



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary
175 Edward Foster Road
Scituate, Massachusetts 02066
Tel: 781.545.8026 Fax: 781.545.8036

51st SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL
October 11, 2017 9:30 am-3:00 pm
Plymouth Yacht Club, Plymouth, MA
MINUTES of MEETING

Present:

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Bill Adler | Primary: Fixed Gear Commercial Fishing |
| Jennifer Anderson | Federal: NOAA Fisheries GARFO |
| Aurora Avallone | Primary: Youth |
| Michelle Bachman | Federal: New England Fishery Management Council |
| Tim Brady | Alternate: Recreational Fishing |
| Shelley Brown | Alternate: Education |
| Todd Callaghan | State: Coastal Zone Management |
| Christina Ciaramatero | Alternate: Education |
| Deborah Cramer | Primary: At Large |
| Tracey Dalton | Primary: Research |
| Rich Delaney | Primary: Education (Vice Chair) |
| LT Phil Desroches | State: Mass Environmental Police |
| Tim Donovan | Federal: NOAA Office of Law Enforcement |
| Susan Farady | Primary: Education |
| Laura Howes | Primary: Whale Watch |
| Les Kaufman | Alternate: Research |
| CPT Kevin King | Federal: First US Coast Guard District |
| Martin Klein | Alternate: Maritime Heritage |
| Heather Knowles | Primary: Diving (Chair) |
| Joseph Levine | Research: Alternate |
| Randall Lyons | Alternate: Business Industry |
| Marissa Marcoux | Alternate: Diving |
| Bob McCabe | Primary: Marine Transportation |
| Chris McGuire | Primary: Conservation |
| Frank Mirarchi | Alternate: Mobile Gear Commercial Fishing |
| Cate O'Keefe | State: Mass Division of Marine Fisheries |
| Monica Pepe | Alternate: Education |
| Wayne Petersen | Alternate: Research Primary |
| Kevin Powers | Primary: At Large |
| Jeff Rosen | Primary: Business Industry |
| Rory Simpson-Brown | Alternate: Youth |
| Mason Weinrich | Primary: Research |

SBNMS Staff:

| | | |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Ben Haskell | Anne Smrcina | Alice Stratton |
| Anne-Marie Runfola | Elizabeth Stokes | Mike Thompson |



Other NOAA Staff:

Jonelle Dilley NOAA General Council

I. Welcome New SAC Members and Approval of 50th SAC Minutes and Review of 51st SAC Agenda (H. Knowles)

The 50th SAC Minutes were approved unanimously with the following revisions and modifications:

Michelle Bachman requested that language be clarified in *Section IV, paragraph vii. Mid-Water/Pair Trawling Update*, pages 12-13, regarding NEFMC Amendment 8 and the experimental fishing permit process. (This section in the 50th SAC Minutes was revised accordingly.)

II. SAC Business (B. Haskell and A-M. Runfola)

i. SAC Recruitment

Results from May 2017 SAC Recruitment:

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| At Large Primary: | John Williamson, incumbent |
| At Large Alternate: | Jeanine Boyle, incumbent |
| Business Industry Primary: | Jeff Rosen |
| Conservation Primary: | Howard Rosenbaum, incumbent |
| Education Alternate: | Christina Ciarametaro, Ipswich Middle School |
| Youth Primary: | Aurora Avallone, Scituate HS Student |
| Youth Alternate: | Rory Simpson-Brown, Scituate HS Student |

Seats that expire in November 2017, to be recruited once Federal Register Notice is published:

- At Large Alternate
- Conservation Alternate
- Maritime Heritage Primary
- Maritime Heritage Alternate

New SAC recruitment process:

As of August 2017, ONMS HQ discontinued the quarterly SAC recruitment process. Under the new recruitment process, ONMS HQ will publish only one Federal Register Notice per year and each sanctuary site will advertise its individual recruitments on an 'as needed' basis on its dedicated recruitment webpage and conduct outreach accordingly. When there are no vacancies, a statement to that fact will be posted on the sanctuary's dedicated SAC recruitment webpage. The sanctuary will only accept applications for those vacancies that are posted on its website.

