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**NOAA FISHERIES PUBLISHES RULES TO MODIFY
TURTLE EXCLUDER DEVICES (TEDs)**

The NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has amended the turtle excluder devices (TEDs) regulations to enhance TEDs' effectiveness in reducing sea turtles deaths that result from trawling in the southeastern United States, the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced today. The modifications, which apply throughout the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, affect shrimp fishermen that use bottom trawl gear in state and federal waters and take effect on April 15, 2003 in the Atlantic, and August 21, 2003 in the Gulf of Mexico.

"These rule changes are necessary to enable all species of sea turtles found in U.S. waters to escape from trawl nets," said NOAA Fisheries' Director Bill Hogarth. "When TEDs were first mandated in 1990, their openings were much too small to allow leatherback turtles, the largest species, to escape. In addition, comprehensive data on the body depths of loggerhead and green turtles were not available. There is new information showing that a significant percentage of stranded loggerhead and green turtles were too large to fit through the current TED openings."

All sea turtles that occur in U.S. waters are listed as either endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). The Kemp's ridley, leatherback, and hawksbill turtles are listed as endangered. The loggerhead and green turtles are listed as threatened, except for breeding populations of green turtles in Florida and on the Pacific coast of Mexico, which are listed as endangered.

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The rule, which includes an increase in the size of the escape opening, will help all sea turtles escape from shrimp trawls. The rule amends regulations governing the types of TEDs allowed and certain structural aspects of TEDs. The changes include:

- requiring the use of either the recently approved double cover flap TED or a TED with an opening of at least 71-inch straight-line stretched mesh measurement in all offshore waters and the inshore and offshore waters of Georgia and South Carolina*;
- requiring the use of TEDs with a 44-inch straight-line stretched mesh opening in all inshore waters, except those of Georgia and South Carolina*;
- requiring that hooped hard TEDs can only be used in inshore waters, and not in Georgia or South Carolina. Those TEDs must have a minimum inside horizontal width of 35 inches and an inside vertical height of 30 inches on the front hoop, and a clearance between the bars and the front hoop of 20 inches;
- requiring the use of grids with minimum outside measurements of 32 inches by 32 inches in all waters;
- disallowing the use the Jones TED;
- requiring the use of a brace bar on weedless TEDs;
- requiring accelerator funnels to have a 44-inch horizontal opening on the 44 inch TED and a 71-inch opening on the 71 inch and double cover flap TEDs;
- requiring bait shrimpers to use TEDs in states where a state-issued bait shrimp license holder can also fish for food shrimp from the same vessel; and
- requiring tow time restrictions on try nets with headrope lengths of 12 feet or less.

Questions about this rule can be sent to: NOAA Fisheries' Office of Protected Resources, Attn: Chief, Endangered Species Division, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3282. You may also call Bob Hoffman at (727) 570-5312.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitats. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. To learn more about NOAA, please visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

*Diagrams and construction guidelines for these TEDs are available at:
<http://www.mslabs.noaa.gov/teds.html>

Printed copies of the specifications for all the TEDs authorized under these rules are available from NOAA Fisheries at the above address or by calling (301) 713-2332. The entire Federal Register notice that describes the rule can be viewed on line at:
http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR3/regulations.html

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