

**Remarks by Dr. William Hogarth, Director
National Marine Fisheries Service**

**Sea Turtle Press Conference
National Press Club
Washington, D.C.
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Thanks, Rebecca. I appreciate you all coming today. It's not often we get people to come and talk about good news in fisheries, and so we're glad you all took the time today to come.

Rebecca has given you the importance of the sea turtle bycatch reduction devices that we've been working with, and now I'll talk a little bit about how important it is and why we feel like it's something that should be carried forward, both internally in domestic waters but also to foreign countries.

There is no doubt that when the Magnuson Act was passed in 1976 the fishery managers of the U.S. were told to try and get fisheries Americanized, and I think in doing this we tried to promote underutilized fisheries, get people to fish with various types of gear to get the fisheries Americanized. They were very effective at that, but in the process I think we forgot a little bit about conservation, and now we have to go back and look at the conservation measures and to make sure that we are managing our nation's living resources in a very effective and transparent matter.

We are now promoting sustainability, rebuilding our stocks, and protection of our nation's living resources, and the sea turtles are a very important part of this. In fact, since I've been working with the National Marine Fisheries Service, I've heard from constituents most about either sea turtles or sharks. I worked in the Highly Migratory Species Division for a number of years, and I kept a box at the end of my desk with cards I got from all over the country about sea turtles or marine mammals, stating, "you've got to protect them, you've got to protect them."

As Rebecca mentioned, we have six types of sea turtles that are now either threatened or endangered. One of them, the leatherback – the Pacific leatherback in particular – is in a very precarious position, and we have to do all we can to rebuild them. So we have to reduce all the threats – including fishing activities, but we also have to look at other harmful things that man does that impacts sea turtle populations and keeps us from rebuilding them.

The reason we called this press conference today is because the United States cannot tackle this alone. As Rebecca mentioned, we only have about 6 percent of the longline efforts in the world. We have fisheries shut down all around because of sea turtles. A swordfish fishery in Hawaii has been shut down for almost three years because of the sea turtle. We have problems with Northeast distant waters that we have to work with. We've shut down gill net Fisheries in North Carolina and in Virginia.

There are a number of things that we've done all around the country – we have issues with the fisheries off California right now. But we cannot just continue to close areas in the U.S. and expect to rebuild turtles. We have to go international, and we have to do this in any way that we can get it done, by education. We hope that the industry will be working with Congress to look at the same things that we've done for turtle excluder devices in the shrimp industry. If you do not use TEDs in the foreign fleets you cannot export shrimp to the U.S. I think our fishing industry could work with Congress on some of the same things for the international longline fleet. We'll be happy to work with them in this effort.

We can make a difference for the future sea turtles, and this has been proven. As you look around the room and see the results of our 3-year experiment, you'll find it has resulted in very significant achievements. We are reducing the take and mortality of turtles. There's no doubt about it; it cannot be denied. We are improving the selectivity of fishing gear, and we are exporting the technology to the rest of the world. We've already had workshops in Ecuador. At our last ICCAT meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas In Ireland in November, we got a resolution passed on sea turtles, and we exhibited this research for five days. There was a lot of interest in this technology by all the countries there.

And we are forging new – and to me the most exciting part – are unprecedented partnerships between the government, the industry, fishermen, and environmental advocates, and this has got to be done in this country if we want to make progress. We're going to have to do it as partners. And my goal as director of National Marine Fisheries Service is to make sure that we do this; we can sit down and work together.

So we are proud to stand here today and to make this announcement with Nelson Beideman, who is the executive director of one our country's largest longline fishing organizations, and Scott Burns, director of marine conservation programs for the World Wildlife Fund. I'd like to shake hands with both of you, if you'll come up right here. See, it's not often I get to stand and shake hands with these types of groups. I'm usually in the middle between environmental groups and the fishing industry, so today I want to take the opportunity to stand between them as partners in this. And thank you both for what you've done.

My message today is that if the National Marine Fisheries Service and all the groups that are willing to work cooperatively use our time and funding resources appropriately, we can and will find viable, practical solutions to our marine conservation challenges. It doesn't take an overhaul of all our systems, it doesn't take millions of dollars of reports; it takes getting in the field, working together, looking at the problems, and finding viable solutions.

In conclusion, sea turtles have been on the Earth longer than any of the humans, for over 150 million years. They have become icons in cultures around the world. They have been humanized in folklore, myths, religion, legends, science, literature, and even in cartoons. The turtle reduction achievements we are unveiling today, if utilized by longline fleets in every fishing nation, will help turtle populations recover and thrive. That's the important message today: we can recover these turtle populations. It will take all of us, internationally and domestically. We have the commitment from our industry here in the United States; now we've got to move forward, and you'll see that we'll be doing that a lot over the next few months.

I want to thank you all for coming. I hope that – it's somewhat difficult for us at times to get people to come and take the positive message, and this is a positive message for NOAA. Admiral Lautenbacher, the leader of NOAA, would like to have been here today. He is working with us everyday on bycatch. One of his priorities is reducing bycatch.

So now I'd like to thank all of you and invite Nelson to come up and make some comments and explain how we worked together to get this accomplished. The key word here is work together to get this done.