CPT Kevin King is the new the Ex-Officio Representative for First District US Coast Guard Boston. He replaces CPT Brian Fiedler.

ii. 2018 SAC Meetings

Sanctuary staff is proposing 4 formal SAC meetings per year with one being a webinar to keep momentum going. More information to come concerning new locations with tentative dates and potential new locations and venues that would better serve the current make-up of the SAC and balance the burden of the commute.

The format of the future SAC Minutes will be streamlined by solely capturing the main key outcomes/highlights rather than a complete verbatim transcription as provided in the past. The SAC meetings will continue to be recorded and the verbatim audio recording will be available upon request.

iii. SBNMS Personnel Updates

The Sanctuary Superintendent position remains vacant. Ben Haskell continues to fill in as Acting.

Anne-Marie Runfola is filling in as Acting Deputy Superintendent and Acting SAC Coordinator while these positions remain vacant.

Matthew Lawrence, Maritime Archaeologist, was reassigned to Florida Keys NMS. There is no replacement for Matt anticipated at this time.

iv. FY18 Staff and SAC Work Plan

This is the first draft SAC Work Plan created since the inception of the SBNMS SAC. A SAC work plan is required by the SAC Charter. This Plan will align as much as possible with a similar sanctuary Staff Work Plan. SAC members are asked to review the draft SAC Work Plan and provide the Executive Committee with comments and ideas. These work plans identify topics and priorities that the SAC and sanctuary staff will focus on over the upcoming calendar year, and will be representative and useful for both the sanctuary staff and the SAC. The goal is to have a final SAC Work Plan ready for approval at the first SAC meeting in 2018.

III. **Sanctuary Updates**

i. Atlantic Link HVDC Cable (A. Stratton)

- AtlanticLink is a proposal for a clean energy project which has been submitted in response to the Massachusetts Clean Energy RFP. The proposal is to install a high voltage direct current (HVDC) cable from New Brunswick to Plymouth, connecting into the Pilgrim Nuclear Station after it is retired in 2019. There are a couple possible cable routes being considered, at least one of which would cross the SE corner of the sanctuary.
- SBNMS staff had an information meeting with Emera (the company proposing this) in June. They provided an overview of the project and we provided an overview of sanctuary regulations and permitting requirements. In August, we were invited by BOEM to participate in the project review and be a cooperating agency on the Federal permits, and we continue to have periodic updates and meetings with BOEM and other Federal agencies.
- As far as the sanctuary is concerned, there are two parts to permit process. BOEM is the primary Federal agency for the permit to actually install the cable. We will be working with

them and provide input during the environmental analysis of the proposal. Once the cable is installed, it would also require an SBNMS Special Use Permit (SUP), which is required for ongoing operation in and thus "use of" sanctuary resources. The SUP typically includes special conditions related to paying a fair market value assessment; for instance, in the case of the existing Hibernia Atlantic cable installed in 2001, we received a substantial assessment for monitoring as well as annual "use" assessment for 25 years.

- As of now, we still have not seen any official application and preferred routes, so have not been able to review or assess any specific details. We will continue to will keep the SAC updated as we learn more.

Matthew Lawrence will continue to be called upon for his expertise regarding the effect this cable may have on maritime heritage resources. Ben Haskell will contact the Emera Company to see if they can present at the next meeting to address SAC members' concerns regarding the cable line. Related Website: www.emera.com.

ii. Scallop Fishing Impacts on Wreck Sites (B. Haskell)

Better ways need to be explored to manage maritime heritage sites damaged by trawlers. The SAC Executive Committee proposed creating a Maritime Heritage working group to focus on this issue and bring some options forward to engage external parties apart from the SAC. The SAC Executive Committee will follow up off line as to what the SAC representation of the working group would entail and will reach out to these specific SAC members.(i.e., maritime heritage, diving, recreational fishing, and conservation members as the core representation).

