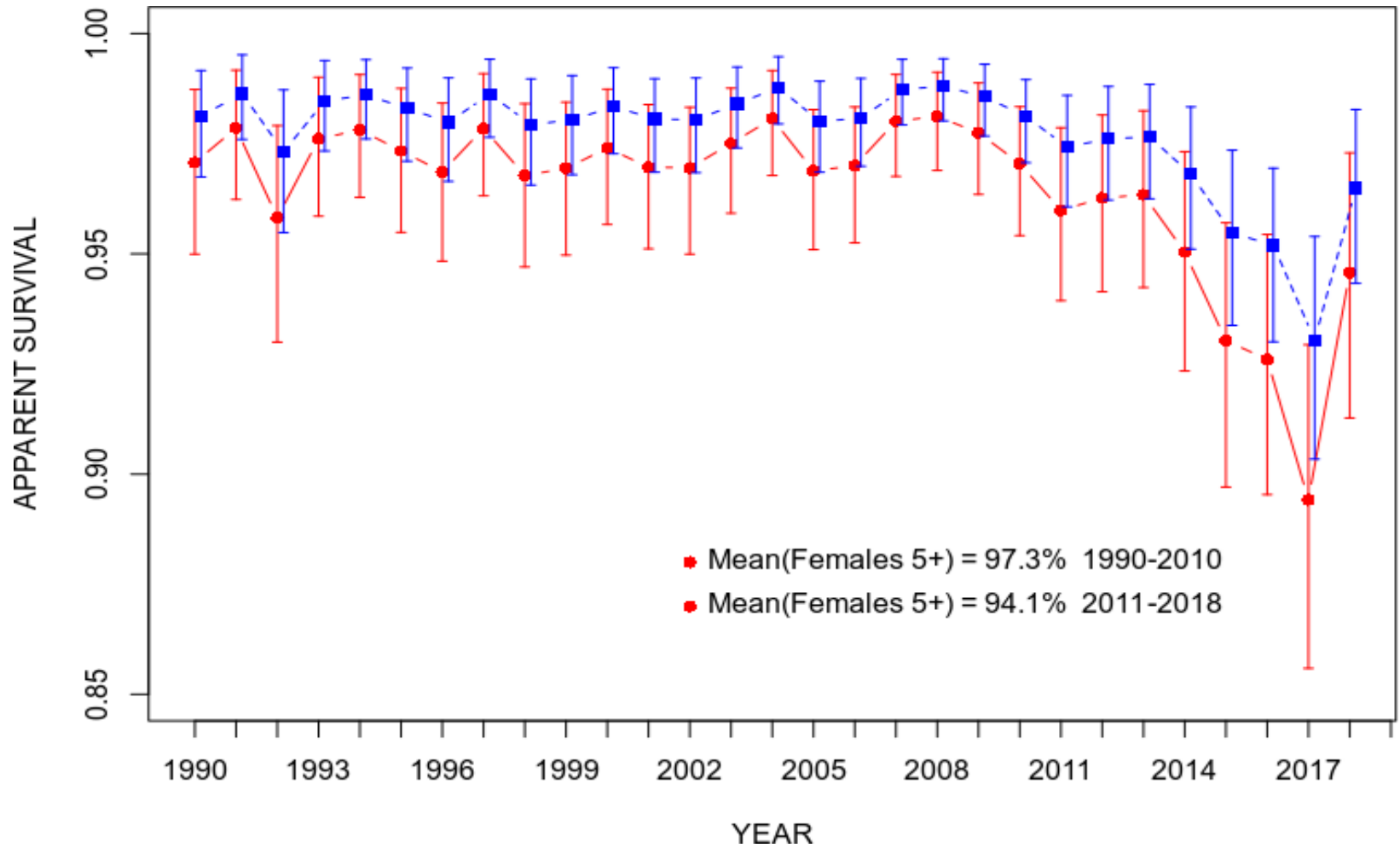
- Preliminary 2019 population estimate
- Status of Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Modifications:
 - Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), proposed rule, Batched Biological Opinion
- Ropeless Fishing Technology, 2020 Update



