



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE ISSUES RULE TO IMPROVE SEA TURTLE BYCATCH MONITORING

NOAA Fisheries Service issued a rule under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) today to require fishing vessels in designated fisheries to take observers on board to help collect information on bycatch of sea turtles. Collected information from the observers helps better protect sea turtles from being injured or killed in fishing nets. All sea turtles in the United States are listed as endangered or threatened. Thousands die each year as a result of getting entangled in fishing gear.

“We’re issuing this rule to increase our ability to protect sea turtles, and to restore their populations,” said Dr. Bill Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries Service Director. “Observers collect key scientific information that we need to minimize bycatch in our fisheries. This information also helps us carry out our obligations under the ESA.”

NOAA Fisheries Service will be better positioned to address the sea turtle bycatch problem in the future as a result of the observer rule. Observers will help determine whether existing measures to reduce sea turtle bycatch are working, or whether new or additional measures are needed. The rule will apply to designated fishing vessels operating in both state and federal waters, and to designated U.S. fishing vessels on the high seas.

Current regulations under the Endangered Species Act allow NOAA Fisheries Service to place observers on vessels on a short-term basis in response to an emergency event, such as a mass sea turtle stranding. However, these limited, temporary observer requirements do not enable the agency to collect comprehensive information on all sea turtle-fishery interactions of concern. The new rule allows NOAA Fisheries Service to identify potential sea turtle bycatch problems before they reach crisis levels, which could ultimately result in stricter management measures.

Under this rule, each year NOAA Fisheries Service will publish in the Federal Register a draft and final determination of fisheries it intends to monitor for sea turtle interactions. The determination will be based on the best available information regarding sea turtle-fishery interactions, sea turtle distribution or fishing gear characteristics.

The final rule can be found online at
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/turtles/regulations.htm>

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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.

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.

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On the Web:

Final Observer Rule: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/turtles/regulations.htm>

NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

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