Pelagic Longline Closed Area and Gear Restricted Area Issues and Options

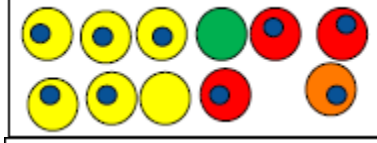
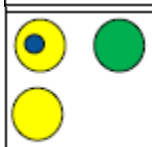
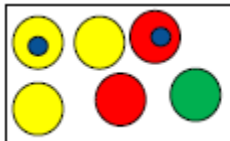
Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel Meeting
September 2017

Background Issues

- Time/Area closures created in 1999 and 2000/2001 to reduce bycatch
  - 1999: June Northeast – bluefin tuna
  - 2000/2001: East Florida Coast, DeSoto Canyon, Charleston Bump – juvenile swordfish, billfish, sharks
  - NMFS has little, or no, data on catches and catch rates from the time/area closures since implementation
- Gear Restricted Areas (GRAs) established in Amendment 7 (A7) in 2015 to reduce BFT catch
  - Cape Hatteras: qualified access; Gulf of Mexico
  - NMFS committed to review GRA efficacy in 3-Year Review
- Since A7: Increased individual vessel accountability but… decreasing PLL effort and swordfish landings
- Commitment to revitalizing U.S. swordfish fishery
- Area management identified as Priority at the Spring 2017 AP meeting

Spring 2017 AP Feedback

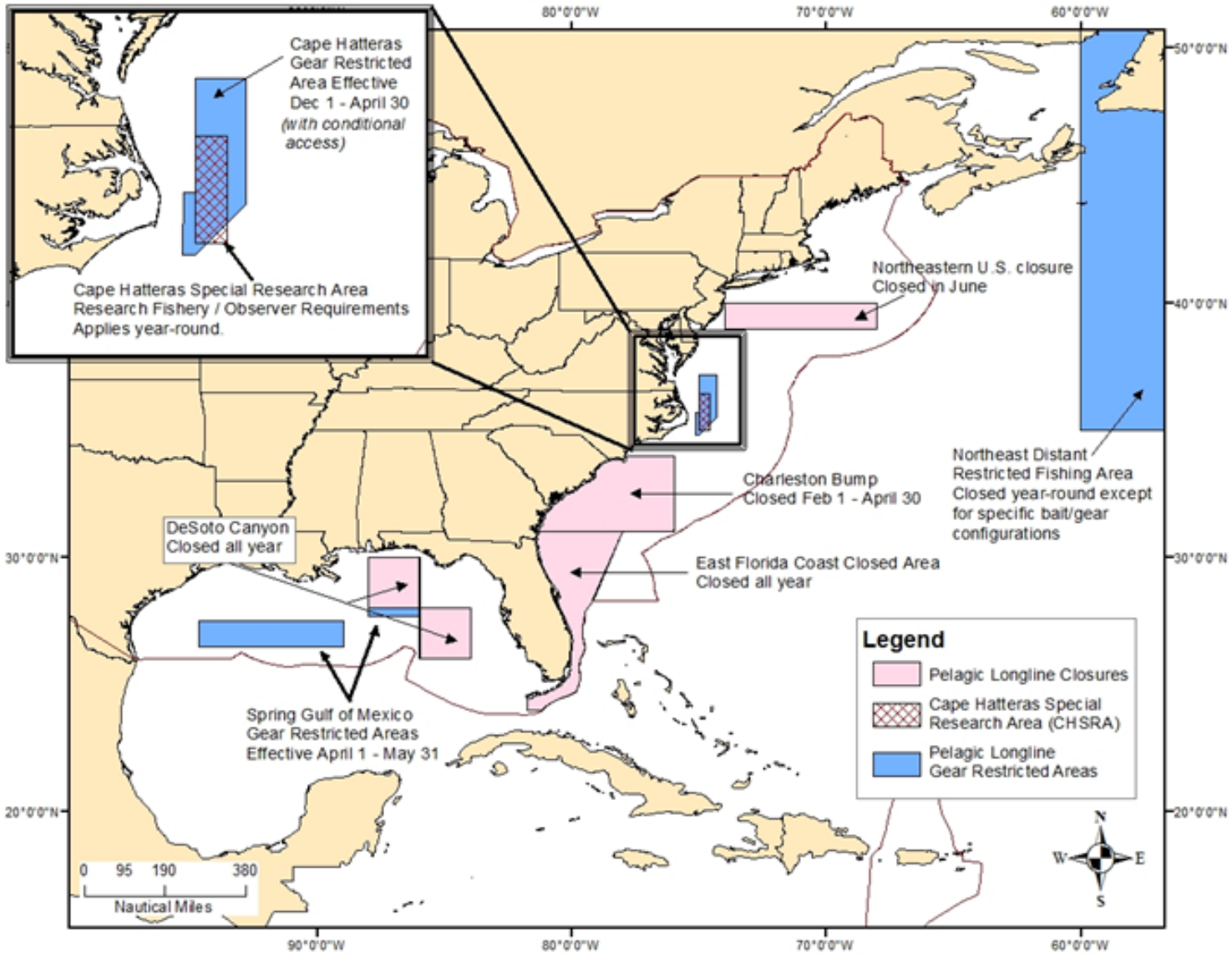
Yellow is Commercial; Green is State/Council/Commission; Red is Academic; Orange is Environmental; Blue is Recreational (no dots); inner dot is priority

