



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

52nd SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL
March 1, 2018 9:30 am-3:30 pm
DoubleTree Hilton, Rockland 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
Kevin Blinkoff	Primary: Recreational Fishing
Tim Brady	Alternate: Recreational Fishing
Jeanine Boyle	Alternate: At Large
Todd Callaghan	State: Coastal Zone Management
Christina Ciaramatero	Alternate: Education
Tracey Dalton	Primary: Research
Rich Delaney	Primary: Education (Vice Chair)
Tim Donovan	Federal: NOAA Office of Law Enforcement
John Galluzzo	Primary: Maritime Heritage
Steve Milliken	Alternate: Whale Watch
CPT Kevin King	Federal: First US Coast Guard District
Martin Klein	Alternate: Maritime Heritage
Heather Knowles	Primary: Diving (Chair)
Randall Lyons	Alternate: Business Industry
John Mandelman	Alternate: Conservation
Marissa Marcoux	Alternate: Diving
Bob McCabe	Primary: Marine Transportation
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
John Williamson	Primary: At Large

SBNMS Staff:

Ben Haskell	Elizabeth Stokes
Anne-Marie Runfola	Alice Stratton
Anne Smrcina	

Other NOAA Staff:

Brad Barr, Senior Policy Advisor, ONMS



I. Welcome New SAC Members and Approval of 51st SAC Minutes and Review of 52nd SAC Agenda (H. Knowles)

The 51st^h SAC Minutes were approved (unanimous).

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

i. SAC Recruitment Update (AM. Runfola)

Recruitment for the following seats closed on February 28, 2018:

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

Results from this recruitment will not be known until sometime in early May 2018 after the review process is complete. It is hoped to have new members seated at the 53rd SAC meeting on May 22nd.

ii. 2018 SAC Meetings (AM. Runfola)

The next SAC (53rd) Meeting will be held at NOAA GARFO in Gloucester on Tuesday, May 22nd. SAC members are asked to respond to the Doodle Polls to help determine whether there is a quorum in place. The fall meeting will be in October or early November. A SAC webinar may be scheduled in winter just to keep momentum and SAC engaged with ongoing topics and discussions.

A Google Doc to propose new potential venues and locations for future SAC meetings will be shared with SAC members so they can add recommendations.

iii. SBNMS Charter (AM. Runfola)

Anne-Marie Runfola is currently revising the SAC Charter. The current Charter is on the SBNMS website <https://stellwagen.noaa.gov/management/sac/documents.html>. One main change in the revised Charter is that Alternates can chair subcommittees. SAC members are asked to send their comments to Anne-Marie.Runfola@noaa.gov. ONMS will approve and renew the charter by April 30.

iv. SAC Roles and Responsibilities: Expectations, Activity Commitments (AM. Runfola)

SAC members are asked to commit to concrete issues to help sanctuary staff meet its biggest priorities that tie into the overall sanctuary mission. To this effect, SAC members are asked to send their specific commitments to Anne-Marie Runfola who will compile them into a Google Doc that will be shared and can be revised as needed by anyone at anytime. This document will tie into and align with the SAC Work Plan.

v. FY18 Staff Work Plan (B. Haskell)

The Staff Work Plan is organized like the SAC Work Plan. In draft form, the staff's plan is very detailed with objectives and specific strategies that sanctuary staff will work on throughout the year.

Ben Haskell and Anne-Marie Runfola will work with the staff to consolidate the plan to reflect the largest priorities, but the current detailed version gives the SAC a good idea of the wide variety of staff activities. Staff will revise their plan annually and link it with the annual SAC Work Plan.

vi. FY18 SAC Work Plan (H. Knowles)

This is the first time the SAC has had a Work Plan in place and it's a great accomplishment. It's a starting point to formalize discussions and to review and decide on priorities. This plan helps to serve as a framework to interface with SBNMS staff and ensure that everyone is focused and working on the relevant issues in a timely manner, all tied into the Management Plan.

