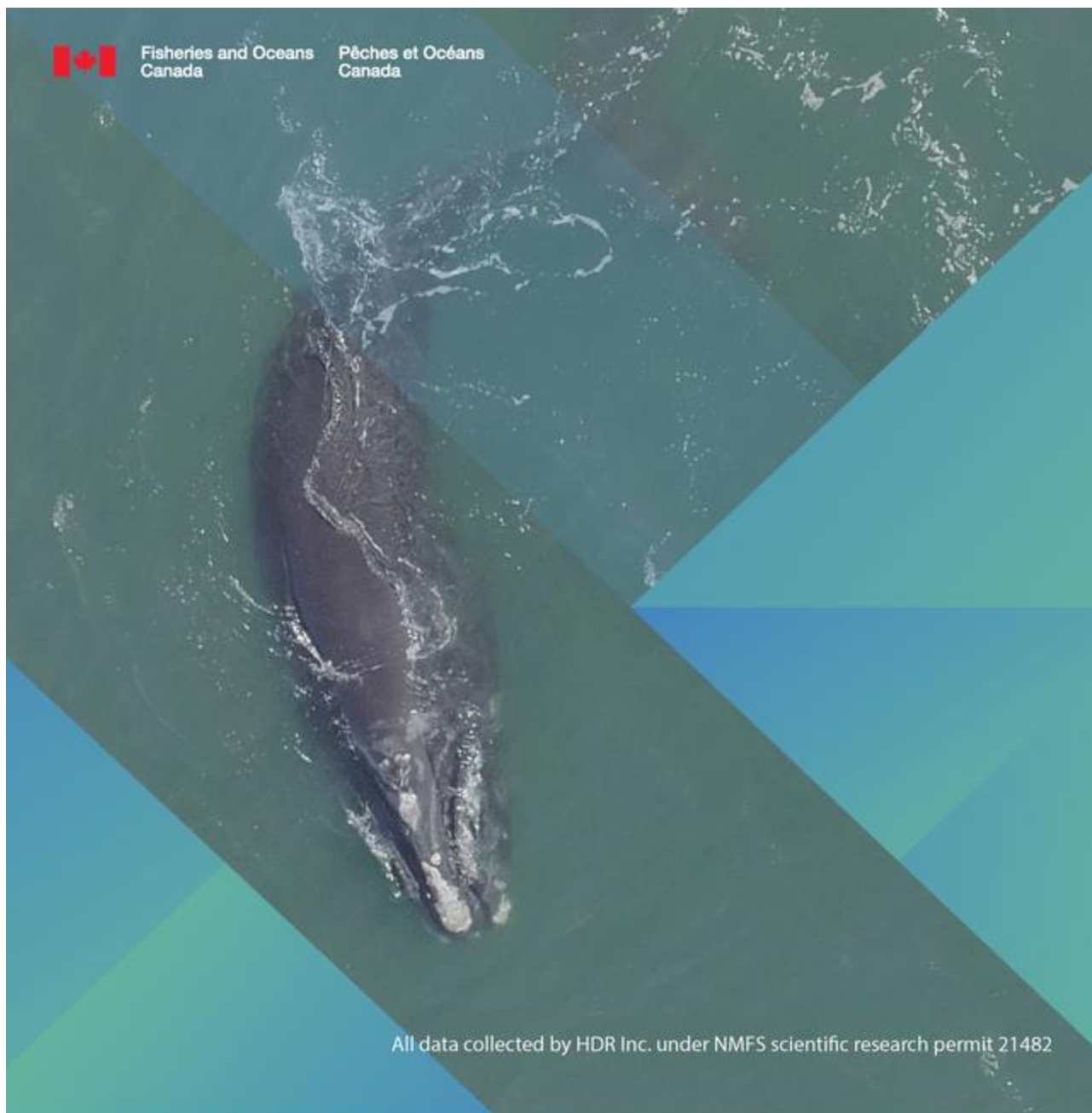




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All data collected by HDR Inc. under NMFS scientific research permit 21482

Gear Analysis of North Atlantic Right Whale Eg #5132

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Gear Analysis of North Atlantic Right Whale Eg #5132

Executive summary

An aerial survey team spotted North Atlantic Right Whale #5132 entangled in fishing gear 110 km off the coast of North Carolina on December 16, 2024. The juvenile 3-year old male was observed with rope wrapped around its head and mouth, with lines attached to two marked buoys and a single line was trailing the animal by a distance of about three body lengths. Eg #5132 was last seen gear free in the Bay of Fundy on October 21, 2024.

