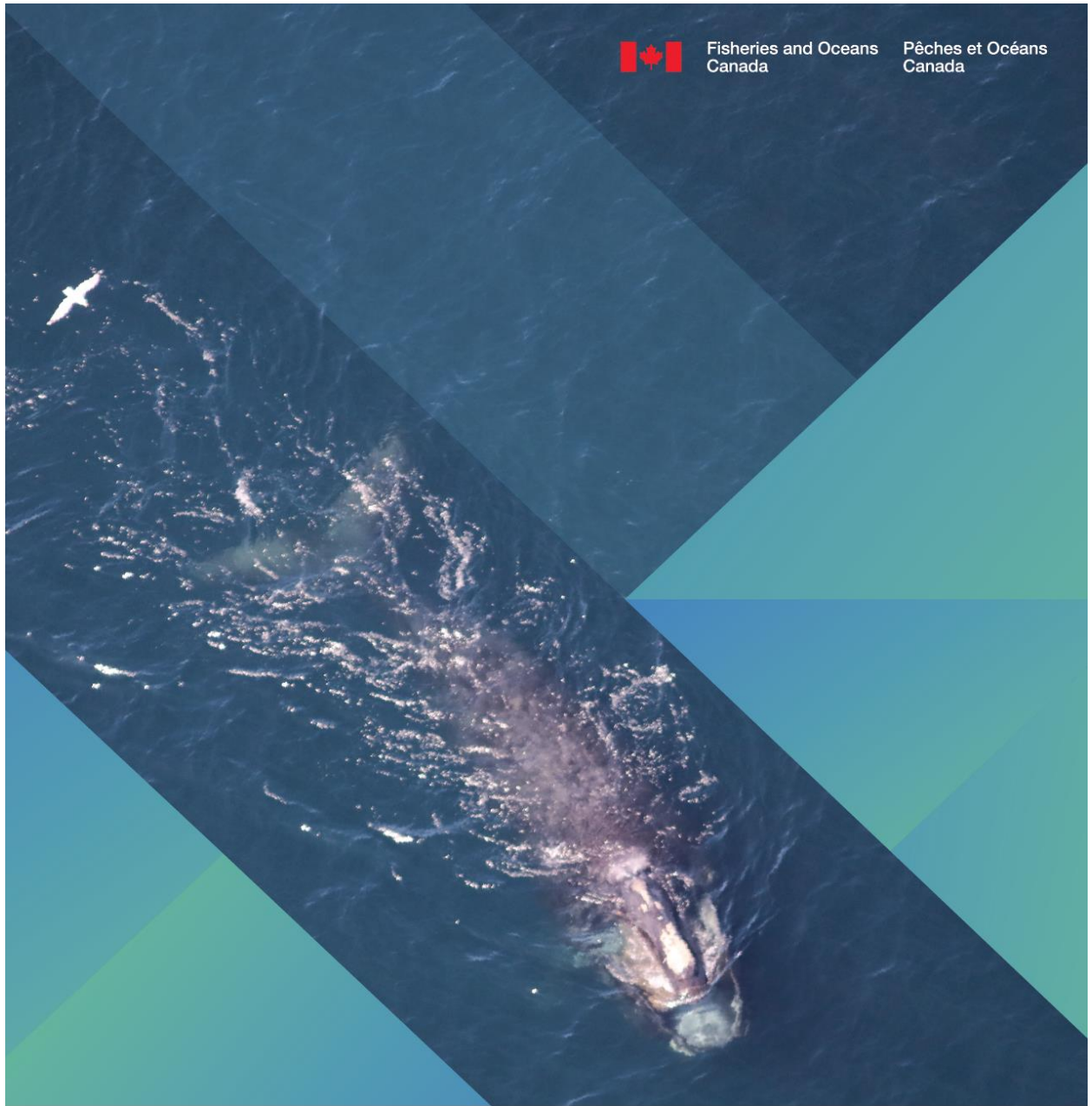




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Recovered Gear Analysis of North Atlantic Right Whale Argo Eg #1218

