



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

## Reminder to All Atlantic Pelagic Longline Fishermen Participating in Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species

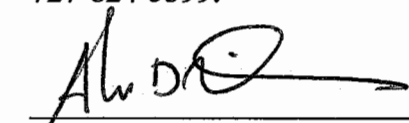
The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reminds all pelagic longline fishermen participating in Atlantic highly migratory species fisheries to possess and use sea turtle release and disentanglement gear, and to comply with safe handling and release protocols. The June 2004 Biological Opinion for the Atlantic pelagic longline fishery found that continued operation of this fishery jeopardizes the continued existence of leatherback sea turtles in the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea. To mitigate this threat, the Biological Opinion requires the fishery to limit its bycatch and bycatch mortality of Atlantic sea turtles. Failure to achieve certain benchmarks specified in the Biological Opinion, including the number of sea turtle interactions and their associated mortality, could result in the imposition of additional management measures on this fishery.

The safe removal of fishing gear from sea turtles prior to release is critical to their survival. Sea turtle mortality is estimated, in part, based upon the type, amount, and location of fishing gear that is remaining on released animals. Therefore, removing fishing gear from sea turtles reduces the estimated mortality of released animals. Releasing sea turtles without removing fishing hooks and lines results in higher estimates of mortality.

To achieve the necessary reductions in sea turtle interactions and mortalities contained in the June 2004 Biological Opinion, pelagic longline fishermen must possess and use circle hooks and type-approved equipment designed to safely remove fishing hooks and line from incidentally captured sea turtles (see Federal regulations at 50 CFR § 635.21). A list of required equipment is available at [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/hmsdocument\\_files/protected\\_species.htm](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/hmsdocument_files/protected_species.htm).

Additionally, NMFS reminds owners and operators of HMS-permitted vessels using pelagic longline, bottom longline, or gillnet gear of the requirement to attend, and become certified at, a Protected Species Safe Handling, Release and Identification Workshop, as specified at 50 CFR § 635.8. These free workshops are intended to ensure that fishermen possess the skills and knowledge necessary to correctly identify and handle protected species, including sea turtles, and to maximize the safe removal of fishing gear from incidentally captured sea turtles. These workshops are further described at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/workshops/index.htm>.

For additional information, please contact the Highly Migratory Species Management Division at 727-824-5399.

  
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Date

