

Response to CEQ Question about Right Whales and Ship Strike Reduction
14 November 2007

Question. The Washington Post article asserted that the rule protecting from the shore outward was especially necessary because cows are more likely to be found closer to shore. Is it true that cows are more likely to be found closer to shore than male NARWs? What does the data show?

Response. First, a reminder that terms such as “close to shore” and “near shore” mean within 30 miles in typical oceanographic contexts.

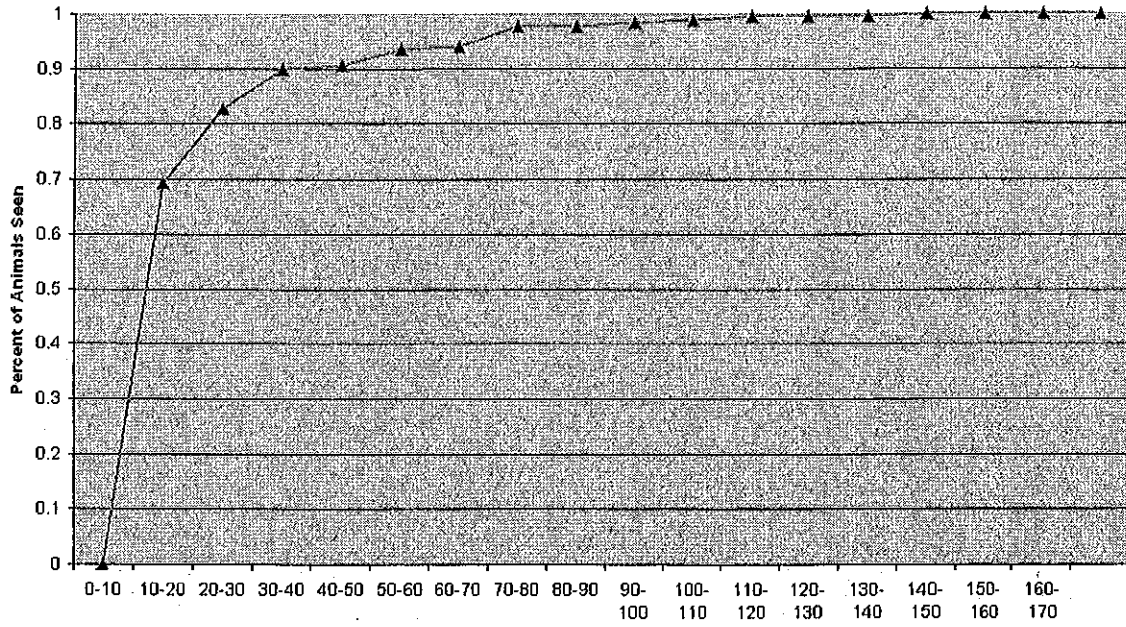
These questions apply only to waters off the U.S. mid-Atlantic (MAUS) and, to some extent, the southeast U.S. (SEUS). In waters off the northeast U.S. (NEUS), which is a feeding area, right whale distribution is broad and there are no known differences in distribution by gender.

Most right whale sighting information is derived primarily from aircraft; ship-based surveys secondarily. Although possible, it is not always feasible to discern gender from these survey platforms – except when it is inferred (a female) by the presence of a calf. Having said that, the portion of the population using the SEUS calving/nursery areas are primarily pregnant females or cows and calves. In the MAUS, they are found to occur primarily within 30 miles of the shore (see attached). Migration south along the eastern seaboard is primarily pregnant females headed to the SEUS calving/nursery areas, and cows with calves moving north along the same corridor.

From a recovery standpoint, females are the most valuable to the population.

It is around major ports along the seaboard that the confluence of migrating whales and high vessel density occurs, and the regulations are tied directly to these co-occurrences.

Cumulative Distribution of Right Whales Observed by Distance from Shore
South Carolina to Connecticut for 1972 to 2000



Right Whales Observed By Distance From Shore
South Carolina to Connecticut for 1972-2000

