



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Office of the Chief Information Officer

Washington, D.C. 20230

OCT 09 2008

Ms. Susan E. Dudley
Administrator
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
Office of Management and Budget
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Ms. Dudley:

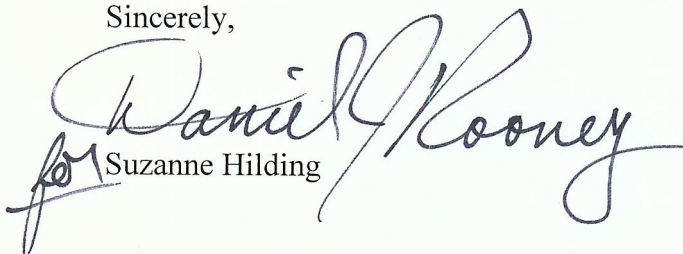
The Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) would appreciate your consideration in conducting an emergency review of an information collection request for the provisions proposed under a final rule entitled, "Endangered Fish and Wildlife; Final Rule to Implement Speed Restrictions to Reduce the Threat of Ship Collisions with North Atlantic Right Whales."

The North Atlantic right whale is a highly depleted species, only about 300 exist. Collisions with vessels (i.e., "ship strikes") are a major cause of serious injury and death, and therefore are the greatest threat to the species. Thus far, nineteen known ship strikes-related right whale deaths occurred between 1986 and 2005; the actual number is almost certainly higher as not all carcasses are detected. The evidence implicates vessel speed as a primary factor in the strikes and indicates that the occurrence and severity of ship strikes can be reduced if vessels are traveling ten knots or less.

This rule would implement speed restrictions of no more than ten knots applying to all vessels 65 ft (19.8 m) or greater, in overall length, in certain locations and at certain times of the year along the east coast of the U.S. Atlantic seaboard. The rule provides an exemption from the speed restrictions if a vessel is in an area where oceanographic, hydrographic and/or meteorological conditions severely restrict the maneuverability of the vessel. If a deviation from the ten-knot speed limit is necessary, the reasons for the deviation, the speed at which the vessel is operated, the latitude and longitude of the area, and the time and duration of such deviation shall be entered into the logbook of the vessel. This information collection would aid in enforcement of the rule and provide an exemption for inclement conditions.

To assure that the collection of information is cleared as close as possible to the publication of the final rule, we are requesting review approval by October 20, 2008.

Sincerely,


for Suzanne Hilding