Motion: Create a Maritime Heritage working group to address the issues around non disclosure of shipwreck sites and present options to the SAC and sanctuary staff to potentially implement and address these issues and present recommendations. Unanimous.

iii. Mid-Water Pair Trawling (B. Haskell)

The issue is: Is it appropriate to conduct mid-water pair trawling in the shallow portion of the sanctuary where these vessels are fishing in less than 90 feet of water with a net that is 60 feet high? This fishing practice presents considerable risks to marine mammals in terms of entanglement and is essentially depleting a forage base that is absolutely critical to the healthy functioning of the sanctuary ecosystem, not just for whales but for the whole array of animals and humans that rely on forage fish. Ben Haskell along with sanctuary staff have made some head way and are working hard to find a solution working with National Marine Fisheries Service regarding the fishing activity of mid-water pair trawling on top of Stellwagen Bank which has happened under the research set aside program for herring. Linkage is being made between Amendment 8 and the RSA so that future exempted permits are modified. It is hoped that a solution can be reached before Amendment 8 is finalized in June 2018 time frame. (More details on this topic are below in paragraph VII(iii), Michelle Bachman's NEFMC Report.)

iv. Get Into Your Sanctuary (A. Smrcina)

This program is a national outreach/social media effort promoting recreation and tourism in the sanctuaries. It is our hope that NGOs and local tourism industries will re-tweet our messages (and create some of their own) to increase our participation in this national

promotion. We are arranging GIYS public events, such as GreenFest in Boston and the Woods Hole Science Stroll, along with tweets and Facebook posts to attract public attention. How can the sanctuary work with the whale watch, diving, and fishing communities to increase participation in this outreach campaign? Is the slogan something that will work for everyone? Rather than focusing on only one GIYS Day, we believe it could become a summer-season-long effort that could increase awareness of the sanctuary and be beneficial to various industries. Enhancing our GIYS effort might be of interest to the SAC Business and Tourism subcommittee.

vi. Marine Mammal Protected Area [Protection Act] Photography [Permit] (B. Haskell)

Ben Haskell has been working on a Hollings Grant to fund Keith Ellenbogen, a professional underwater photographer, to video and photograph the underwater beauty and splendor of the sanctuary's wildlife and shipwrecks. The sanctuary has never had a dedicated professional photographer to document these amazing resources in the sanctuary. It is essentially a public outreach effort using stunning imagery of wildlife. Mr. Ellenbogen has been granted a Marine Mammal Protection Act Permit to video and photograph in the sanctuary, with some stipulations. Sanctuary staff will communicate Mr. Ellenbogen's underwater activity to whale watch vessels and their naturalists since this is a very sensitive issue involving public perception.

vii. Economic Surveys for Research and Whale Watching (B. Haskell)

SBNMS and Olympic Coast NMS were chosen as sentinel sites to undergo two surveys to be conducted by two economists from ONMS HQ. The first is an economic survey to determine the value and benefits of sanctuary research. The second one is two-part valuation of wildlife viewing trips. One survey for owners/operators in Spring 2018 and one for passengers in Summer 2018. The purpose of the study is to determine the contribution of whale watching and other wildlife viewing in the sanctuary and benefits to the greater regional economy. Ben will reach out to SAC members who will be directly involved with both surveys. Sanctuary staff is looking for volunteers to administer the whale watch survey.

IV. SAC Updates

i. Management Plan Subcommittee and Timeline (R. Delaney and B. Haskell)

The Management Plan subcommittee held its first meeting and created a timetable for updating the plan. The process should run in parallel with the sanctuary's Condition Report since the two are interdependent. The group is trying hard to expedite the process, but there are some formal benchmarks required under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. One goal is to shorten these time frames to avoid the multi-year process used for the last Management Plan process. The next meeting is set for some time in November 2017.

ii. Condition Report Update (B. Haskell)

The Condition Report is an assessment of the status of a sanctuary's natural and cultural resources which is done periodically and usually precedes the Management Plan review. The major change in the Condition Report process this time is the addition of an assessment of ecosystem services to answer the question: What is the value of this sanctuary to humans and why is that important? An expert panel workshop will be held 23-25 January 2018. The objective of the workshop is to address the status of sanctuary resources and ecosystem

services, and get feedback from external experts on the assessment and condition of resources.

iii. Small Boat Interactions Working Group (L. Howes)

Each meeting has had a theme/focus. The focus of the August 16th meeting was on perspectives from recreational boaters. Dave Slocum gave a summary and presentation about SBNMS's BOWW Program (Boater Outreach for Whale Watching) and the working group (WG) provided feedback on ideas, Monica Pepe provided additional materials from Whale and Dolphin Conservation to help add to the BOWW program content.

Matt O'Connor gave a presentation about the Freedom Boat Club and their class program/training they give to their clients. His talk was extremely informative about the recreational boater perspective and gave the WG a good baseline.

