

## **BLOCKING CONSERVATION MEASURES FOR NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALES**

Failed: 84-345

### **SUMMARY:**

The House rejected an amendment that would have prohibited the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) from using a science-based, stakeholder-driven decision support tool for conservation and protection of the critically imperiled North Atlantic right whale. The amendment would have effectively blocked vital new right whale protections under development by NMFS. (*June 20, 2019, Roll Call No. 372*)

### **BACKGROUND:**

The critically endangered North Atlantic right whale is one of our country's most iconic marine mammal species, connecting all Americans living along the East Coast. However, there are less than 400 right whales remaining on earth, and in the last two years alone 30 have died. Entanglements in fishing gear and lobster and crab pot lines, as well as ship strikes, are the two greatest threats to right whale survival and have reduced the average lifespan from 70 or more years to only 30 to 40 years. Tragically, 85% of all right whales bear the scars to show they have been entangled at least once in their lifetime. To make matters worse, less than 95 females of reproductive age remain in the population and they are having fewer calves each year. If deaths continue to outnumber births, the North Atlantic right whale will be effectively extinct within our lifetime.

As mandated by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), NMFS employs Take Reduction Teams composed of scientists, fisherman, and federal and state fishery managers, to develop consensus plans to mitigate the risk to marine mammals posed by fishing gear and other human sources of mortality. In April 2019, the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (TRT) released their recommendations to NMFS to reduce human-caused activities decimating the right whale population. The measures proposed by the TRT meeting were drafted with and fully supported by all representatives of the fishing industry that sit on the team. NMFS is currently working on a proposed rule to implement solutions recommended by the TRT in order to reverse the North Atlantic right whale's trajectory toward extinction.

Reps. Golden (D-Maine) and Pingree (D-Maine) offered an amendment to H.R. 3055, the FY 19 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Bill to prevent NMFS from proceeding on the proposed rulemaking process to implement the consensus recommendations. The amendment would have potentially undermined right whale protection across the board, including on seismic oil and gas exploration and other issues. The amendment would have set a dangerous precedent for other species and fisheries around the country, while undermining the science-based decision-making process embodied in the Endangered Species Act and the MMPA.

### **OUTCOME:**

On June 20, 2019, the House rejected the Golden/Pingree amendment, 84-345. "No" was the pro-conservation vote.