



# NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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## **NOAA SEEKS PUBLIC COMMENT ON RESEARCH IN CLOSED AREAS**

NOAA Fisheries Service invites the public to comment on an Environmental Assessment to conduct research with a limited number of pelagic longline vessels in two areas of the South East Atlantic Ocean that have been closed to fishing since 2001.

“In less than a decade, we have nearly rebuilt swordfish and dramatically reduced bycatch of sea turtles and other species by requiring that pelagic longline fishermen use new fishing techniques,” said William T. Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service. “Now it is time for us to examine whether these techniques can be used in the closed areas with the same success.”

Because these areas have been closed to pelagic longline fishing since 2001, the agency does not have baseline data on how effective several newly introduced fishing measures designed to reduce the unintended catch of sea turtles and other non-target species would be in portions of the East Florida Coast and Charlestown Bump areas. The proposed research would be conducted under strict scientific protocols using a limited number of vessels (approximately two) with 100 percent observer coverage.

In 2004, NOAA required pelagic longline vessels to use specific circle hooks and baits designed to reduce bycatch of sea turtles and other non-target species. The regulations also required certain types of release equipment be used to remove fishing gear from any animals captured incidentally. These measures have significantly reduced the unintended catch of sea turtles or their deaths and have likely aided in the rebuilding of swordfish – one of the great successes of fishery management of a highly migratory species.

“We are hopeful that these new fishing methods will significantly reduce bycatch in the closed areas as well,” Hogarth said. “This research is designed to answer that question.”

NMFS will accept comments on the Environmental Assessment and proposed research until Nov. 20, 2007. To read the EA, go to [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/breaking\\_news.htm](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/breaking_news.htm). Comments can be addressed to: Chris Rilling, NOAA Fisheries, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or at 301-713-2347.

Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries Service, please visit: [www.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov).

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