Demian Schane from NOAA provided a written summary of all current whale watch regulations and guidelines per region in the U.S. This provided material for discussion on regulations in the Northeast.

The group discussed various outreach ideas, including a suggestion by Randall Lyons to coordinate the inflatable whale Salt at the New England Boat Show in Boston (which is now happening for real!). We also discussed how to reach various audiences for outreach, coordinating with Freedom Boat Club to increase outreach about safe whale watch habits and to link guidelines with Whale Alert.

The Subcommittee has recommendations that will be presented to the sanctuary superintendent.

iv. Capitol Hill Ocean Week: Report on Meetings with Representatives and Take-Aways (K. Powers)

- Capitol Hill Ocean Week (CHOW) was convened June 5-7 in Washington, DC by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF).
- CHOW brings together more than 600 national and global policymakers, scientists, scholars, businesses, and conservation leaders to address pressing science, conservation, and management issues facing our ocean and Great Lakes.
- Kevin Powers was invited to participate as the national sanctuary volunteer of the year for 2017 and was joined by Anne-Marie Runfola.
- Kevin and Anne-Marie worked with Shannon Yee (Policy and Conservation Director for NMSF) to make visits to Capitol Hill and meet congressional and senate leaders: Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA) and Rep. Bill Keating (D-MA). They discussed the importance of Stellwagen Bank NMS as an environmentally critical area for marine life and raised awareness of its vulnerability to ocean warming and acidification. They also invited representatives to participate in a sanctuary visit and all expressed interest in doing so.

V. Constituent Report (R. Delaney)

North Atlantic Right Whale Update

Rich Delaney, CEO for Center for Coastal Studies presented on the devastating mortality rate and entanglements of right whales in Canada. The Center for Coastal Studies is working with sanctuary staff, NOAA GARFO, and New England Aquarium to put in place increased surveillance flights and monitoring and expand the jurisdiction but this will take some funding. All the resources available are needed and hopefully sanctuary staff will be actively involved. This topic should be raised higher on the SAC Work Plan. Ben Haskell will follow up with Leila Hatch, the sanctuary's acoustics expert, on the future of the acoustic buoys that the LNG terminals previously used to monitor marine mammal activity but have now been drawn down. Rich Delaney asked SAC members for support and to encourage their agencies to make their resources available to protect and prevent extinction of right whales.

VI. Great Shearwater Tagging Project (K.Powers)

Sanctuary Science - Great Shearwater Tagging Project Update

- Identified the team members and their roles on the project
- Provided natural history overview of great shearwaters
- Showed video on how shearwaters are caught using long-handled nets
- Noted key spatial analysis publication this year in Marine Ecology Progress Series (MEPS)
- Presented example movements of individual shearwaters
- Provided overview of areas most used by great shearwaters
- Discussed how great shearwaters leverage feeding opportunities presented in assemblages with baleen whales
- Noted that great shearwaters in the Gulf of Maine are primarily non-breeders (1-2 years old) as we able to age them using plumage characteristics
- Discussed migration routes and timing out of the Gulf of Maine and flight tracks used to return them to the South Atlantic in the fall
- Discussed published by-catch information showing that great shearwaters are most vulnerable to the gill-net fishery on Stellwagen Bank and Great South Channel
- Showed video and discussed 2017 great shearwater concentrations off Race Point noting co-occurrence with young menhaden driven into the shoreline by mackerel

VII. Agency/Government Reports

i. MA Division of Marine Fisheries (C. O'Keefe)

MA Division of Marine Fisheries in partnership with the University of Mass Dartmouth SMAST opened a new building in New Bedford. It's a beautiful facility, and everyone is encouraged to visit it. The facility can also be used as a meeting site at no charge.

ii. NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) and MA Environmental Police (MEP) (T. Donovan and LT P. Desroches)

- NOAA Enforcement Officer (EO) Wilmarth received notice that a case made jointly with MEP in the sanctuary just settled. The case involved a state permitted scalloper found

fishing and possessing scallops twice in two weeks. Penalty assessed: \$2,000 to be paid by the owner over 2 years due to financial hardship and both captain and owner received probation for 2 years. During their probation, a \$33,000 penalty will be suspended. If the Respondents are found liable for violating federal natural resources law during their probation, the Agency may impose the suspended penalty.

