



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 28, 2006

NEW SEA SCALLOP GEAR CHANGE WILL OFFER MORE PROTECTION FOR SEA TURTLES

NOAA Fisheries Service has announced a required change for sea scallop gear that will prevent sea turtles from entering dredges, where they can be injured or killed during fishing operations. All sea turtles in U.S. waters are listed as either endangered or threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act.

“Our research demonstrates that dredges properly modified with a chain mat will keep turtles out of the dredge bag where they may be caught and injured or killed,” said Mary Colligan, chief of the protected species division of NOAA Fisheries Service’s Northeast regional office.

Sea scallops are harvested mostly with dredges—a heavy bag made of steel rings attached to a steel frame at the front, and a bar at the back of the bag. The frame keeps the bag open, and the frame and bar maintain the bag’s shape as it drags along the ocean bottom. Turtles that enter the dredges can be injured or killed by physical trauma, drowning, or being dropped on the deck of a boat when the bag is hauled back and emptied.

The new modification is a "mat" placed across the dredge opening, made from both horizontal and vertical chains that are spaced widely enough to allow sea scallops to enter, but closely enough to prevent turtles from entering the bags.

Some operators are already using chain mats. Properly configured mats will now be required on all sea scallop dredges used by federal permit holders fishing in the mid-Atlantic from May 1 until November 30, when sea turtles are most likely to be in the area where sea scallops are operating. Turtle takes have not been documented elsewhere in the Northeast sea scallop fishery.

Field experiments were conducted with the chain mat under typical fishing conditions during 2003 and 2004 by vessels using one modified and one unmodified dredge at the same time. Eight turtle interactions were reported in 22 trips, all in the unmodified gear. Although overall there were slight reductions in the catch of sea scallops with the modified gear, the reduction was minimal and variable between vessels.

Sea scallop dredges may still injure or kill sea turtles that go under the heavy dredge frame. NOAA Fisheries Service is working with the scallop industry to support testing of other dredge designs that move turtles in the dredge path up and over the gear.

Preliminary results indicate that the new dredge design may reduce the number of turtles going under the dredge frame, and may modestly increase the sea scallop catch when compared to a standard sea scallop dredge.

In 2005, northeastern sea scallopers landed just over 56 million pounds of scallop meats worth \$432 million at first sale, according to NOAA preliminary estimates.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats 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.

In 2007 NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. Starting with the establishment of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA. The agency 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 60 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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For more on chain mat requirement: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/>
NOAA Fisheries Service bycatch website: www.nmfs.noaa.gov/bycatch.htm/
NOAA Fisheries Service, Northeast Region: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov>
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