III. Sanctuary Updates

Ben Haskell gave a summary on his trip to Iceland conducted on behalf of the State Department, and Rich Delaney suggested a follow up with collaborators in Husavik, Iceland to develop a sister sanctuary relationship. Ben Haskell said there is an initiative to develop a Marine Protected Area and he will follow up.

i. Scallop Fishing Impacts on Wreck Site/Working Group (B. Haskell)

There has been a lot of activity taking place in preparation for the April 1st opening date for scallop fishing in the Northwest corner of the sanctuary and Jeffreys Ledge. Based on past experience, sanctuary staff is concerned that at least seven shipwrecks are at risk of being disturbed or destroyed as was the case with one shipwreck last year. Staff is taking action to avoid destruction of these sites and specifically will conduct a baseline side scan survey of each site prior to the April 1st opening. Then a post-fishery survey will be completed in June time frame. Ben Haskell will work with NOAA GARFO to provide notice to the scallop fleet and tell them where the sites are and ask them to voluntarily stay a certain buffer distance away from these sites. Releasing previously undisclosed historic sites to the fishing fleet has never been done before and is an experiment. Before and after surveys will be used to determine where the dredge marks are and whether the scallopers were compliant. This information will be used to inform and kick off discussion of the newly formed SAC Maritime Heritage Working Group. Ben Haskell has also reached out to the Massachusetts Historical Commission to consult with them prior to taking this action on releasing the locations of shipwrecks. (Update: The side scan mission was planned for late March, but the mission was canceled due to the Nor'easter. The survey was completed on April 11-12.)

Ben Haskell will follow up with Michelle Bachman, NEFMC, about providing an outreach product to disseminate to a broad audience at future NEFMC scallop meetings.

Cate O'Keefe, MA DMF, is a member of the Scallop Plan Development Team and on their list of priorities is to investigate longer term management methods specifically for the Gulf of Maine. This may turn into a future amendment to the scallop plan which may fundamentally change the way the fishery is managed in the Gulf of Maine area. She encouraged sanctuary staff to participate in this process which will be developed over the next 2-3 years.

ii. ONMS Leadership Team (LT) Meeting (B. Haskell)

SBNMS has been chosen to host the annual ONMS LT meeting where all the sanctuary superintendents and ONMS headquarters senior management team get together to discuss issues relevant to the sanctuary program. The LT meeting will be held at the Center for Coastal Studies in

Provincetown, week of May 14-18. It is hoped to have some SAC members involved in presentations and in social activities during that week.

iii. BOEM Oil and Gas Leases – Public Comment Letter (R. Delaney)

The Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management (BOEM) recently released a Draft Proposed Program (DPP) for the 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program: <https://www.boem.gov/National-Program/>. Public Comment from Secretary Wilbur Ross, Department of Commerce and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Notice: Requests for Information: Preparation of 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program submitted this fall during public scoping for the DPP: <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=BOEM-2017-0050-51339>.

Several SACs from around the nation have submitted public comments due March 9th. Rich Delaney drafted a short statement for the SBNMS SAC to consider sending to BOEM and any other office or entity that is interested or with which the SAC would like to communicate. A motion was brought forward for the SAC to consider submitting the statement to BOEM with some minor changes to the language:

Motion: The Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) opposes any oil and gas leasing, exploratory or drilling activity anywhere in the northwest Atlantic Ocean including George’s Bank and other surrounding areas that would impact Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Passed unanimously.

Following is the public comment statement to be submitted to BOEM:

“STATEMENT FROM:

NOAA Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council

IN RESPONSE TO:

Draft Proposed Program (DPP) for the 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program: <https://www.boem.gov/National-Program/>

The Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) opposes any oil and gas related leasing, exploratory or drilling activity anywhere in the northwest Atlantic Ocean including Georges Bank, Stellwagen Bank and all adjacent waters.

The economic risks to New England's sustainable fisheries and recreational and tourism-based economies far outweigh any potential benefits from additional oil and gas production in this biologically productive area.

The environmental risks range from catastrophic oil spills impacting coastal communities to dramatic increases in noise levels from seismic testing that will further threaten already critically endangered marine mammals like the North Atlantic right whale.

And finally, with the ocean waters in the Gulf of Maine already being the fastest warming area in the world, it is simply fool-hardy to further intensify climate warming by adding more greenhouse gases from fossil fuels, especially at a time when viable alternative energy sources are increasingly available.

Submitted by Heather Knowles, Chair, NOAA Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council on behalf of the entire Council.”

iv. Migratory Bird Treaty Act (K. Powers)

Kevin Powers provided background information on the Department of the Interior's recent reinterpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) which involves a reinterpretation of incidental take as defined by the MBTA. This new interpretation will have an impact within the sanctuary in that there is incidental take in the sanctuary through commercial fishing and potentially other activities. To that effect, SAC members Kevin Powers, Wayne Petersen and John Galluzzo composed a letter on behalf of the SAC to submit to the Department of Interior, Secretary Zinke, expressing its opposition to the new interpretation. Following SAC discussion, the following motion was brought forward:

Motion: That the SAC provides a response to Department of Interior Memorandum 37050 regarding the reinterpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and that we vote on this here as discussed, the letter is revised accordingly, and is provided to the SAC Executive Committee for final review and approval. Passed unanimously.