- EOs conducted **3** joint at sea patrols aboard US Coast Guard platforms in the sanctuary (focus on HMS and multispecies). Patrols resulted in multiple safety violations, undersize fish, and a permit violation. 1 vessel was escorted back to the dock for safety violations, no registration plus no HMS permit.
- EO's conducted **4** joint at sea patrols with MEP in the sanctuary resulting in numerous fisheries violations including undersize fish and HMS reporting violations.
- OLE and MEP conducted an enforcement operation 9/15-9/16 focused on HMS enforcement. The bulk of the activity was in the sanctuary. **75** boardings were conducted, resulting in numerous incidents of failure to report fish, permit violations and multispecies size violations.
- Officer Wilmarth recently issued multiple summary settlements for JEA referrals submitted by MEP for violations that occurred in the sanctuary. Civil violations included cod possession limits, undersize fish, discarding fish when approached by officers, and targeting tuna without a permit.
- EO Wilmarth and SA Nickerson investigated 4 whale harassment complaints that occurred within the sanctuary. Education/compliance assistance provided and one investigation ongoing.
- EO Wilmarth closed out an investigation into noncompliant gear recovered from a humpback whale off the outer Cape. The marked gear did not match any vessels in New England or Canada.
- An EO attended a briefing with Sector Boston on 7/10. Focus: HMS enforcement specifically within the sanctuary.
- EO Wilmarth reached out to the owner of Cape Rib Tours (the fastest whale watch boat in the Northeast) expected to begin operations within the sanctuary next season. Safe operation around whales was discussed.
- Metal Shark has started building 4 OLE patrol boats. One PV will be docked at the sanctuary boathouse. Estimated delivery late spring 2018. Expect patrols in summer 2018.

iii. New England Fishery Management Council (M. Bachman)

The NEFMC met last month in Gloucester. Various ongoing actions may be of interest to the SAC:

Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2 (OHA2) was finalized by the Council in June 2015. The notice of availability (NOA) for the amendment was published last Friday (10/5/17) and the proposed rule will publish in the coming weeks. The comment period on the amendment closes on December 5. NOA publication triggers a 90 day timeframe for NMFS to make a decision on the amendment. The RA could recommend implementation as submitted, or could disapprove portions of the amendment on grounds that the Council's action are not consistent with the Magnuson Stevens Act. The Council could opt to revisit these issues in a future action. If partial disapproval occurs, existing management measures remain in place.

Council staff, Sanctuary staff, and NMFS staff plan to collaborate on implementation of the Stellwagen Dedicated Habitat Research Area, which is part of OHA2. This could include fleshing out research objectives and coordination on permitting and dissemination of research results.

The Council is actively working on management actions in herring, groundfish, and scallops.

Herring Amendment 8 addresses the overall strategy for setting catch limits in the herring fishery, and includes time-area measures to address localized depletion. Herring is managed using an area-based quota system. Stellwagen is located within herring management area 1A, which is closed to all gears January through May (0% of quota), mid-water trawls June through September (75% of quota), and reopens to mid-water trawls from October to December (25% of quota). SBNMS has expressed concerns about fishing trips that occur in shallow waters (<120 ft) on top of the bank in the fall quarter, because whales are feeding in the area during this time. Some of these trips, especially later in the fall, are research set aside (RSA) trips. Vessel owners and crew give a portion of the proceeds from RSA trips to support research, and therefore make less money from these trips. Despite this, RSA trips are exempt from two key regulations in Area 1A. These exemptions make them attractive for vessels, which is good from the Council's perspective as part of the proceeds support research projects.

Specifically, RSA trips can still occur in Area 1A even after the overall 1A catch limit has been exceeded. This is because RSA catch is set aside from the annual 1A herring quota allocated at the beginning of each year. This condition typically occurs sometime in November, after the 4th quarter 1A quota is exhausted. In addition, RSA trips can be taken between January through May, when Area 1A is generally closed to herring fishing. There is no incentive to take RSA trips when a management area is otherwise open and there is quota remaining. Thus, RSA trips are typically taken once an area closes to fishing for a seasonal closure, and/or once all of the quota has been harvested from an area.

