



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

December 20, 2002

Dear Permit Holder:

In March of this year, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) published new restrictions for the use of gillnets with larger than 8 inch (20.3 cm) stretched mesh, in Federal waters (3-200 nautical miles) off of North Carolina and Virginia. These restrictions were published in an Interim Final Rule under the authority of the Endangered Species Act and were implemented to reduce the impact of the monkfish and other large-mesh gillnet fisheries on endangered and threatened species of sea turtles in areas where sea turtles are known to concentrate. Following review of public comments submitted on the Interim Final Rule, NOAA Fisheries published a Final Rule on December 3, 2002, that establishes the restrictions on an annual basis.

As a reminder, under these restrictions, gillnets with larger than 8 inch stretched mesh are not allowed in Federal waters (3-200 nautical miles) for the following areas:

- north of 33° 51.0' N (North Carolina/South Carolina border at the coast) and south of 35° 46.0' N (Oregon Inlet) at all times;
- north of 35° 46.0' N (Oregon Inlet) and south of 36° 22.5' N Currituck Beach Light, NC) from March 16 through January 14;
- north of 36° 22.5' N (Currituck Beach Light, NC) and south of 37° 34.6' N (Wachapreague Inlet, VA) from April 1 through January 14; and,
- north of 37° 34.6' N (Wachapreague Inlet, VA) and south of 37° 56.0' N (Chincoteague, VA) from April 16 through January 14 (map on reverse).

Waters north of 37° 56.0' N (Chincoteague, VA) are not affected by these new restrictions.

If you have any questions on this letter, please contact the Northeast Region Division of Protected Resources at 978-281-9328 or the Southeast Region Division of Protected Resources at 727-570-5312. You can obtain a copy of the Final Rule by going to the Northeast Region Division of Protected Resources website at www.nero.nmfs.gov/ro/doc/whale.htm or by calling either of the two numbers above.

Sincerely,

for

Patricia A. Kurkul
Regional Administrator



Figure 1. Time-specific area closures to minimize interactions between monkfish gillnet gear and threatened or endangered sea turtles.