The proposed letter will be revised to incorporate the SAC's recommendations, which were generated from the discussion, then sent to the SAC Executive Committee for final approval. Anne-Marie Runfola will check with ONMS HQ to confirm the appropriate recipients for this letter.

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

The economists for the ONMS sanctuary program will be conducting two economic surveys – one for research and the other for whale watching. The research survey has been moved to next fall but the whale watch economic survey will begin this April-May timeframe with a survey of the whale watch vessel operators and a passenger survey this summer. The passenger interviews will be conducted by volunteers primarily affiliated with Emerson College in Boston. This the first time a formal whale watch economic survey has been conducted focused on the sanctuary. It is hoped the survey will generate useful data on the economic value of whale watching, passenger experiences, and issues encountered by vessel operators on the water. Sanctuary staff is working with whale watch companies and other partners, including coordinating with Allison Rosner, NOAA GARFO who runs the WhaleSense program. Staff is excited for the survey to be completed and to see new and relevant data on this important industry in the sanctuary.

IV. SAC Updates

i. SAC Summit Update (R. Delaney)

The summit was a productive meeting with representatives from every SAC.

Highlights included:

1. Review and discussion of NMS Strategic Plan and its relationship to new NOAA Administrator Gallaudet's priorities. Sanctuaries align with the NOAA priorities regarding resilient ecosystems and communities.

2. Update on two Executive Orders (EO) from President Trump requiring a review of public lands including sanctuaries. Appears to be a continuing process although one EO would insert BOEM further into any decisions about new and or expanded sanctuaries.

3. A major focus of several panels and presentations was the relationship of recreational fishing with sanctuaries. This has been and continues to be a challenging relationship with top lobbying

officials in DC and commercial recreational entities being very negative. Yet everyday recreational fishers been more appreciative of the benefits of sanctuaries.

4. Rich Delaney gave a presentation on SBNMS work regarding small boat interactions with marine mammals which prompted a lot of interest.

ii. Management Plan Subcommittee and Timeline (B. Haskell and J. Williamson)

The Management Plan Subcommittee met in November 2017. A lot of ground was covered in the one-day meeting. Ben Haskell provided a full briefing on the regulatory and legal framework for the sanctuary, and a lot of material and in-depth perspective on the sanctuary's legal structure was presented. A few of the Action Plans were covered as well during the meeting. The next meeting will be held in March. The goal is to continue the review of the remaining Action Plans. A later follow-up meeting will be scheduled in June at which time the draft Condition Report should be finalized and will be incorporated into the Management Plan. Recommendations will be provided to the SAC at the October SAC meeting.

iii. Condition Report Update (B. Haskell and B. Barr)

Brad Barr, who is coordinating the development of the Condition Report for SBNMS, provided the SAC with a brief update on the process. Sanctuary staff were fully engaged in preparing background information for the expert panel workshop held 13-15 February. Participants at the workshop included those with relevant expertise and experience across many disciplines and constituencies, including a number of SAC members. At this workshop, the state of sanctuary resources was evaluated and assessed by the panels, and ratings were developed from the panel deliberations to reflect the current status of water quality, habitat, living resources, and maritime archaeological resources. Observed trends over the last decade, since the first condition report was developed in 2007, were identified. An assessment of ecosystem services was also conducted at the workshop, which helps to identify the benefits to people from sustaining healthy ecosystem conditions in the Sanctuary. The process is being completed under the guidance of the ONMS Conservation Science Team with support from the economists on HQ staff. The draft report, when completed, will be first reviewed by workshop panel participants and SBNMS staff, then by agency partners and the SAC, and finally will be subjected to an independent peer review, coordinated by HQ. The draft report is being developed and will be available for review by the SAC at its May meeting.

iv. Working Group Updates (H. Knowles)

The Maritime Heritage Working Group (MH WG) is in motion. Ben Haskell and Heather Knowles have reached out to individuals whom they would like to have as members of the working group. Next step is a kick-off meeting planned for end of April. Anyone who would feels they can contribute to the working group but were not contacted should reach out to Ben or Heather.

