



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
NORTHEAST REGION  
One Blackburn Drive  
Gloucester, MA 01930-2298

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## SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION

The incidental take and mortality of sea turtles as a result of scallop dredging has been documented in the mid-Atlantic. On May 27, 2005, NMFS published a proposed rule which would require a gear modification for federally permitted sea scallop dredge vessels fishing in the mid-Atlantic from May 1 through November 30 each year. The proposed gear modification (a chain mat across the opening of the dredge) is designed to sharply reduce the capture of sea turtles in the dredge itself, as well as any ensuing injuries and mortalities that occur as a result of being caught in the dredge (drowning, crushing in the dredge bag, crushing on deck, etc.). NMFS is considering the public comments received on the proposed rule and a final rule is under development.

There are steps that sea scallop dredge vessels may take at this time to reduce the severity of injuries that can occur following the take of a sea turtle. These include:

- Not setting the dredges if there are sea turtles in your wake
- Not steaming or jogging with the dredge frame in the water
- Stopping the dredge on the way up for 30 seconds at the 10 fathom mark
- Observing the dredge when it comes alongside the vessel for sea turtles
- If a sea turtle is seen in or on the dredge, avoid dropping the turtle from height while dumping the catch
- Care should be taken if the dredge is dropped on top of the catch to avoid crushing sea turtles that may be present in the pile

NMFS strongly encourages vessels to take these operational precautions when operating in areas where sea turtles are known to be present.

Regulations for sea turtles include handling and resuscitation requirements. Sea turtles brought on board must be released while the engine is out of gear, when fishing gear is not in use, and in areas where they are unlikely to be recaptured or injured by vessels. A turtle is only considered to be dead if the muscles are stiff (rigor mortis) and/or the flesh has begun to rot; otherwise, the turtle is determined to be comatose or inactive and resuscitation attempts are necessary. Resuscitation is attempted by placing the turtle on its plastron (bottom shell) so that the turtle is right side up and elevating its hindquarters at least 6 inches (greater elevations for larger turtles). Periodically, rock the turtle gently left to right and right to left by holding the outer edge of the shell and lifting one side about 3 inches then alternate to the other side. Gently touch the eye and pinch the tail (reflex test) periodically to see if there is a response. Sea turtles being resuscitated must be kept shaded and damp or moist. This may be done by using wet cloths or towels. Resuscitation attempts should be continued for at least 4 hours and, preferably, up to 24 hours.

For more information on interactions between sea turtles and sea scallop dredge gear, please call 978-281-9208.