Most Recent Population Estimate

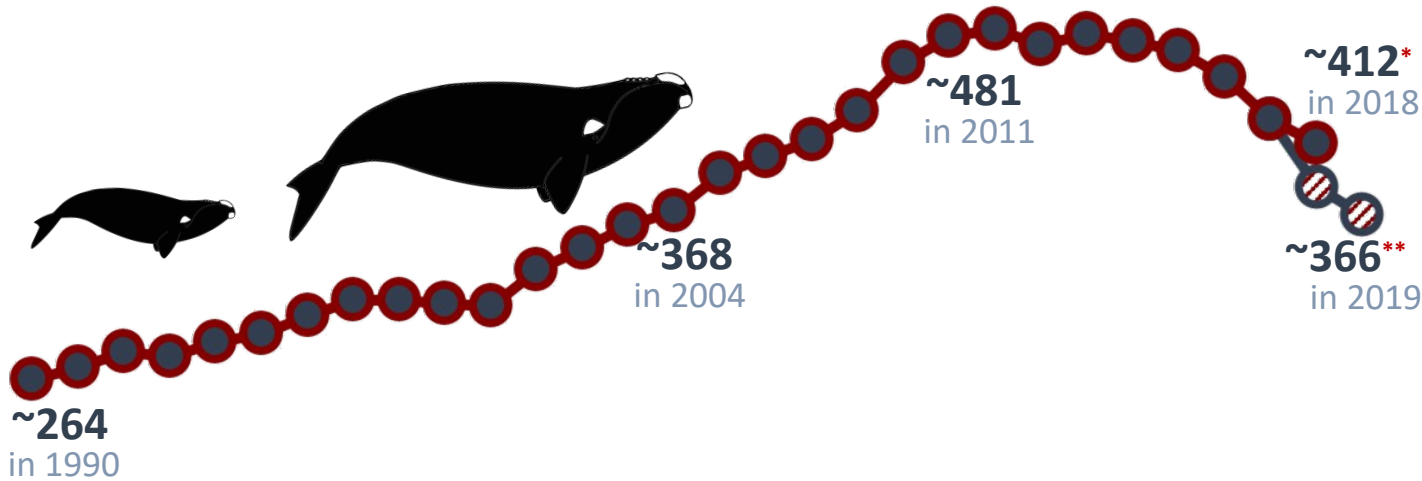


Updated model estimates population size at the end of 2018 to be ~366 animals (CI 353-377)



NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALES

BY THE NUMBERS



~366†

TOTAL WHALES AT THE BEGINNING OF 2019

<100

POTENTIAL MOTHERS

25††

CALVES BORN SINCE WINTER OF 2016/2017

46†††

KNOWN MORTALITIES AND SERIOUS INJURIES SINCE JAN 2017

* Previous estimate, beginning of 2018 (Pace model; NARWC 2018 Report Card)

** Preliminary estimate, beginning of 2019 (Pace model; draft 2020 NARWC Report Card)

MORTALITIES

- 32** Known Dead (8 US, 23 CN)
 - 8** entanglements (4 US, 4 CN)
 - 10** vessel strikes (2 US, 8 CN)
 - 14** cause undetermined (3 US, 11 CN)

INJURIES THAT WILL LIKELY RESULT IN MORTALITY

- 14** Known Seriously Injured (7 US, 4 CN)
 - 12** entanglements (8 US, 4 CN)
 - 1** vessel strikes (US)
 - 1** cause undetermined (US)

5

SERIOUS INJURIES AVERTED SINCE JAN 2017

†Oct 2020 NARWC estimate, not yet peer reviewed

††Includes one dead off NC in Nov 2020 and two born Dec 2020

†††This count may be different from UME page as it includes an SI of unk cause

Location = Usually country of first sighting of incident, less often of known origin



Proposed Modifications to the Take Reduction Plan

Completed:

- April 2019 - Near-consensus TRT meeting ✓
- August and Fall 2019 - Scoping, state proposal development ✓
- December and Early 2020 - State proposals submitted ✓
- Spring 2020 - develop alternatives, draft environmental impact statement, proposed rule ✓
- Summer 2020 - In review ✓

Anticipated:

