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NOAA seeks to improve North Atlantic right whale risk assessments

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

Endangered marine mammal is considered threatened by fixed-gear fisheries

The United States' marine fisheries agency, NOAA Fisheries, this week announced that a recent peer review of its North Atlantic right whale risk assessment tool will lead to improvements.

Researchers will focus on better understanding uncertainty in model results after convening in January in order to better inform management options related to endangered North Atlantic right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*). The reviewers' **summary report** (<http://chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2023-06/2023-decision-support-tool-peer-review-summary-report-nefsc.pdf>) is now available.

The software program helps the agency understand the relative risk of North Atlantic right whale entanglement in fixed-gear fisheries throughout U.S. Atlantic waters. It also allows the agency to evaluate entanglement risk reduction under different mitigation actions.

The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team first used the original version of the tool in April 2019. It considered the distribution and configuration of Northeast lobster and Jonah crab gear. It has been updated and now incorporates all fisheries regulated under the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction



NOAA Fisheries says a recent peer review of its North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) risk assessment tool will lead to management improvements. Wikimedia Commons image.

Plan along the entire East Coast, and also includes additional data on right whale distributions.

A dark green banner with white text and a small image of fish on a plate. The text reads "SEAFOOD FROM SCOTLAND" in a bold, sans-serif font, followed by "See you in St. John!" in a larger, bold, sans-serif font. To the right, there is a small image of two fish on a silver plate.

**SEAFOOD FROM
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Balancing protection and production: Diving into the North Atlantic right whale conflict with lobster and crab fishing

A closer look at the conflict between North American fixed-gear fisheries and North Atlantic right whale protection measures.



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The research panel recommended additions to the model inputs, structure and outputs to improve how uncertainty is accounted for and communicated to stakeholders. They also acknowledged the extensive efforts undertaken to describe the U.S. Atlantic fixed gear fisheries.

Some recommendations can be done in the short term while others will take longer. Results obtained using the tool inform but do not specify management decisions, nor does it tell users what the “best” solution is, the agency said.

Recent federal legislation has extended the timeline for implementing further measures to reduce risks posed to North Atlantic right whales by lobster and Jonah crab gear into 2028.

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