From: Jennifer Goebel - NOAA Federal
To: NMFS ALWTRT - NOAA Service Account
Subject: Update: December 2026 ALWTRT Meeting
Date: Thursday, November 5, 2026 12:12:40 PM

Dear Team Members,

We have decided to postpone the December 2026 in-person meeting until March 2027 to ensure we have the best science available to inform discussions. In lieu of an in-person Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT or Team) meeting in December, we will hold a virtual information session on December 2, 2026, which will be open to the general public. Additional details on this information session will be forthcoming. During that session, we will provide updates on the current status of science findings, highlighted below.

There are several considerations for reconvening the ALWTRT and, as of this moment, several scientific analyses are still being finalized and reviewed before they can be used to inform ALWTRT deliberations, including:

- A new scientific method for apportioning entanglements by country based on the latest gear identification data available indicates the U.S. proportion of entanglements is around 25%, which is less than previously estimated. These preliminary results are currently in peer review and are subject to change.

- The Population Viability Analysis model can be used to inform recovery factors for use in the calculation of PBR under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Given that this is one of the most well-studied whales in the country, with advanced modeling tools and high quality data, there is reduced uncertainty in the current and future status of the species and, as a result, an adjustment to the recovery factor may be justified.

- The 2025 population estimate and 2024–2025 estimated mortality, which will be released in mid-November at the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium.

Based on a preliminary review of this latest information, NMFS expects the estimated mortality and serious injury incidental to U.S. commercial fixed gear fisheries to be substantially lower than estimated in 2022, bringing estimates within the range of PBR (i.e., the estimates of mortality and serious injury overlap the estimates of PBR and may be at, slightly above, or slightly below PBR once the process has concluded). This outcome is still preliminary as the new science needs to undergo peer review and is dependent on no changes to the underlying data. To ensure compliance with the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 to have a final rule in effect by December 31, 2028, we intend to convene the ALWTRT meeting in March 2027, with a second meeting (if needed) in summer 2027, with the goal of publishing a final rule by the end of 2028.

We appreciate the hard work of fishermen to reduce the entanglement risk, as well as all the Team members, researchers, stranding responders, and interested parties who have worked tirelessly to understand and reduce right whale entanglements over the years. While entanglements are still occurring, we are in a very different position than we were in 2019

when the right whale population was in a steep decline.

We will provide additional information as it becomes available. Please refer to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan website for those details.

Best,
Jen

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