

# Longline hooking of false killer whale could close fishing grounds



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By Ben Gutierrez | March 7, 2013 at 1:58 AM HST - Updated June 30 at 9:35 AM



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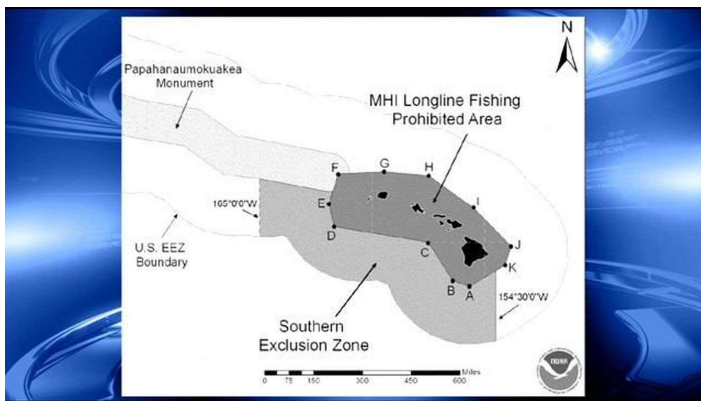


A false killer whale

The industry uses longlines to catch ahi tuna, but the lines have occasionally snared false killer whales. There are only some 1,500 of them in offshore waters, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service, which said



Lisa Van Atta



the hooking happened January 29th and likely resulted in the death of the animal.

Under a protection plan that took effect just last November, another fatal hooking will mean the loss of 17 percent of Hawaiian waters that can be used for fishing.

"So in the terms of those plans, if there's a second interaction, then yes, what we call the southern exclusion zone will be closed for the remainder of the calendar year," said Lisa Van Atta, the Fisheries Service assistant regional administrator for protected resources.

The Fisheries Service also implemented new rules, require longline fishers to use weaker hooks that can still catch ahi tuna. "The idea behind that is that if the whale can straighten the hook and get off the line and be released, then it may not be a serious injury. Maybe some sort of an injury, but not an injury that would lead to mortality," said Van Atta.

However, those rules took effect after January's fatal hooking. "It's only last week that fishers are required to use what are called weak hooks and strong lines to make sure that false killer whales that do get hooked can pull themselves free," said David Henkin, an attorney for the environmental group Earthjustice.

The group had filed suit to protect the false killer whales, which are dying faster than they can be replaced.

Henkin also noted that there was a Fisheries Service observer aboard the fishing boat where the hooking occurred. "The National Marine Fisheries Service only puts one observer on every five boats. So a lot of deaths and interactions could be happening out there on the high seas that are completely unobserved," he said.



David Henkin

The rules were developed by the Fisheries Service, conservation groups and the fishing industry itself, so having a fatal hooking so early in the year is not good. "The hookings are bad news for the false killer whales, but they're also bad news for the fishermen," said Henkin, who added that the rules are not meant to put fishers out of business. "So we have to get together on this, that we implement the plan and make it work."

Van Atta and Henkin both said all sides will discuss the rules and whether they are working in a conference call later this week.

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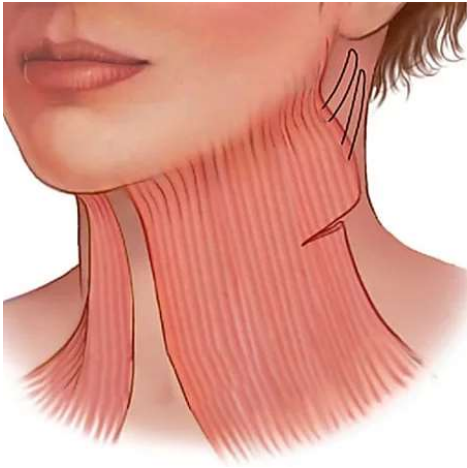
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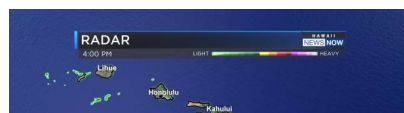
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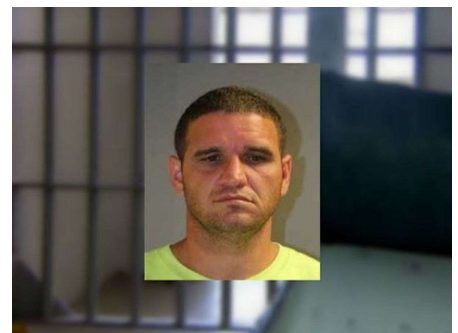
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