The vessel registration number photographed on the aerial observed buoys permitted the identification of the owner of the gear. On December 2, two surface buoys with the same identification markings and sections of a buoy line were reported missing by a Canadian lobster harvester that had set a 25-pot lobster trawl in the Bay of Fundy. Although no gear was retrieved from the whale, DFO has completed this gear analysis based on photographs provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and discussion with the Canadian harvester.

Available evidence indicates the 3 year-old male became entangled in actively fished gear in Lobster Fishing Area 38 equipped with a plastic oval weak link (low breaking-strength gear modification). As no gear was retrieved, DFO cannot confirm whether other fishing gear was also involved in the entanglement.

Conclusion of gear origin: Based on available evidence, the gear photographed in this entanglement has been attributed to Lobster Fishing Area 38 (LFA 38) (Bay of Fundy).

Event details

- **ID and/or Date:** December 16, 2024
- **Event type** (stranding, death, disentanglement): Aerial observation of entangled whale in US waters (Figs. 1 and 2)
- **Species:** North Atlantic right whale
- **Last seen gear free:** October 21, 2024 in the Bay of Fundy
- **Entanglement Status:** Eg #5132 was resighted entangled in Cape Cod Bay on April 24, 2025 and on May 27, 2025 in the area of des Escoumins in the St. Lawrence Estuary.
- **Conclusion of gear origin:** Lobster Fishing Area 38 (Bay of Fundy) (based on available photographic evidence)
- **Active or ghost gear:** Gear was being actively used for fishing, based on lost gear report and conversation with harvester.
- **Harvester submitted lost gear report:** Yes

Recovered gear

No gear was retrieved from the entangled whale. All analysis is based on photographs provided by the NOAA and discussion with the harvester.

Contact with harvester

A description of the missing gear was recorded during conversations between DFO's Fishing Gear Specialist and the harvester on January 31 and February 5, 2025. The information below is based on this dialogue as no gear has been recovered from Eg #5132 as of May 30, 2025. The harvester was retrieving a 25-pot lobster trawl in LFA 38 on December 2 and discovered missing the top section of one of the two 720 ft (220 m) buoy lines.

Lost gear

- **Lost Floats and connecting rope:** The primary buoy that was missing was a HL3 buoy (74.5 cm length) and the missing secondary buoy was a HL2 (62 cm) Norwegian Low Drag Buoy. Each was marked with the name of the vessel and its registration number. Sixty feet (18 m) of 7/16 inch diameter sink (negatively buoyant) rope containing beaded lead in each strand connected the two missing buoys.
- **Lost Traps:** None
- **Lost Trap tags:** None
- **Lost Buoy line:** 240 ft (73 m) of rope from the primary buoy to the parted section of the buoy line was reported missing. This was comprised of 180 ft (55 m) of 3/8 inch float (positively buoyant) rope followed by a spliced in 60 ft (18 m) section of 7/16 inch float rope.
- **Line Markings:** Pre-marked ropes with yellow and black yarns in one strand and black yarns on a second strand were present in each of the ropes making up the buoy line. These are used to identify the fishery of origin (Maritimes Region - black, lobster – yellow and LFA 38 – black).
- **Weak Link Present:** Yes (Maine Mold)
- **Location of Weak Link:** A black plastic Maine Mold weak link (Fig. 3) was located 1/3 the distance from the primary buoy towards one of the trawl's anchors. This was added by the harvester to each buoy line prior to the November 12 start of the fishing season to be compliant with his Conditions of Licence issued by DFO.
- **Method of Attachment:** Lazy man splices with four tucks were used to attach two ropes to the inner ring of a Maine Mold link having an opening that can accommodate up to two ½ inch diameter ropes. A 60 ft (18 m) section of 7/16 inch float rope was attached to the top section of the link. An 180 ft section of 7/16 inch float rope was attached to the bottom section of the oval weak link and this was spliced into a 300 ft (91 m) length of ½ inch float rope that was attached to the anchor. These two lengths of recovered rope of the altered buoy line summed to 480 ft (146 m) and with the torn weak link were last to be hauled in by the harvester when retrieving this trawl on December 2. Within the same haul, the harvester brought on board 25 lobster traps, two anchors, groundline and the other buoy line with its intact weak link and two floats.
- **Weak Link Parted:** Yes
- **Description of Weak Link:** The harvester stated that one end of the oval ring was torn open (the end marked top). This is consistent with the appearance of a parted plastic oval weak link. Unfortunately, the harvester did not retain the broken weak link.