Importantly, up to this point, the Council has declined to put limits on RSA trips through Amendment 8. As presently specified, the range of localized depletion time-area closures under consideration in Amendment 8 would not restrict RSA trips, and only one of the localized depletion alternatives overlaps SBNMS (Alternative 3, year-round mid-water trawl closure of Area 1A). Time grows very short for RSA-specific restrictions to be added to the range of alternatives.

Final action on Scallop Framework 29 is planned for the December 5-7 Council meeting in Newport, RI. As part of the framework, the Council is developing measures that would modify the rules for limited access fishing in the Northern Gulf of Maine Management Area, which partially overlaps SBNMS. Measures will likely include additional reporting requirements, such as a specific vessel monitoring system declaration into the area, and an overall cap on what the limited access fishery (larger vessels) can harvest. The Council is developing total allowable catch options that would restrict both limited access and limited access general category (smaller vessels with individual quotas) harvests in the area. The scallop committee will discuss these options on October 26, with a follow up meeting on November 30. The Council elevated survey work in the Northern Gulf of Maine to a high priority for the 2018-2019 scallop research set aside program.

Two optical surveys of scallops on Stellwagen Bank were conducted during summer 2017. These surveys suggest close to one million pounds of total scallop biomass on the bank, which represents most of the biomass in the Gulf of Maine, and is therefore the most attractive target for fishing activity. The overall harvest in 2018 will be closer to a few hundred thousand pounds, as compared to 1.6 million lbs during spring 2017. With new rules for the limited access component, and one overall total allowable catch for the area, fishing year 2018, which will begin on April 1, will not be like 2017. The Scallop Plan Development Team has suggested conservative harvest in the Northern Gulf of Maine.

In light of the discussion earlier in the day about vessel impacts to wreck sites, it may be productive for Council staff to engage with Sanctuary staff to share GIS data on the NGOM surveys and areas where biomass is concentrated relative to wreck sites.

The Council also plans final action on Groundfish Framework 57 at the December meeting. At this meeting, the Council will receive the Scientific and Statistical Committee's 2018-2020 allocation recommendations for all groundfish stocks. Framework 57 includes fishery specifications and other management measures, 2018 catch limits for transboundary stocks of cod, haddock, and yellowtail, and other measures. Of relevance to the Sanctuary, recreational management measures will be recommended in December as well.

iv. NOAA Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (J. Anderson)

PERSONNEL UPDATES

- John Bullard (Regional Administrator) and Daniel Morris (Deputy Regional Administrator) are leaving in the coming months. No acting Regional Administrator has been named yet but Kim Damon-Randall, chief of GARFO's Protected Resources Division, will be acting Deputy RA.

RIGHT WHALE UPDATES

US/Canada Joint Initiatives to Address Right Whale Abundance and Anthropogenic Issues

- An unprecedented situation has occurred in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, Canada. Since early June, 13 endangered North Atlantic right whales have been found dead, floating at sea. Although right whales are known to have died in the southern Gulf of St.

Lawrence in 2015 and 2016, the scale of the mortalities this year appears to be substantially greater than previously.

- Several of the carcasses have been necropsied to ascertain cause of death.
- Other mortalities have also occurred this year. At least 1 right whale has died from ship strike in US waters, and 2 other carcasses have been observed in US waters.
- These 16 right whale deaths represent over 3% of the species total population.
- In addition, as of September 27th, there are 7 confirmed live right whale entanglements - 5 were entangled in Canadian snow crab gear, two of which have been disentangled, and 2 were found entangled in US waters (the fishery was not identifiable).
- The mortalities coupled with the known entanglements have experts in both countries concerned for the future of this species.

In response to the recent right whale mortalities and entanglements, several U.S./Canada work groups have been established:

Unusual Mortality Event Working Group

- In August 2017, NOAA Fisheries formally declared an official Unusual Mortality Event (UME) in response to an alarming elevated number of dead right whales discovered in Canadian (n=10) and U.S. (n=2) waters this summer, as well as several live-entangled animals.
- A new peer-reviewed paper being published by NOAA Fisheries scientists indicates the population was already in decline prior to the UME declaration, and estimates approximately 460 animals remained in 2015 prior to the 2017 deaths. Thus, the 15 mortalities since June 2017, plus an additional one in April 2017 caused by ship strike in Cape Cod bay, brings the 2017 year-to-date total known mortalities to 16, which constitutes 3% of the population dead.
- The exact causes of the recent mortalities in Canada and the U.S. since June 2017 are not yet known, and results are still pending from the necropsies and laboratory analyses, which are underway. NOAA Fisheries, Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), and the Marine Mammal Stranding Networks in both the U.S. and Canada are all on High Alert for any new reports of dead or live stranded or entangled right whales, and ready to mount additional emergency responses.