Photo Credit: NOAA NEFSC Alison Ogilvie

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Gear Recovered from North Atlantic Right Whale Argo Eg #1218

Executive summary

Two lobster traps and 44 m of rope (Fig. 1) were removed from Argo (Eg #1218), a 42-year-old male, by a multi-group United States (U.S.) response team off Surf City, North Carolina during the period of January 28 and 29, 2023. Analysis of recovered gear was jointly undertaken by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on April 18, 2023. Purple tags for Canadian Lobster Fishing Area (LFA) 33 were present on the gear. The harvester reported the gear lost on December 7, 2022, and follow-up confirmed that the traps were part of an initial 15-pot trawl that was actively being fished.

Conclusion of gear origin: LFA 33 (southwest Nova Scotia).

Event details

- **ID and/or Date:** January 28-29, 2023
- **Type** (stranding, death, disentanglement): Disentanglement in U.S. waters
- **Species:** North Atlantic right whale
- **Last seen gear free:** May 26, 2022, in the Great South Channel, U.S.
- **Status:** Nearly all the gear was removed from the whale.
- **Conclusion of gear origin:** LFA 33 (southwest Nova Scotia)
- **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

- **Buoys:** None
- **Traps:** Two blue lobster traps, partially crushed (122 x 61 x 38 cm) (Fig. 1).
- **Trap tags:** An LFA 33 purple tag (Fig. 2) with 7-digit number was attached to each trap that identifies licence holder. Purple tags were issued for the 2022-23 fishing season that began on November 28, 2022.
- **Buoy line:** None
- **Ground line:** In total, 44 m of half-inch rope was recovered. Half-inch light green float (positively buoyant) rope comprised the ground line. Half-inch light gray float line comprised each gangion (rope from ground line to each trap bridle). Bridles were comprised of half-inch blue rope. Several splices existed in the ground line and may have been remnant locations where previous gangions were attached.
- **Line markings:** Coloured twines interlaced among rope strands were not present. However, a variety of colours of integrated yarns (tracers) were present. Some rope sections had a combination of yellow/black tracers and some sections only orange tracers (Figs. 3 and 4). The marking observed on the short sections (gangions) with a yellow/black combination on a single strand with no other colours was required by LFA 34 harvesters in their buoy lines beginning in

the 2020 fishing season. Pre-marked rope with coloured tracers for LFA 33 require yellow/black on one strand and orange on a second strand (no other tracers permitted). However, the Conditions of Licence for gear marking only apply to the buoy line. These tracers were in the gangions.

Contact with harvester

Harvester set a 15-pot lobster trawl on December 5, 2022 and reported a portion of it lost to DFO on December 7, 2022: 220 m of rope, one yellow buoy, and 11 traps. The harvester hauled 4 of their initial 15 traps, and 2 of their lost 11 traps were recovered off Argo 53 days later. The harvester noted they had never seen their hauled rope frayed and torn like that before. In addition, the trawl's direction had shifted from southwest to west.

Method of initial entanglement

The method of initial entanglement is inconclusive based on the recovered gear and conversation with harvester. Positively buoyant ground line was recovered off the whale, though this is not conclusive evidence that the whale first came in contact with the ground line. The harvester reported a missing buoy line; it is possible the whale first came in contact with the buoy line in the water column rather than the ground line.

Related information

- [Eastern Canada Mandatory Colour Scheme for non-tended, fixed gear fisheries](#)
- [NOAA Gear Marking for Northeast Lobster/Jonah Crab Trap Pots](#)
- [NOAA - 2023 Argo Gear Analysis Report](#)

Photos of inspected gear



Fig. 1. Gear removed from Argo laid out in the NOAA Gear Warehouse in Narragansett, Rhode Island.



Fig. 2. LFA 33 purple coloured tags that were attached to the lobster traps recovered from Argo. The 32 is used to identify tag manufacturer and does not represent LFA 32.



Fig. 3. Half-inch rope with yellow and black tracer on the same strand.



Fig. 4. A gangion attachment site to ground line on gear removed from Argo. The lower rope (ground line) has orange tracers and the upper rope (gangion) has yellow and black tracers.