UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
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Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026

October 15, 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR: MRAG Americas, East West Technical Services, AIS Inc.
Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NFEOP) Observers
At- Sea Monitor (ASM) Program Monitors

FROM: Amy S. Van Atten
Branch Chief, Fisheries Sampling Branch (FSB)

SUBJECT: Pinger and Pinger Testing Update

This memo is providing you with important information about pingers. You may see an increase of usage of pingers, there may be "doubling up" of pingers, there may be new pingers with an LED light, and there may be renewed interest in the results from the pinger tester. We need you to be prepared to recognize and annotate these new trends.

Background

NMFS completed analyses, as detailed in the Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan, on observed harbor porpoise bycatch from September 2010 through May 2011. The number of harbor porpoise takes was nearly twice the threshold in the Gulf of Maine and the level of compliance with pinger regulations was shown to be low. A gillnet fishery closure, in waters from northern Massachusetts to Portland Maine, was originally scheduled to be in effect during October and November. However, the timing of this closure has been shifted to February and March of 2013.

Under the Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan, gillnet fishermen are required to use acoustic deterrent devices, or pingers, on their gillnet gear during certain times and in certain areas when porpoises are present to help avoid deadly interactions. Gillnet fishermen fishing within the harbor porpoise management areas are urged to make sure that their gillnets are equipped with the correct number of pingers and that the pingers have fresh batteries so they are properly functioning. This is especially important during the months of October and November when high levels of harbor porpoise bycatch have typically occurred in the coastal waters of the Gulf of Maine.

1. Doubling of Pingers and LED Pingers

Please note that some gillnets may be doubling up on the number of pingers normally used. In a webposting on September 26, 2012, the Northeast Seafood Coalition stated that they are working closely with gillnet fishermen in the Northeast Fishery Sectors and the Gloucester Fishing

Community Preservation Fund to double pinger deployment beginning October 1 and begin deploying the latest LED-pinger technology in November, which is hoped to eliminate any further concerns about compliance and problems with pinger functionality and testing.

The Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan states that when & where pingers are required, a pinger should be placed at the end of each string, as well as in between each net panel along the floatline (see illustration below). The industry may now be voluntarily doubling up on that required number, putting two pingers in between each net panel. **If additional pingers (i.e. "doubling up") are observed, please comment about the placement of the additional pingers**, whether it's on the floatline in the middle of the nets, alongside other pingers or somewhere else entirely. Please make sure you are counting the number of pingers coming on board, correctly recording this information on your Gear Logs and/or Haul Logs, and keeping an eye out for any extra pingers.

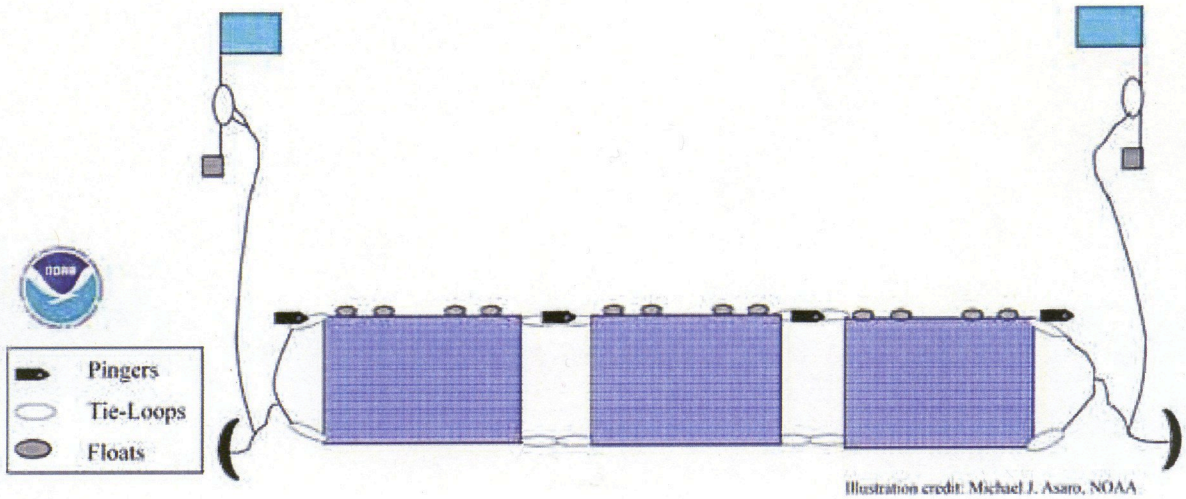


Illustration credit: Michael J. Asaro, NOAA

A new Fumunda pinger equipped with a LED light to indicate whether the pinger is functional will shortly become available in our area. For observers, if and when you see these new pingers, please indicate on your Gillnet Gear Characteristics Log that a Fumunda pinger is used and also **that an LED light was present**.

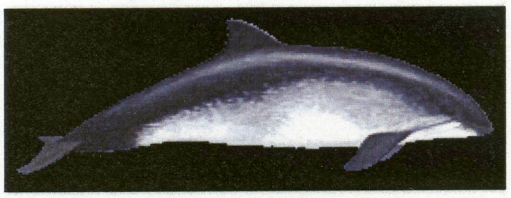
2. Observers with Pinger Testers

For observers doing pinger tester trips please continue to record not only pingers but also places where pingers should be if no pinger is present (at the end of each string and between each net panel) in the order they come on board. As usual, be sure to **test the tester prior to the trip** to ensure that the batteries of the tester are good. The data collected from the testers are critical. Captains may be interested in the results of the functionality of their pingers. If you are asked about your results **when testing pingers, you are welcome to and encouraged to share this information with the captains**. It is important to understand that observers are not enforcing regulations and by no means should you be telling captains to replace non-functioning pingers.

However, the data may be used to assess overall adherence to the requirements. If a malfunctioning pinger is fixed by the captain or crew, you should note that clearly on your logs.

The Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Team is convening in late October to review the most recent harbor porpoise abundance and bycatch information, as well as information related to changes in fishing effort and practices that may have resulted from the implementation of groundfish sectors in 2010. At that time, the Team may recommend an alternative conservation strategy for effectively reducing harbor porpoise bycatch in gillnet fisheries.

If you have any questions or concerns on anything related to pingers or pinger testing please contact Bill Greer at (508)495-2126, or e-mail william.greer@noaa.gov, or Sara Weeks at 508-495-2227, or email Sara.Weeks@noaa.gov. You may also visit the Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan website at www.nero.noaa.gov/hptrp.



(Harbor Porpoise)