Contact with disentanglement team

Not applicable.

Method of initial entanglement

The method of initial entanglement was in the top section of one of the two buoy lines in the trawl. The harvester retrieved all 25 pots and groundlines and he noted an unchanged alignment of the traps along the seafloor set at a water depth of ~480 ft (~146 m) over the short duration of 1 or 2 days it was being fished.

Related information

- [Eastern Canada Mandatory Colour Scheme for non-tended, fixed gear fisheries](#)
- [NOAA Gear Marking for Northeast Lobster/Jonah Crab Trap Pots](#)

Photos of gear/entanglement

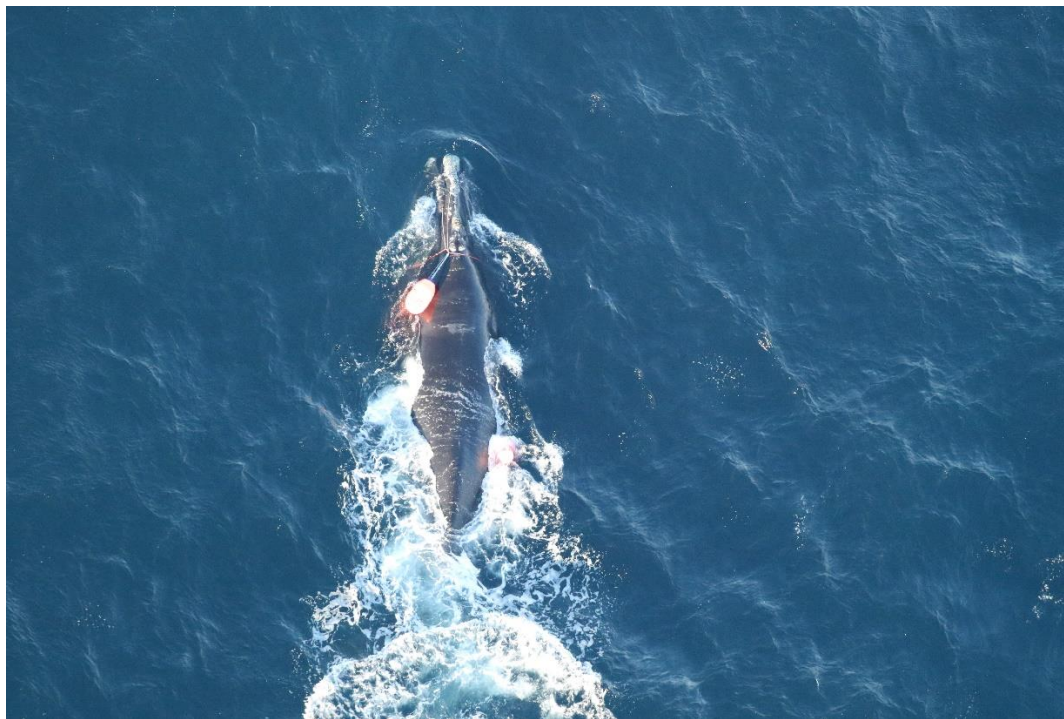


Fig. 1. Aerial view close up of entangled North Atlantic right whale #5132 entangled in fishing gear 110 km off the coast of North Carolina on Dec. 16, 2024 (Photo credit: Clearwater Marine Aquarium Research Institute).



Fig. 2. Aerial view from a distance of North Atlantic right whale #5132 entangled in fishing gear 110 km off the coast of North Carolina on December 16, 2024 (Photo credit: Clearwater Marine Aquarium Research Institute).



Fig. 3. An example of a Maine Mold weak link inserted in a buoy line with lazy man splices using several tucks (Photo credit: E. Trippel).