V. Wildlife Photography

Mr. Keith Ellenbogen, a professional underwater photographer and Hollings Grant recipient gave a presentation of the work he will doing in the sanctuary to film and photograph the underwater beauty and splendor of the sanctuary's wildlife and shipwrecks. This is the first time a professional photographer will work with the sanctuary staff to document wildlife both in and out of the water.

VI. Atlantic Link HVDC Cable (Emera Inc.) (A. Stratton)

Emera gave a presentation on the status of their proposal to install a 1000-megawatt, high voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line that will deliver clean energy to southern New England from onshore wind and hydroelectric generating facilities in Atlantic Canada or Maine. The project was proposed in response to a Massachusetts Request for Proposals (RFP) for clean energy; although the project did not win the RFP, Emera is still hoping to implement the project and is assessing options to continue. Emera has consulted with a wide range of state and Federal entities as well as numerous communities and stakeholders to select its preferred route, which would cross about 15 miles of the southeast corner of SBNMS. They are in the process of planning a survey of the entire route to gather geophysical, geotechnical, and biological data to refine the preferred route. Regarding concerns about electromagnetic field (EMF) exposure, HVDC cables have a lower profile than alternating current (AC) cables. For installation, the two cables are bound together into a less than 15 inch diameter bundle, and buried in a narrow trench created with a jet plow and an installation vessel that can deploy and bury as much as 20 miles of cable per day; the target burial depth is 6 feet.

VII. Agency/Government Reports

i. MA Coastal Zone Management (T. Callaghan)

1. The NOAA line item that funds the Massachusetts A buoy was cut by 30%. This buoy is important to SBNMS because it helps provide important data to allow modeling of potential water quality impacts to SBNMS, in addition to larval species modeling, and measuring ocean pH changes. The decrease in funding also cuts into the budget of NERACOOS the organization that serves the whale acoustic data in a user-friendly graphical interface (web) that boaters and large vessels can use as they approach or leave the Port of Boston.
2. The MWRA Outfall Monitoring Science Advisory Panel is looking for new members. Now is an important time as the OMSAP will enter an intensive revisioning process. Of interest is investigating personal care products and other chemicals of emerging concern and continuing the "far field" monitoring site within SBNMS. The group is looking for a microbiologist, statistician, and public health person (3 separate positions) to fill vacancies. Please contact Todd Callaghan with leads.
3. Both LNG offshore terminals have asked EPA to rescind their NPDES discharge permits as part of decommissioning. However, one owner, NE Gateway has recently retracted its request. This is good news for the whale acoustic monitoring system (mentioned above) that is funded by the LNG terminal owners but is also concerning as increased vessel traffic to this location just west of SBNMS comes with certain risks.
4. MA Coastal Zone Management (CZM) is reviewing the document that is evaluating the Boston Harbor flood protection options. The report appears to more closely focused on engineering and has less detail on environmental impacts. Stay tuned for public comment options as the marine mammal, forage fish migration, and fish and crustacean movement sections deserve close attention.
5. Recent research related to the Block Island Wind Farm cable gives an idea of the potential scope of impacts associated with the Emera cable proposal. Todd Callaghan will forward documents to Sanctuary staff. I encourage the staff to anticipate how it will respond to the situation where a cable cannot be completely buried along its length within the Sanctuary. State agencies have recently required sand bag placement instead of the industry preferred concrete mattresses, as the sand

bags have been documented to adequately cover the infrastructure and serve as soft bottom habitat, thus avoiding habitat conversion and avoiding potential conflicts with fishing gear.

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

Seasonal Vessel Speed Limits in Cape Cod Bay to Protect Right Whales - Soliciting Comments

The Division of Marine Fisheries scheduled two public meetings and a public comment period to receive feedback on a pending emergency regulation that would enact a 10 knot speed limit for vessels smaller than 65' in length operating in certain waters of Cape Cod Bay during the period of February 1 through May 15. This action would complement a longstanding federal speed restriction in Cape Cod Bay that affects vessels 65' and larger during the period of January 1 through May 15.

Vessel collisions are a major source of mortality for this species. There have been several instances in recent years where right whales in Cape Cod Bay have been killed or injured due to small vessel strikes. Despite the overall decline in the right whale population, their use of Cape Cod Bay has dramatically increased over the last 10 years. As the density of right whales in Cape Cod Bay has increased, the risk posed by vessel collision also increases.

The public meetings have been scheduled for mid-March in Plymouth and Eastham, and the Division of Marine Fisheries will also accept public comment through March 21, 2018.