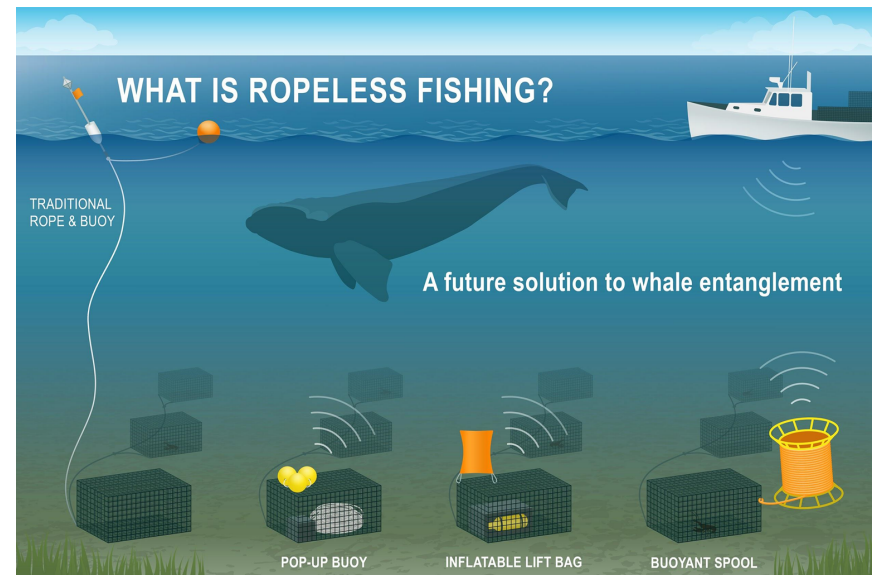


- File proposed rule and Notice of Availability of DEIS in Federal register for public comment
- Remote Informational Public Meetings
- Remote Public Comment Meetings
- Final Rule and FEIS by May 31, 2021

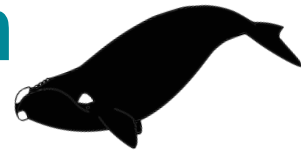


“Ropeless” fishing and North Atlantic right whales

- Remote retrieval of a stowed, bottom-set buoy or other device to replace a persistent buoyed vertical line in fixed gear fisheries
- Three styles of retrieval systems: 1) pop up buoy/stowed rope, 2) air filled lift bags and 3) buoyant spools.
- Gaining interest in recent years as an alternative to closures as North Atlantic right whale entanglements have increased (as measured by scarring)
- Preliminary abundance estimate: **366** whales as of Jan 2019, with over 200 dead in the past decade



