



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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

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NOAA Fisheries hosts public meetings in April to discuss potential skimmer trawl regulations in Southeast US

Agency also preparing Environmental Impact Statement

NOAA Fisheries is considering new regulations in the shrimp fishery of the southeastern United States based on information indicating sea turtles are vulnerable to capture by skimmer trawls and tow times may not be as effective in reducing bycatch-related mortality as turtle excluder devices. The agency will host five public meetings around the region to discuss and receive input from fishermen and other constituents on alternatives to reduce sea turtle bycatch and mortality.

These public meetings are 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 these meetings, 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, which will be made available for public comment. The notice of intent to prepare the draft statement will be published in the *Federal Register* on March 15, 2016.

Additionally, we prepared a scoping document and a list of frequently asked questions as aids to the public on the upcoming scoping process. These documents are available on the NOAA Fisheries website at: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/protected_resources/index.html. 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.

The dates, times, and locations of the five meetings in April are as follows:

1. *Morehead City, NC* -- April 13, 2016, 2 p.m. - 4 p.m., Crystal Coast Civic Center, 3505 Arendell Street, Morehead City, NC 28557.
2. *Larose, LA* -- April 18, 2016, 4 p.m. - 6 p.m., Larose Regional Park and Civic Center, 307 East 5th Street, Larose, LA 70373.
3. *Belle Chasse, LA* -- April 19, 2016, 4 p.m. - 6 p.m., Belle Chasse Community Center, 8398 Highway 23, Belle Chasse, LA 70037.
4. *Biloxi, MS* -- April 20, 2016, 5 p.m. - 7 p.m., Biloxi Visitor's Center, 1050 Beach Boulevard, Biloxi, MS 39530.
5. *Bayou La Batre, AL* -- April 21, 2016, 2 p.m. - 4 p.m., Bayou La Batre Community Center, 12745 Padgett Switch Road, Bayou La Batre, AL 36509.

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.

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