Recreational Gulf of Maine Cod and Haddock Regulations – Comment Period Closed

The Division of Marine Fisheries recently closed a comment period regarding recreational fishing measures for Gulf of Maine cod and haddock in state and federal waters. The New England Fishery Management Council made recommendations to the National Marine Fisheries Service regarding Gulf of Maine cod and haddock rules for 2018, which would impact the way the Division regulates the fisheries inside state waters.

The Division of Marine Fisheries solicited public comments on how to address the Council recommendations in February. Specifically, whether to (1) eliminate the existing state-waters private anglers 1-fish allowance for Gulf of Maine cod and retain status quo regulations for haddock, or (2) maintain the private angler allowance for cod and require additional constraints on Gulf of Maine haddock. Per the Council's recommendation, the latter option would result in a 2-fish reduction in the for-hire haddock limit (from 12 fish to 10 fish) and a closure for private anglers in May.

The Director is considering the public input and will make a recommendation to the Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission. The decision will then be conveyed to the National Marine Fisheries Service to finalize the recreational fishing measures for Gulf of Maine cod and haddock for 2018.

iii. NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) and MA Environmental Police (T. Donovan and T. Wilmarth)

Tim Donovan, Northeast Assistant Director for NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement reported that an approximate 18 million dollar cut is proposed for the Office of Law Enforcement's budget in fiscal year 2019. This will eliminate funding to the Cooperative Enforcement Program with the states.

There are currently five open investigations into vessel (65' and over) speed restriction violations in the sanctuary. Two of the cases have been forwarded to NOAA's General Counsel Enforcement Section for prosecution.

The Massachusetts trap/pot restricted area is in effect until April 30th. This area extends into the southern portion of the sanctuary. Officer Wilmarth is coordinating patrols to enforce the restricted area to mitigate whale entanglements.

Two Supervisory Enforcement Officers from the Office of Law Enforcement's Northeast Division will be conducting a visit to the boat builder Metal Shark in Louisiana next week to review final design specifications on two patrol vessels slated for the Northeast Region. Delivery is expected around late summer. One vessel will be docked at USCG Station Yorktown and the other at the sanctuary's dock in Scituate.

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

The New England Fishery Management Council met in early December and late January to take final action on fishery management plan adjustments and discuss other actions under development. In December the Council finalized fishery specifications for groundfish, scallops, and whiting, and approved Herring Amendment 8 for public hearings. In January the Council discussed recreational groundfish measures.

The scallop specifications are being split this year into two sets of proposed and final rules so that the regulations for the Northern Gulf of Maine Management Area (NGOM), which includes the Sanctuary, will be ready when the fishing year begins on April 1. Scallop landings from Stellwagen Bank were high during 2016, and increased further in 2017. The new regulations will cap the total harvest from the area at 200,000 lbs, and eliminate the ability for larger limited access vessels to use days at sea to fish on the bank, which led to the very high landings in recent years. Starting on April 1 2018, limited access vessels can only fish in the area by using research set-aside (RSA) pounds, and there is a limit of 65,000 RSA pounds from the NGOM during fishing year 2018. Smaller day boat vessels with 200 lb per trip limit can land up to 135,000 lbs during fishing year 2018. The two allocations will be monitored independently. The Council identified scallop surveys on Stellwagen Bank as a high priority for the 2018 RSA program. A decision about funding should be made public in the next few weeks. It is not known when RSA pounds might be harvested during the year, but vessels could opt to fish on Stellwagen or elsewhere on Georges Bank or in the Mid-Atlantic. This choice of RSA fishing location will depend on expected catch rates, product quality, convenience to port, and other factors. The NGOM proposed rule is available for comment through March 7 and regulations for the remainder of the actions in Framework 29 are forthcoming. In terms of fishing gear impacts to archaeological resources, the Council is willing and able to convey concerns to the fishing industry through our meetings and other communication channels.

Also in December, the Council took final action on 2018-2020 groundfish catch limits through Framework 57. Some stocks will see increases from 2017 to 2018, while other catch limits decreased between the current fishing year and next year. The GOM cod catch limit increased by nearly 40% but remains low at only 390 metric tons for the commercial fishery and 220 metric tons for the recreational fishery during the 2018 fishing year, which begins May 1. Framework 57 is currently under review at GARFO. The Council recommended recreational fishery measures to NMFS at its January meeting. These include zero possession for GOM cod, and a 12 fish limit for GOM haddock, a 17 inch minimum haddock size, and two haddock closed seasons during March 1-April 14 and September 17-October 31. The haddock recommendations assume that Massachusetts prohibits possession of GOM cod by private anglers; if this is not the case, the

Council recommended measures that are slightly more restrictive. Georges Bank cod has a 10 fish bag limit with an increase to 24 inches minimum size. Regulations for both specifications and recreational measures will be published by GARFO later this spring.