	Revise/remove time/area closures to increase access to fishing grounds, especially access to Charleston Bump
	Remove June Northeast Closure as redundant with IBQ requirements
	Revisit the Draft A7 alternative to allow access to closed areas when an observer is onboard
	Revise or remove regulations impacting ability to catch sword-fish quota
	Expand temporal/spatial boundaries of A7 Gulf of Mexico closure (BFT)

Area-Based Management History

Year Implemented	Management Measure	Timing	Objectives
1999	Northeastern U.S.	June	Reduce discards of bluefin tuna
2000	VMS	Year-round	Compliance with time/area closures, and now, GRA boundaries
2000	DeSoto Canyon	Year-round	Reduce bycatch and incidental catch of overfished and protected species (particularly juvenile swordfish, as well as billfish, bluefin tuna, and sea turtles)
2001	East Florida Coast (EFC)	Year-round	
2001	Charleston Bump (CHB)	February-April	
2008	EFP for research in the EFC and CHB	3-year study	Investigate catch and bycatch rates between the closed areas and open areas
2015	Cape Hatteras and Gulf of Mexico GRA	December-April; April-May	Reduce interactions of bluefin tuna
2017	EFP for research in the EFC	Authorized for 1-year	Investigate catch and bycatch rates between the closed area and open area

Current PLL Closed Areas and GRAs



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Potential Management Options for Current PLL Closed Areas

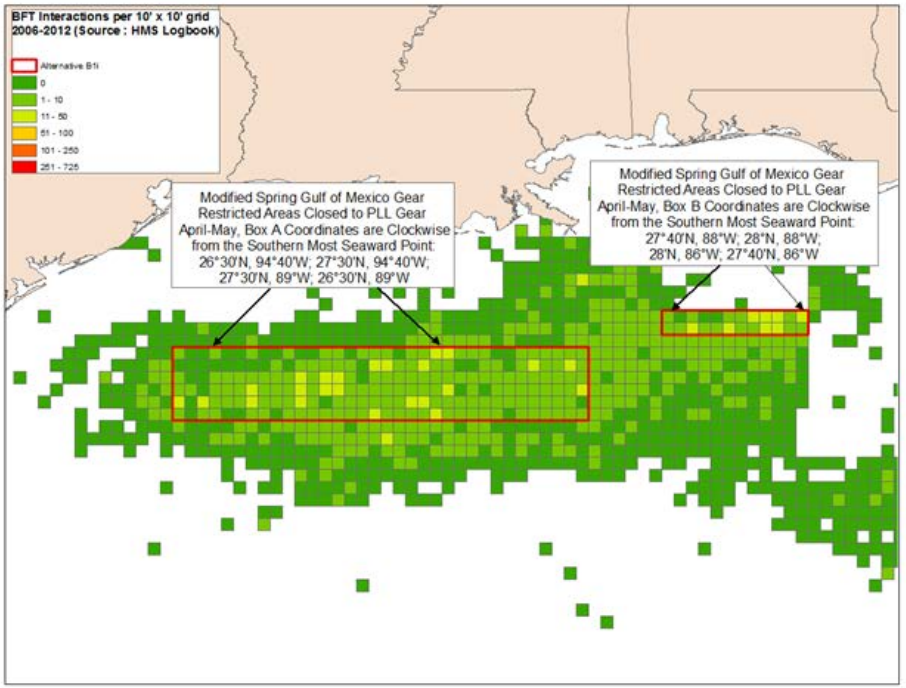
Management Option	Description
Status quo	Maintain current regulations for the Northeastern U.S., DeSoto Canyon, East Coast Florida, and Charleston Bump closed areas
Exempted Fishing Permits	Issue EFPs to interested researchers to work with PLL vessels to fish in current closed areas and evaluate catches and catch rates
Research Fishery	As in the shark research fishery, solicit applications from fishermen and issue research permits for data collection in closed areas with 100% observer coverage
Observer-based access	Grant PLL vessels access to closed areas when an observer is onboard and consistent with IBQ Program requirements
Conditional access	As in the Cape Hatteras GRA, establish performance criteria for qualified PLL vessels to access closed areas
Bycatch caps	PLL vessels can access closed areas while within bycatch caps (e.g., for protected species, prohibited species, bluefin tuna, or juvenile target species)
Open portions of or entire area	Reduce the extent of closed areas, or open them entirely
Other	?

