

Southeastern U.S. Atlantic Shark Gillnet Fishery

Fishing gear type: Gillnet

Current category: Category II*

Basis for current classification on the LOF: The 2010 LOF included a superscript “1” following bottlenose dolphin (WNA coastal stock) because the annual mortality and serious injury of that stock in this fishery was greater than 1% and less than 50% of the stock’s Potential Biological Removal (PBR) level. When the stocks of bottlenose dolphins killed/injured in this fishery were updated on the 2011 LOF, the superscript “1” was retained after the new stocks because NMFS cannot yet differentiate to which stock a killed/injured animal belongs. In this case, there is only one stock the killed/injured animals could have come from.

Current list of marine mammal species/stocks injured/killed (a ⁽¹⁾ indicates those stocks driving the fishery’s classification): Atlantic spotted dolphin, WNA; Bottlenose dolphin, Central Florida (FL) coastal⁽¹⁾; Bottlenose dolphin, Northern FL coastal; North Atlantic right whale, WNA.

Estimated number of current participants: 30

Take Reduction Teams/Plans that affect this fishery: Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP), 50 CFR 229.32; Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Plan (BDTRP), 50 CFR 229.35.

Year added to LOF: 1996

Category when originally listed: Category II

Basis for current classification on the LOF: This fishery was categorized as a Category II based on limited observer data. Data averaged from 1992-1993 indicated that the incidental serious injury and mortality of bottlenose dolphin (WNA coastal) was 4% of PBR. In addition, in 1994 a right whale calf was spotted with wounds indicative of an interaction with this gillnet fishery (it was sighted only once and presumed dead), but could not be confirmed. There was another suspected interaction with a right whale cow, which was not considered fatal.

Estimated number of participants when originally listed: 10

Past names, if any: None.

Gear description/method for fishing: This fishery uses gillnets set in a sink, stab, set, strike, or drift fashion. Mesh size is typically greater than 5 in (13 cm), but may be as small as 2.87 in (7.3 cm) when targeting small coastal sharks. Drift gillnets most commonly use a mesh size of 5 in (13 cm), and average 10.2 hours from setting the gear through completion of haulback; sink gillnets most frequently use a mesh size of 7 in (18 cm), soaking for approximately 2.7 hours; and strike gillnets use the largest mesh size of 9 in (23 cm), soaking for approximately 0.8 hours.

Target species: Large and small coastal sharks (blacktip, blacknose, finetooth, bonnethead, and sharpnose).

Spatial/temporal distribution of effort: This fishery has traditionally operated in coastal waters off Florida and Georgia.

* The fishery is classified based on mortalities and serious injuries of a marine mammal stock greater than 1% and less than 50% (Category II) of the stock’s Potential Biological Removal (PBR) level.

Levels of observer coverage each year[†]: A dedicated observer program for the Shark Drift Gillnet Fishery has been in place since 1998. Since 2000, due to the provisions of the ALWTRP, observer coverage has been high during the winter months. However, due to limited funding, observer coverage outside of this period was generally low (less than 5%) prior to 2000, and has been increasing since. From 2001 to 2006, the annual observer coverage of the drift gillnet fishery was 68%, 85%, 50%, 66%, 58%, and 48%, respectively. The annual coverage of the strike component from 2001 to 2006 was 63%, 86%, 72%, 81%, and 84%, respectively. The sink component of the fishery was observed in 2005 and 2006 with coverage levels of 10% and 22%, respectively. However, given the uncertainties in the level of reported effort, these estimates of observer coverage are highly uncertain. Due to these uncertainties, effort levels for the fishery and estimated observer coverage for 2007 and 2008 are not available.

Management and regulations: This fishery is managed under the Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan (FMP), ALWTRP, and BDTRP. Regulations implemented under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act address managed target species, as well as bycatch species, including some protected under the ESA and Marine Mammal Protection Act (e.g., sea turtles, smalltooth sawfish, and right whales).

History of Changes on the LOF

2012 LOF: Added bottlenose dolphin (Northern FL coastal stock) to the list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery. There were 2 takes (level of injury undetermined) of bottlenose dolphins that occurred in drift gillnet gear in 2002 and 2003 just south of the range of the Northern FL coastal stock, and the dolphins were possibly from this stock (2010 SAR).

2011 LOF: Updated the stock name for bottlenose dolphins killed/injured in this fishery, based on the revised stock structure presented in the final 2008 and 2009 SARs. Replaced bottlenose dolphin (WNA coastal) with the following stock: bottlenose dolphin (Central FL coastal). Retained a superscript “1” after this stock because the 2010 LOF includes a superscript “1” following bottlenose dolphin (WNA coastal).

2007 LOF:

- Clarified that gillnets set in a sink, stab, set, strike, or drift fashion are used in this fishery. Traditionally, this fishery used gillnets in either a drift or strikenet configuration. However, observers placed on various gillnet vessels in the Southeast documented the use of these types of gillnets to target sharks.
- Estimated number of participants updated from 6 to 30.

2006 LOF: Added a superscript “1” in Table 2 after bottlenose dolphin (WNA coastal), indicating that it is driving the categorization of the fishery.

2003 LOF: Estimated number of participants updated from 12 to 6.

2001 LOF:

- Atlantic spotted dolphin (WNA) added to list of species/stocks killed/injured in this fishery based on an animal observed incidentally caught and released alive in 2000.
- All Southeastern Atlantic gillnet fisheries, except for this fishery, were merged to create the Category II “Southeast Atlantic gillnet fishery.”

1999 LOF: Estimated number of participants updated from 10 to 12.

[†] Observer coverage levels include the latest information reported in the most current final Stock Assessment Report (SAR).