Herring Amendment 8 was reviewed by the Council in December and is currently undergoing NMFS review. The Council did not identify preferred alternatives at the December meeting. Hearings are tentatively planned for late April/early May. Two will be held in Massachusetts, one in Gloucester and one on the South Shore or on Cape Cod. The 2017 herring fishing year which concluded on December 31 was somewhat unusual in that the Area 1A quota was not reached, and therefore there was not an incentive to harvest RSA quota in the fall. Also of note, GARFO just this week published a notice closing the directed mackerel fishery. Specifically, as of February 27, 2018, vessels issued Federal Atlantic mackerel permits may not fish for, possess, transfer, receive, land, or sell more than 20,000 lb of mackerel per trip or calendar day through December 31, 2018. Because the herring and mackerel fisheries are closely linked, these limits could affect the herring fishery during the 2018 fishing year.

NOAA Fisheries' decision on Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2 was communicated to the Council on January 3. The final regulations are currently under review and April 1 remains the target implementation date. All measures were approved as proposed in the Gulf of Maine, including the Stellwagen dedicated habitat research area (DHRA) and continued designation of the Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area and overlapping habitat management area. Thus, fishing restrictions in the Sanctuary will not change because of the amendment. The Council and NOAA Fisheries' regional office plan to collaborate with the Sanctuary as needed to ensure effective implementation of the DHRA.

Also in January the Council made final recommendations for its Deep-Sea Coral Amendment. The action proposes mobile bottom-tending gear closures in the Mt. Desert Rock and Outer Schoodic Ridge areas, a research area with no fishing restrictions in Jordan Basin, and a large 600-meter depth zone from the continental margin to the EEZ limit, from roughly Alvin Canyon to Heezen Canyon. This area will be closed to all bottom-tending gears, with an exemption for the handful of vessels that work in the deep-sea red crab pot fishery.

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

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team Update

GARFO is currently working with the Take Reduction Team to investigate the feasibility of gear modifications that may help reduce entanglement risk in the future. GARFO has convened two subgroups of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team to investigate the following:

- Subgroup 1: Feasibility of ropeless fixed gear. Held conference call February 26, meeting in-person in March.
- Subgroup 2: Whale release rope and gear marking feasibility. Held conference call February 26, meeting in-person in April.

Both groups are reviewing current research, technology, barriers and constraints, information gaps, and research needs. The information compiled by these working groups will be presented to the larger TRT in October.

Right Whale Calving Update

Surveys conducted off the coast of FL and GA have sighted 12 right whales, with no calves. One unusual right whale sighting was reported in the Gulf of Mexico. Additional surveys have been flown off NC and in the Gulf of Mexico, with 3 additional right whales being sighted off of NC.

Minke Whale UME

We recently declared the Minke Whale Unusual Mortality Event (UME) along the east coast. Increased mortalities of minke whales have been observed in the North Atlantic from Maine through South Carolina with highest strandings in Massachusetts, Maine and New York. We now have three large whale UMEs open: Humpback, Right whale, and minke whale. Currently, there is no direct connection between the three UMEs. For minkes, preliminary findings show eleven whales have had suspect or confirmed evidence of human interaction (n=2) or fisheries interaction (n=9). Eight whales have findings of suspected or confirmed infectious disease. Final results are still pending for the majority of the cases. More information for all three events can be found on our UME webpage: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/mmume/events.html>.

VIII. New Business:

Request for Proposals – Funding Available for Small Projects related to Recreational Fishing in the sanctuary. Anne-Marie Runfola and Kevin Blinkhoff, Recreational Fishing Primary member, announced a request for proposals (RFP) for small recreational fishing grants. They requested all SAC members to help disseminate the RFP. Awards will be announced in May with 12 months to complete. Average award estimated at \$500-\$1000K per grant, with \$3,000 available in total for this first round. The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation will administer the grants, and will assess this pilot for potential future expansion.

SAC members are reminded to please track their volunteer hours – anything that is connected to the sanctuary whether it's attending meetings, assisting at events, writing etc., need to be tracked.

SAC members are asked to coordinate with their alternates and primaries to keep each other informed.

IX. Adjourn: 3:10 pm.