Pros and Cons of Potential Options for Current PLL Closed Areas

Management Option	Pros	Cons
Status quo	Successfully limiting bycatch of juvenile swordfish, billfish, bluefin tuna, protected species	May limit swordfish landings; viewed by industry as unnecessary given other bycatch reduction measures
Exempted Fishing Permits	Limits scope of access; would support scientific data collection; ability to set terms/conditions on monitoring, catches, reporting, etc	Observer costs; increased coordination with researchers for vessel owners; increase in monitoring costs
Research Fishery	Controlled access for subset of fleet; would support scientific data collection; would allow for the entire fleet to apply; could also have specific terms and conditions	Observer costs; increase in monitoring cost
Observer-based access	Controlled access for the entire fleet	Observer costs; Could preclude small vesssels unable to take and observer
Conditional access	Allows access to subset of fleet with high performance; provides added incentive for compliance	Administrative burden, not all vessels would qualify
Bycatch caps	More targeted approach to limiting bycatch of certain species	Difficult to quantify appropriate caps; would require some catch data
Open portions of or entire area	Least restrictive	Controversial, removes some bycatch reduction measures

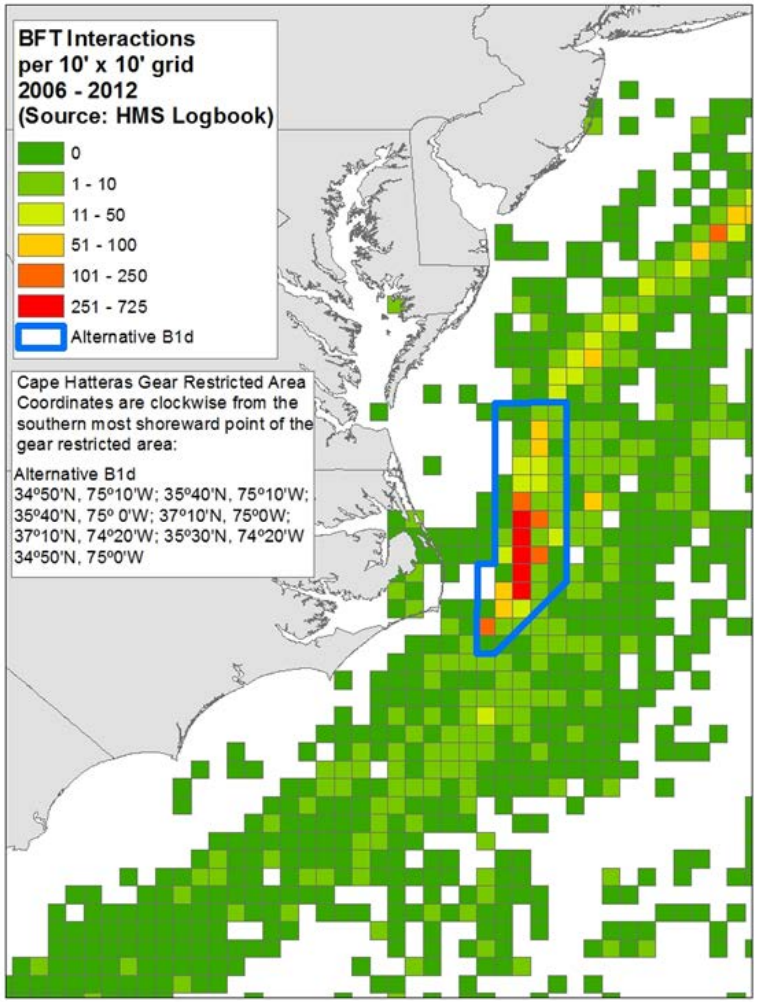
Current PLL GRAs: Gulf of Mexico

- Two areas with consistent interactions with bluefin by PLL vessels over time
- Closed to all vessels fishing PLL gear from April 1 - May 31
- No performance metrics



Current PLL GRAs: Cape Hatteras

- High concentration of bluefin interactions in the area by a small number of vessels
- Vessels with high bluefin interactions and/or poor compliance with regulations cannot fish PLL gear from December 1 - April 30
- 101 out of 108 active vessels qualified for access in 2016/2017 under performance metrics



Pros and Cons of Potential Options for Current GRAs

Consideration	Pros	Cons
Adjustments to GRAs (timing, boundaries)	• Could respond to changes (spatial and time-wise), if any, for BFT interactions with PLL gear • May give more flexibility to the fleet; more reliance on individual accountability	Incorrect adjustments may result in: • ↑ negative socio-econ impacts • ↑ bluefin tuna interactions if shifts have occured
Change / apply performance metrics	• Adaptability / flexibility to changes in the fishery • Could ↑ avoidance	• Need time to improve compliance w/ existing metrics • May not work in GOM due to many vessels interacting with bluefin tuna • ↑ administrative burden of adding new metric to criteria
Add additional EM performance metric – hard drive submission time	• Consistent with goal to analyze “reporting” data streams	• ↑ administrative burden of adding new metric to criteria

Next Steps?

- Are there other options NMFS should consider for current closed areas and/or GRAs?

- Should NMFS pursue regulatory changes?
  Likely next step would be an Issues/Options Scoping document with public comment

- Should NMFS pursue non-regulatory options (e.g, data collection, research)?

Questions? Comments?

For further information, please contact Craig Cockrell or Carrie Soltanoff, craig.cockrell@noaa.gov, carrie.soltanoff@noaa.gov, 301-427-8503; or Jennifer Cudney, jennifer.cudney@noaa.gov, 727-824-5399