

Entangled North Atlantic Right Whales, October 2016 – October 2017

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The Atlantic Large Whale Disentanglement Network extends its heartfelt gratitude to Joe Howlett and condolences to his family and friends. Joe died in the service of whale conservation and is deeply missed.

Since October 2016, there were 15 confirmed right whale entanglement sightings of 11 individual whales located between the Gulf of St. Lawrence (GSL), Canada and Georgia, US. Ten new cases were confirmed, one case was ongoing from 2012. New cases were higher than average over the last decade (5.2) but within the range (2-11) for newly discovered cases. Two were discovered as carcasses; 3603-Starboard and the 2015 calf of 1604. Four cases were likely resolved (3530-Ruffian, WR-2017-06, 4123, and 1317-Ergo) and four whales are at large (3405-Fuse, 4146, 4049-Mayport, and 3245). The ongoing case involved 3821 with a small length of line trapped in his baleen (first discovered in 2012) appears to have been shed. The network is urged to keep an eye out for the at large whales and report any sightings immediately. Gear samples were collected in a minimum of four of the cases: 3530, 3603, WR-2017-06, and the 2015 calf of 1604, a relatively high number that will help inform management and mitigation measures. Of the 10 new cases, seven were discovered in snow crab gear in the GSL, prompting an early closure of that fishery by DFO in Area 12, southern GSL. All of these whales had line through the mouth, at minimum, and had limited mobility due to the heavy characteristics of the gear. Both DFO and NOAA temporarily suspended disentanglement operations for all whales after the death of Joe Howlett, with a resumption of most entanglement response activities after a preliminary review (as of writing, DFO has continued its ban on entanglement response for right whales pending an official investigation by Transport Canada). Equipping of the network and training sessions continued during this past year.



Atlantic Large Whale Disentanglement Network

Right Whale Update, October 2016 – 2017

Moe Brown and Scott Landry



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada



Atlantic Large Whale Disentanglement Network

NGO's, federal & state agencies, whale watches, fishermen, recreational boaters, and much-appreciated funders