NEFSC field testing and economic research



- ***Ropeless Testing Program***

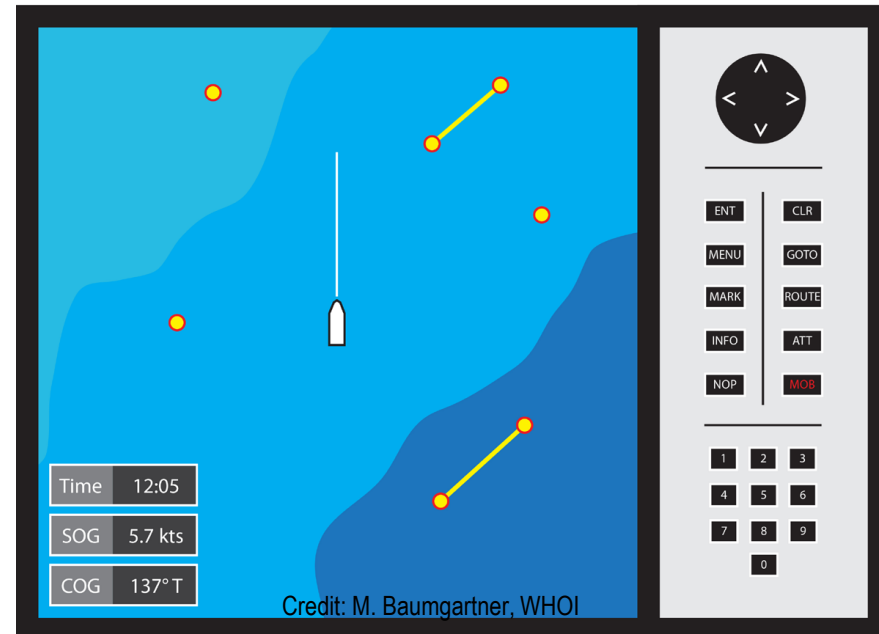
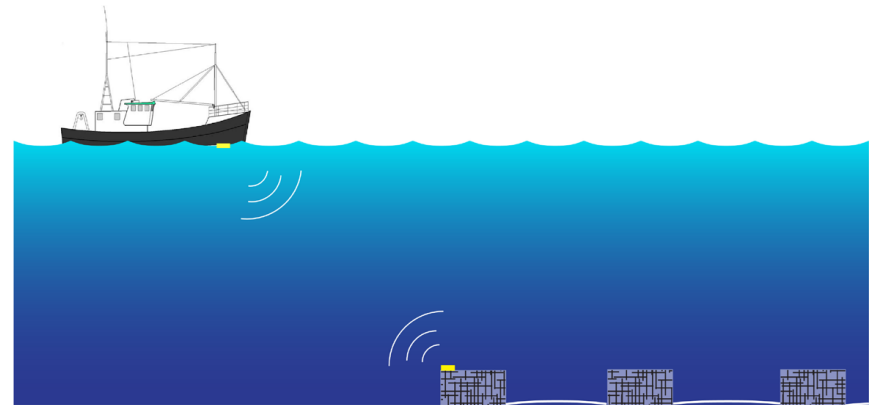
- Testing gear from 10 different companies, including all three styles of ropeless systems
- Testing “not on call” (galvanic, timed release)
- Custom ropeless systems are being designed specifically for different depths and testing includes both shallow (generally <300 ft. depth) and deep applications
- Working with about 10 fishermen - mostly from Massachusetts

- ***Economic Research***

- Ropeless cost estimation to forecast how costs will come down over time due to increases in development and production;
- Vertical line reduction project - how might the economics of an endline reduction program work and the role ropeless would play

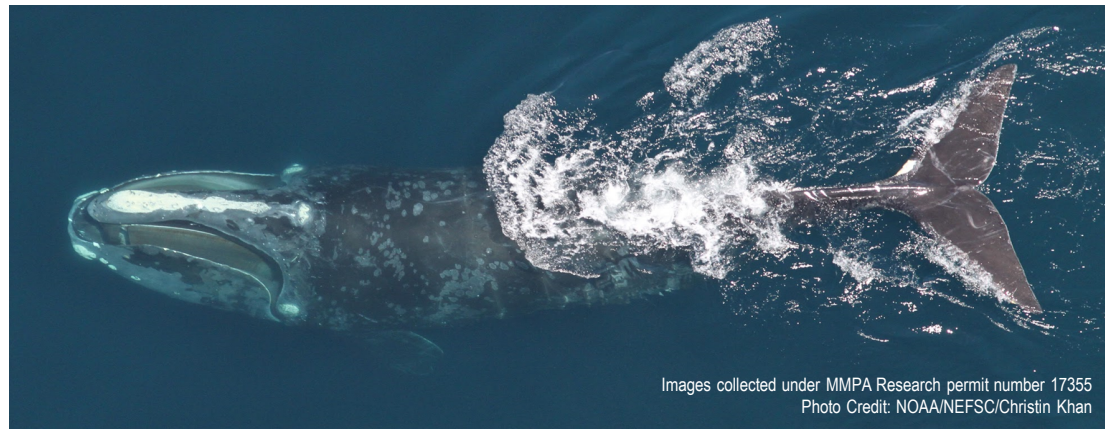
Current challenges and ongoing developments

- Location marking for all mariners
- Enforcement
- Privacy for individual fishermen
- Other fixed gear fisheries
- Transition away from EFP requirement



Ropeless Management updates

- Multiple exempted fishing permits in place allowing ropeless experimentation in commercial lobster fishery
- Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking published in 2018 sought input on whether opening areas currently closed to trap/pot gear would provide economic relief or incentivize the development of ropeless fishing
- Future modifications to Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan could close areas to buoy lines rather than to fishing



Images collected under MMPA Research permit number 17355
Photo Credit: NOAA/NEFSC/Christin Khan

Questions?

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