

commercial data available, i.e. species abundance, new data received during the comment period, re-evaluation of existing data, and other federal and/or international efforts being taken to protect the species.

To assist in their analysis of the species status, the Services request any comments, which have not already been submitted, which provide new information or data and/or reflect on the new information and data that has become available since the publication of the proposed rule, including the state Plan. Written comments may be submitted on or before June 23, 1997 to either of the offices in the **ADDRESSES** section of this notice. Individuals are also requested to send a copy of their comments to the State of Maine.

**Author:** The primary authors of this notice are Mary Colligan and Paul Nickerson (addresses are above).

**Authority:** The authority for this section is the ESA (16 U.S.C. 1531-1544).

Dated: May 15, 1997.

**Patricia A. Montanio,**

*Deputy Director, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.*

Dated: May 16, 1997.

**Cathy Short,**

*Deputy Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**50 CFR Part 229**

[Docket No. 970129015-7072-02; I.D. 031997B]

**RIN 0684-A184**

**Taking of Marine Mammals Incidental to Commercial Fishing Operations; Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Regulations**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Proposed rule; reopening of comment period.

**SUMMARY:** On April 7, 1997, NMFS issued a proposed plan and implementing regulations that would reduce serious injury and mortality of four large whale stocks that occur incidental to certain fisheries. During the comment period NMFS received many comments expressing concern that the existing comment period is inadequate to allow for development of appropriate comments. Therefore, NMFS is reopening the public comment period in order to ensure that these important comments can be received.

**DATES:** Comments on the proposed plan and proposed rule to implement the plan must be received by June 13, 1997.

**ADDRESSES:** Send comments to Chief, Marine Mammal Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910-33226.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Kim Thounhurst, NMFS, Northeast Region, 508/281-9368; Bridget Mansfield, NMFS, Southeast Region, 813/570-5312; or Michael Payne, NMFS, Office of Protected Resources, 301/713-2322.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** On April 7, 1997 (62 FR 16519), NMFS issued a proposed plan and implementing regulations that would reduce the bycatch and serious injury and mortality of several large whale stocks that occur incidental to fishing for multiple species, including monkfish and dogfish, in U.S. New England sink gillnet fisheries; for multiple species in the U.S. mid-Atlantic coastal gillnet fisheries; for lobster in the Gulf of Maine and U.S. mid-Atlantic lobster trap/pot fisheries; and for sharks in the Southeastern U.S. Atlantic shark net fishery, pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The whale stocks considered under this plan consist of the North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*), Western North Atlantic stock, humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), Western North Atlantic stock, fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*), Western North Atlantic stock, and minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), Canadian East Coast stock. The comment period on the proposed rule and regulations implementing the rule ended on May 15, 1997. During the comment period NMFS received many comments at eleven public hearings expressing concern that the existing comment period is inadequate to allow for development of appropriate comments. Further, NMFS has been informed that several groups have been convened to review the proposed measures in detail in order to provide the agency with constructive comments on the proposed rule. Therefore, we are reopening the public comment period until June 13, 1997, in order to ensure that these important comments can be received.

Dated: May 19, 1997.

**Rolland A. Schmitt,**

*Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Services.*

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