

## NOAA FISHERIES ANNOUNCES:

### THE FINAL RULE IMPLEMENTING SEA TURTLE BYCATCH AND BYCATCH MORTALITY MITIGATION MEASURES IN THE ATLANTIC PELAGIC LONGLINE FISHERY

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is implementing regulations to reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality of Atlantic loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles in the Atlantic pelagic longline (PLL) fishery consistent with the Endangered Species Act, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), and all other applicable law. These new regulations will affect all vessels participating in the Atlantic pelagic longline fishery.

NOAA Fisheries also announces the initial list of NOAA Fisheries-Approved Models For Equipment Needed For The Careful Release of Sea Turtles Caught In Hook And Line Fisheries. This list is available on the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Division's website (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms>) and upon request (727-570-5447).

**Effective immediately**, the final regulations allow vessels with pelagic longline gear onboard to fish in the Northeast Distant (NED) closed area subject to certain requirements. Such vessels in the NED are limited, at all times, to possessing onboard and/or using only 18/0 or larger circle hooks with an offset not to exceed 10 degrees. Only whole Atlantic mackerel and/or squid baits may be possessed and/or utilized with allowable hooks within the NED closed area. PLL vessels fishing within the NED must also possess and use sea turtle handling and release gear consistent with NOAA Fisheries' careful release protocols. Required handling and release gear is described in the NOAA Fisheries-Approved Models For Equipment Needed For The Careful Release of Sea Turtles Caught In Hook And Line Fisheries.

**Effective August 5, 2004**, vessel operators participating in the pelagic longline fishery for Atlantic HMS, operating outside of the NED, are limited, at all times, to possessing onboard and/or using only 16/0 or larger non-offset circle hooks and/or 18/0 or larger circle hooks with an offset not to exceed 10 degrees. Only whole finfish and/or squid baits may be possessed and/or utilized with allowable hooks outside the NED. Finally, vessel operators aboard all federally permitted vessels, or those required to be permitted, for Atlantic HMS with pelagic longline gear onboard must possess and maintain line cutters and dipnets meeting newly revised design and performance standards, and to possess, maintain, and utilize additional equipment, in compliance with NOAA Fisheries' careful release protocols, to remove fishing gear from incidentally-captured sea turtles. Required handling and release gear is described in the NOAA Fisheries-Approved Models For Equipment Needed For The Careful Release of Sea Turtles Caught In Hook And Line Fisheries.

Copies of the Technical Memorandum (NMFS-SEFSC-524) containing the careful release

protocols are available on the web at [http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/PDFdocs/TM\\_524.pdf](http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/PDFdocs/TM_524.pdf). A training video on release and disentanglement techniques is available on the web at <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/seaturtlefisheriesobservers.jsp>.

This FAX notice is a courtesy to pelagic longline fishery participants to help keep you informed about your fishery. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register. For further information, contact Russell Dunn, Greg Fairclough, or Rick Pearson at (727) 570-5447.

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Dated