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada



Marine Fisheries
A Commonwealth of Massachusetts Agency



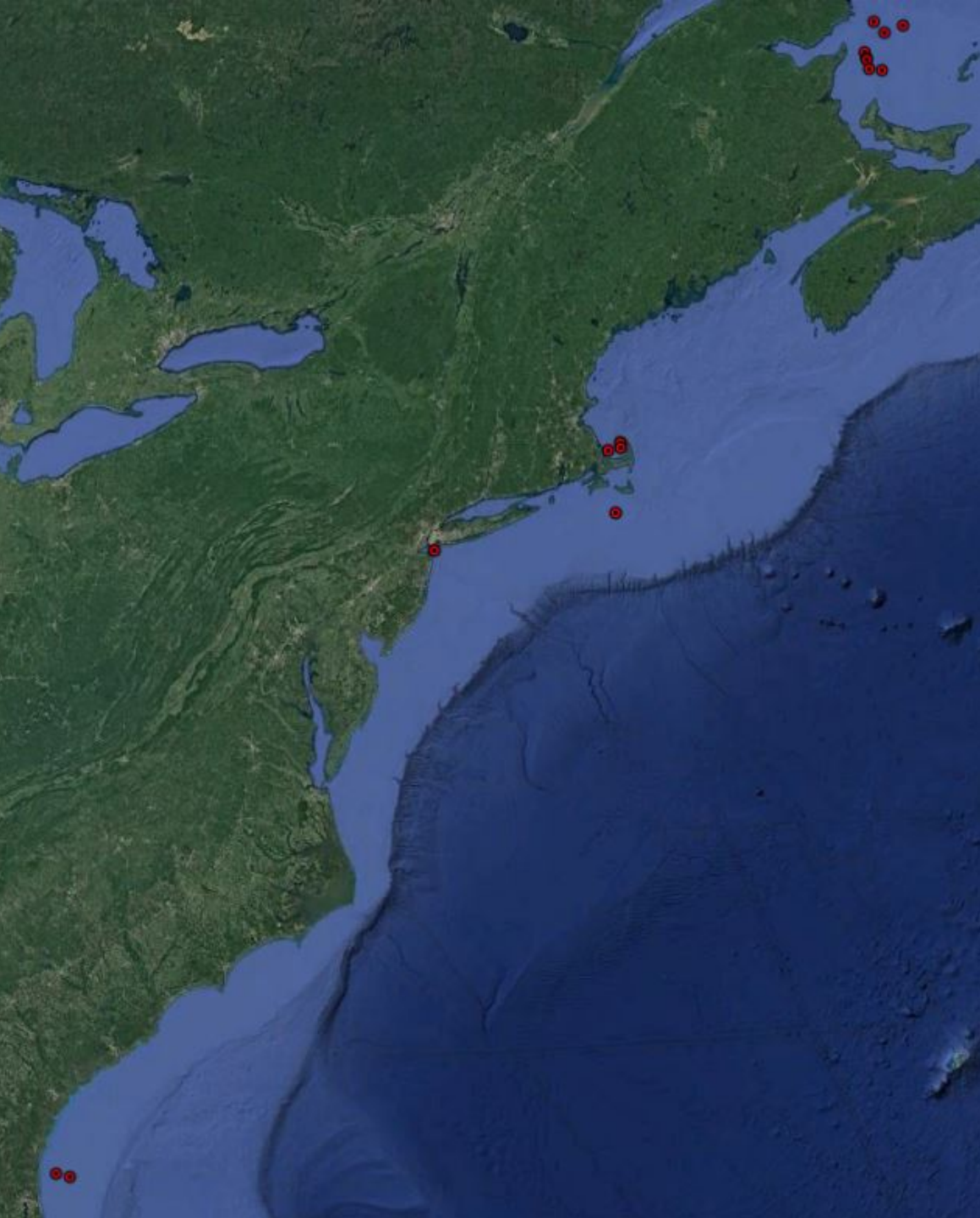
CANADIAN WHALE INSTITUTE



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Entangled right whale sightings, November 2016-2017:

- 11 known cases from New Brunswick to Georgia
- 10 new cases, 1 ongoing case – average new cases over previous 10 years: 5.2 (range: 2-11)
- Of new cases: 5/10 were known to be lethal; 3 were disentangled, 2 were discovered as carcasses, 1 likely shed gear, and 4 are at large
- Sighting sources: the research community (13), commercial fishermen (1), whale watch (1)
- Gear samples were collected in four cases (a relatively high number)

Right whale #3405 (Fuse): discovered off New York Harbor in December 2016. Status: entangled.



Right whale #3530 (Ruffian): discovered off Georgia, January 2017; Two lines emerged from the right side of the mouth and two twisted lines exited the left side, effectively forming a bridle at the area of the blowholes. Status: gear-free.



Right whale #3530 (Ruffian): discovered off Georgia, January 2017; Two lines emerged from the right side of the mouth and two twisted lines exited the left side, effectively forming a bridle at the area of the blowholes. All gear removed. Status: gear-free.



Right whale #4146: discovered in Cape Cod Bay, April 2017; whale towing line exiting from the left mouth. Status: entangled.



CCS

Right whale #3821: first discovered in Cape Cod Bay 2012; sighted entangled in March and April then gear free May 2017.
Status: likely gear-free.



NEFSC

Likely Gear Free

Right whale, #3603 (Starboard): discovered in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, June 2017; entangled with multiple lines and buoys. Status: carcass.

NEFSC



Right whale, BK01BOF2015: discovered in Gulf of St. Lawrence, July 2017; buoy lines caught in mouth, all gear removed. Status: gear-free.



Right whale #1317 (Ergo): discovered in Gulf of St. Lawrence, July 8, 2017; buoy lines caught in mouth. Gear likely shed.
Status: likely gear-free.

