



David E. Pierce, Ph.D.
Director

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

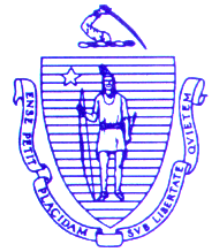
Division of Marine Fisheries

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February 28, 2018

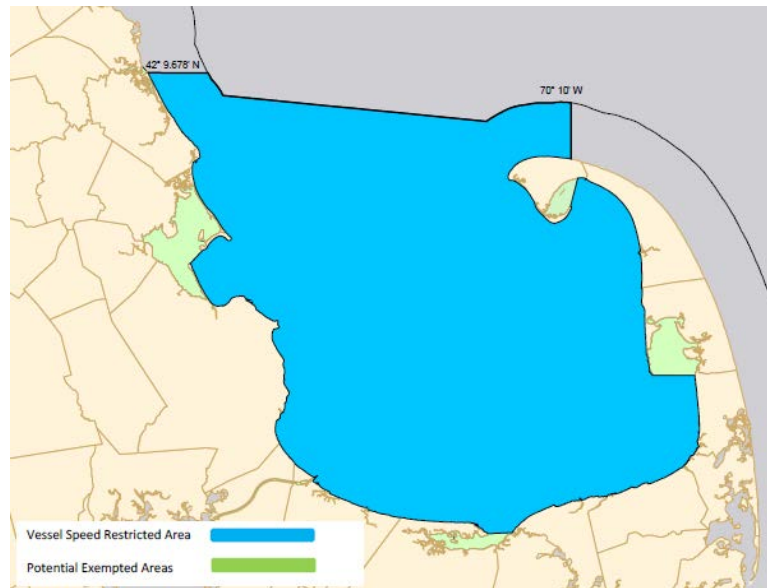
Marine Fisheries Advisory

DIRECTOR SEEKS COMMENTS:

SEASONAL VESSEL SPEED LIMITS IN CAPE COD BAY TO PROTECT RIGHT WHALES

The Division of Marine Fisheries is scheduling 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 (see map) during the period of February 1 through May 15.

The new regulation would allow DMF to lift the small vessel speed limit prior to May 15 if whales have departed the area, as they often do. A copy of the regulations may be found on the agency's [website](#). DMF is considering potentially exempting inshore harbors and embayments from this vessel speed limit and is seeking comment on such an exemption



Vessel collisions are a significant cause of right whale mortality, in addition to entanglements in fishing gear. This action would complement a longstanding federal speed restriction in Cape Cod Bay that affects vessels 65 ft. and larger during the period of January 1 through May 15.

Right whales are an endangered species and their population has been in decline since 2010. In 2017, 17 fatalities were observed in waters of the US and Canada resulting in elevated concern about the future of the species. 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. In April 2017, a right whale was found dead in Cape Cod Bay (off Barnstable) from a suspected small vessel collision. Despite the overall decline in the right whale population, their use of CCB has dramatically increased over the last 10 years. As the density of right whales in CCB has increased, the risk posed by vessel collision also increases.

Cape Cod Bay provides an important wintertime habitat for right whales. Surveys conducted over the last 21 years have shown right whales are present in Cape Cod Bay during winter months and the aggregations peak in April departing by the end of April or early May. Although right whales are known to travel between the Canadian Maritimes and the SE U.S., Cape Cod Bay has seen the

densest aggregations of right whales anywhere in the northwest Atlantic. In 2017, approximately 200 whales (more than 50% of the known population) were seen in a single day.

Public Meeting Schedule:

The Division of Marine Fisheries has scheduled two public meetings for:

6PM
Thursday, March 15, 2018
Hotel 1620
180 Water Street
Plymouth, MA

6PM
Monday, March 19, 2018
Four Points Sheraton
3800 State Highway
Eastham, MA

Public Comment Instructions

The Division of Marine Fisheries will also accept public comment through 5PM on Wednesday, March 21, 2018. Please address all written comments to Director Pierce and submit to DMF by e-mail at marine.fish@state.ma.us or by post to 251 Causeway Street, Suite 400, Boston, MA 02114.

For more information about the management of protected species in Massachusetts, contact DMF at 617-626-1520 or visit our website at www.mass.gov/marinefisheries.