



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701

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Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for Sea Turtle Conservation and Recovery Actions and to Conduct Public Scoping Meetings

Over the past two years NOAA Fisheries Service has documented elevated sea turtle strandings in the northern Gulf of Mexico, particularly throughout the Mississippi Sound area. A significant number of those turtles necropsied indicate they likely perished due to forced submergence, which is commonly associated with fishery interactions. Additionally, recent information on the size and scope of the skimmer trawl fleet indicates the fishery may be affecting sea turtles in a manner not previously considered, which warrants a new evaluation.

As a result, we are considering new regulations to reduce the incidental bycatch and mortality of sea turtles in the shrimp fishery of the southeastern United States. The scoping process will be the first stage in a multi-step process required by the National Environmental Policy Act to ensure that Federal agencies evaluate the environmental impacts of major Federal actions. During the scoping process, the public is provided with an opportunity to assist us in determining the scope of issues that require analysis. The analysis of issues and the environmental impacts of the proposed actions will be presented in a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which will be made available for public comment. The notice of intent to prepare the draft EIS will be published in the *Federal Register* on June 24, 2011.

We prepared a scoping document and a list of frequently asked questions as aids to the public on the scoping process that we are about to undertake, which are available online at: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pr.htm>. The scoping document describes the major issues, current management and legal requirements, and identifies potential management measures to reduce interactions, and in particular, lethal interactions, between sea turtles and trawl fisheries.

Five scoping meetings have been scheduled in July 2011 to solicit public input on alternatives to reduce sea turtle bycatch. The dates, times, and locations of the meetings are as follows:

1. *Gray, LA* -- July 12, 2011, 12pm-2pm, Terrebonne Parish Public Library, North Terrebonne Branch, 4130 West Park Avenue, Gray, LA 70359.
2. *Belle Chasse, LA* -- July 12, 2011, 6pm-8pm, Belle Chasse Community Center, 8398 Highway 23, Belle Chasse, LA 70037.
3. *Biloxi, MS* -- July 13, 2011, 4pm-6pm, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, 1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, MS 39530.
4. *Bayou La Batre, AL* -- July 14, 2011, 12pm-2pm, Bayou La Batre Community Center, 12745 Padgett Switch Road, Bayou La Batre, AL 36509.
5. *Morehead City, NC* -- July 18, 2011, 2pm-4pm, Crystal Coast Civic Center, 3505 Arendell Street, Morehead City, NC 28557.

Scoping comments may also be submitted during a concurrent 45-day comment period. When we publish the draft EIS, it will also have a 45-day public comment period.

How can we improve these fishery bulletins?

If you have any suggestions on how we may improve future fishery bulletins, please contact:

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If you would like to receive these fishery bulletins via e-mail as soon as they are published, e-mail us at: SERO.Communications.Comments@noaa.gov. You will still receive a hard copy of these bulletins through the mail.