



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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Director

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

NOAA FISHERIES RECOGNIZES DMF FOR WORK ON RIGHT WHALE CONSERVATION

On July 25, at Massachusetts State House, NOAA Fisheries gave its Partner in the Spotlight Award to the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) for their conservation efforts regarding the endangered North Atlantic right whale. This award is presented biennially to a single outstanding partner who has expanded and enhanced the recovery of our most imperiled marine species.

The award was presented to DMF by NOAA Fisheries Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, Samuel D. Rauch, III. Rauch added, "As a NOAA partner, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries has led the way on the protection of endangered North Atlantic right whales when they are in Massachusetts waters by implementing regulations to reduce whale entanglements in fishing gear and the potential for vessel strikes. DMF regulations are especially important because they complement federal regulations and support right whale recover efforts."

Director Daniel J. McKiernan received the award on behalf of DMF. McKiernan stated, "it was a great honor to receive this recognition from NOAA Fisheries." He added, "Massachusetts faces a unique challenge. Our inshore waters are a critical late-winter and early-spring habitat for right whales with up to two-thirds of the known population seasonally aggregating here. This places enormous responsibility on the Commonwealth to ensure the whales are safe while in our local waters. Working with the fishing industry and vessel operators, we have tried to devise conservation strategies that are as surgical as possible while minimizing impacts on our maritime industries and seafood economy. Massachusetts has the most restrictive rules in the nation to protect right whales, including a three-month closure to fixed gear fishing to prevent entanglements, the mandatory deployment of weak buoy lines designed to part if an entanglement should occur, and a March – April speed limit for all vessels in Cape Cod Bay to reduce the risk of ship strikes."

McKiernan also recognized the contributions to the state's conservation program by the Center for Coastal Studies, who perform aerial surveillance documenting the presence of right whales; the Massachusetts Environmental Police for their patrol efforts to enforce conservation rules and to look after whales, including mother/calf pairs, when in vulnerable locations; the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission for approving the DMF's conservation rules; and the commercial fishing industry for their leadership and cooperation.

Senator Bruce Tarr provided introductory remarks and spoke on behalf of the Massachusetts Legislature's Coastal Caucus. The Senator stated, "in 2023, the Massachusetts Legislature designated April 24 as Right Whale Day in the Commonwealth to celebrate the importance of this species to the state and has appropriated funds for substantive measures to protect right whales. Therefore, it is fitting that NOAA Fisheries is here today to recognize the state's dedication to the conservation of this species." He also

noted the sacrifices made by commercial fishermen to the conservation efforts, especially the extended season closures and the costly and time-consuming buoy line modifications.

Commissioner Tom O’Shea provided remarks on behalf of the Department of Fish and Game. He stated that, “few species in Massachusetts are as imperiled or iconic as the right whale. The future of the right whale and the health of our oceans depends on critical conservation measures. This award is an outstanding honor and celebration of 27-years of leadership and efforts of DMF, in partnership with NOAA Fisheries and the commercial fishing industry to protect right whales.”

For more information, please visit www.mass.gov/marinefisheries



Left to Right: Michael Pentony, NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator for Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office; Samuel D. Rausch III., NOAA Fisheries Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs; Thomas O’Shea, Commissioner for the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game; Daniel McKiernan, Director for the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries; Robert Glenn, Deputy Director for the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries; Julia Kaplan, Outreach Coordinator for the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries; Kevin Creighton, Assistant Director for the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries; Story Reed, Assistant Director for the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries; Jared Silva, Policy Analyst for the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries; Collen Coogan, NOAA Fisheries Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Branch Chief