



NMFS Announces the Availability of NOAA Technical Memorandum 580 and Issues Reminders to All Pelagic and Bottom Longline Fishermen Participating in Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fisheries

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announces the availability of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Technical Memorandum NMFS-SEFSC-580 (TM-580) entitled “Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury.” Pursuant to current NOAA Fisheries regulations at 50 CFR §635.21 (a)(3), all pelagic (PLL) and bottom (BLL) longline vessels must possess this document inside the wheelhouse. TM-580 updates and replaces NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SEFSC-524 (TM-524) which previously met the regulatory requirement. Please replace TM-524 in your wheelhouse with TM-580.

NMFS regulations at 50 CFR §635.21 (c) and (d) also require that all pelagic and bottom longline vessels possess and use sea turtle handling and release gear consistent with the protocols described in TM-580. Use of these gears and protocols is mandatory and may prevent the need for additional corrective measures, such as additional time/area closures, to reduce sea turtle mortality in compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). If you have questions regarding the use or necessity of equipment, please contact Charlie Bergmann, NMFS Fishery Methods and Equipment Specialist, at 228-762-4591 or 228-623-0748.

NMFS reminds all PLL fishermen participating in Atlantic highly migratory species (HMS) 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 (BiOp) for the Atlantic PLL fishery found that continued operation of this fishery as proposed would jeopardize the continued existence of leatherback sea turtles in the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea. The BiOp, therefore, requires the fishery to limit its bycatch and bycatch mortality of Atlantic sea turtles to avoid jeopardy under the ESA. Failure to achieve certain benchmarks specified in the BiOp, including the number of leatherback and loggerhead sea turtle interactions and their associated mortality, could result in additional management measures on this fishery. In the extreme, this means that the fishery could be closed if too many turtles are taken.

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 on 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.

NMFS also reminds owners and operators of HMS-permitted vessels using PLL, BLL, 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 and to maximize the safe removal of fishing gear from incidentally captured sea turtles. More information about these workshops may be found at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/workshops/index.htm>.

Waterproof copies of TM-580 are available by contacting Craig Cockrell with NMFS HMS Management Division at 301-713-2347. TM-580 may also be downloaded and other information obtained at: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/hmsdocument_files/protected_species.htm.

For additional information, please contact the HMS Management Division at 727-824-5399.

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Date

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