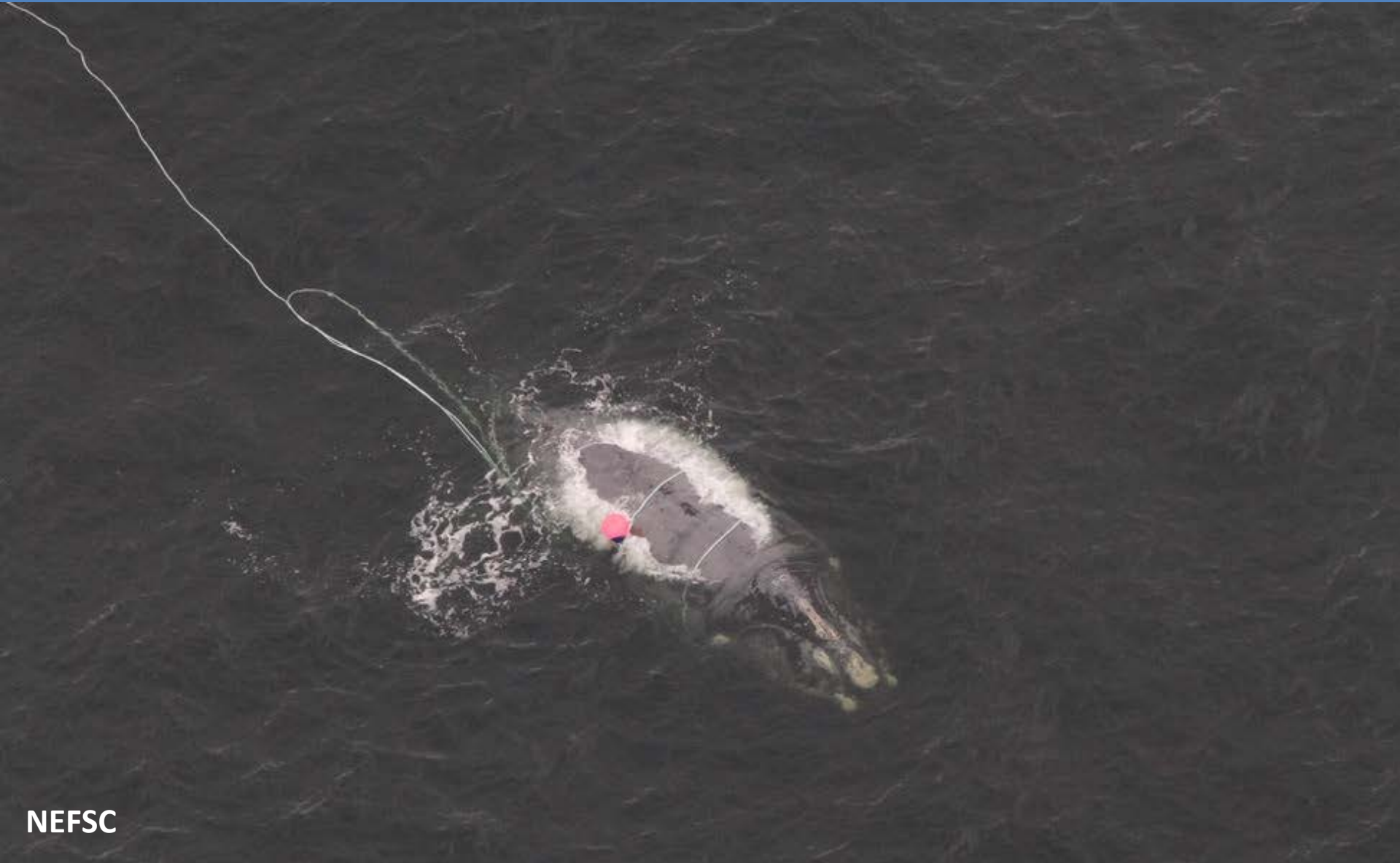


NEFSC



DFO

Right whale #4123: discovered in Gulf of St. Lawrence, July 2017; buoy
multiple body wraps originating at the mouth, all gear removed.
Status: gear-free.



Right whale #4094 (Mayport): discovered in Gulf of St. Lawrence, July 2017; buoy lines caught in mouth. Status: entangled.



Right whale #3245: discovered in Gulf of St. Lawrence, August 2017; lines caught in mouth leading to wraps of peduncle. Status: entangled.



Right whale, 2015 calf of #1604: discovered in Gulf of St. Lawrence, September 2017; wraps of mouth leading to wraps of the flippers. Status: carcass.



SUMMARY

- The number of new entanglements were at the high end of the spectrum compared to prior years
- Entanglement response aided three individuals and necropsy response gleaned details from a further two individuals
- Two cases were discovered as carcasses (above average for last decade) and a further four had likely lethal entanglements
- All of the cases involved, at minimum, rope in the mouth
- Seven of the ten new cases occurred in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in heavy pot gear
- Any increase in rope will be an increase in threat

COLLABORATORS

Bar Harbor Whale Watch, Blue Ocean Society, Boston Harbor Cruises, Brier Island Whale and Seabird Cruises, Cap'n Fishes Whale Watch, Campobello Whale Rescue Team, Canadian Whale Institute, Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance, Cape May Whale Watch, Captain Bill and Sons Whale Watch, Center for Coastal Studies, Coastwise Consulting, College of the Atlantic, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Dolphin Fleet, Duke Marine Lab, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Grand Manan Whale and Seabird Research Station, Granite State Whale Watch, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution, Hyannis Whale Watcher, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Maine Department of Marine Resources, Maine Lobstermen's Association, Maine Marine Patrol, Marine Animal Response Society, Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program, Marine Mammals of Maine, Marine Mammal Stranding Center, Marine Resources Council, Marineland Right Whale Project, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, Massachusetts Environmental Police, Massachusetts Environmental Trust, Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Marine Sanctuaries, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, New England Aquarium, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, Plymouth Whale Watch, Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife, Riverhead Foundation, Sea to Shore Alliance, Sea Tow, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Transport Canada, United States Coast Guard, University of North Carolina, Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.



In fond memory of Joe Howlett