U.S./Canada Bilateral Right Whale Work Group

- The U.S. and Canada convened a bilateral working group to focus on the U.S.-Canada recovery efforts for the North Atlantic right whale. The government-to-government meeting was held September 11 and 12 in Boston.
- The primary focus of the U.S./Canada Bilateral Work Group was to increase coordination and communication to collaboratively address threats to whales, with an emphasis on reducing human impacts.
- To achieve this objective, the bilateral workgroup identified science and management gaps that are impeding recovery of North Atlantic right whales particularly in North Atlantic waters of Canada and the United States. Follow-up meetings are in the planning stages.

Right Whale Recovery Expert Working Groups

- To understand what management actions should be taken to effectively minimize and reduce threats and promote recovery of North Atlantic right whales, NOAA Fisheries must better understand: 1) the current status of North Atlantic right whale, including population parameters and distribution in U.S. and Canadian waters; 2) the natural and anthropogenic factors within and outside the U.S. having the greatest negative impact on the species; 3) whether current science and management efforts are effective and whether additional studies, analyses, or approaches are necessary to understand and target key threats; and 4) what management measures will be most effective in minimizing threats and promoting recovery.
- NOAA Fisheries will be convening expert working groups to address these questions. The initial working group is tentatively set for late November 2017.

New Model to estimate right whale abundance

On September 18, 2017, NOAA Fisheries will announce the publication of a new, collaborative scientific research paper announcing a new and better way to estimate North Atlantic right whale population numbers, which are declining (Pace III RM, Corkeron PJ, Kraus SD. State–space mark–recapture estimates reveal a recent decline in abundance of North Atlantic right whales. *Ecol Evol.* 2017;00:1–12.).

This new population estimation method is a major advance that provides a clearer and timelier picture of North Atlantic right whale numbers.

- The new method is less affected by changes in whale distribution, less reliant on sighting frequency, and better accounts for animals that are still alive, but not frequently seen.
- It also allows trends in population trajectory to be confirmed sooner than is possible using the resighting methods alone.
- It can also estimate both minimum alive and an estimate of total alive. Until now, only minimum number alive could be estimated.

Both the estimation methods currently in use and the new method show a definite and concerning decline since 2010.

- The new model results show that abundance declined by just under 1% per year between 2010 and 2015, from 482 to 458 animals, after relatively steady increases since the early 1990s.
- Deaths of female right whales were about 50% higher than among males.
- There are presently 1.5 males for each female in the species.
- Only 5 calves were born this year while at least 13 whales are known to have died, of which at least 10 have died this summer in Canadian waters.

VIII. New Business:

i. Rich Delaney attended the “Our Ocean” conference. Plastics in the ocean was one of the big topics during the conference. Plastic pollution is one more big issue the SAC needs to pay attention to. If nothing else, the Sanctuary and its related events should be “plastic free” (i.e.,

plastic straws, cups and water bottles). It is a manageable campaign. This is a New Business potential for down the road and would be a great addition to the draft Work Plans.

ii. Anne-Marie reported that the SAC Charter will expire on February 8th. This is an opportunity for the SAC to update/revise the Charter. Deadline to submit revisions to HQ is February 18th. Anne-Marie Runfola will follow-up with the SAC Executive Committee so they can get a sense of the scope of the work involved before soliciting input from the SAC.

iii. Follow-up Items (H. Knowles, SAC Chair):

- Will follow up with Executive Committee on the Draft SAC Work Plan to figure out next steps and discussions.
- Maritime Heritage Working Group. Ben Haskell and Heather Knowles have compiled a shortlist of SAC constituencies that they would like to have participate in the working group. Those specific representatives will be contacted directly. It is hoped that others have interest and will participate as well.

IX. Public Comment. Joseph DeGutis, member of the general public talked about his work with polylactic acid (PLA), a product made from corn, potatoes and other fermentation products. It totally dissolves over time in water and is compostable. This could be a solution in fabricating plastic shopping bags and other materials.

X. Adjourn: 2:45 pm.