



# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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

## FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

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## NOAA Seeks Public Comment for Proposed Rule to Require Turtle Excluder Device Use for Skimmer Trawls, Pusher-Head Trawls, and Wing Nets (Butterfly Trawls)

In an effort to strengthen sea turtle conservation efforts, NOAA Fisheries is seeking comments on a newly proposed rule. The rule, if implemented, would require all skimmer trawls, pusher-head trawls, and wing nets (butterfly trawls) to use turtle excluder devices (TEDs) in their nets. A TED is a device that allows sea turtles to escape from trawl nets. The purpose of the proposed rule is to aid in the protection and recovery of listed sea turtle populations by reducing incidental bycatch and mortality of sea turtles in the southeastern U.S. shrimp fisheries.

Vessels participating in the Biscayne Bay wing net fishery in Miami-Dade County, Florida would be exempt from this rule because they operate by sight fishing and the agency does not currently believe this fishery presents a threat to sea turtles.

To further support the proposed rule, NOAA Fisheries also prepared a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), which includes:

- a description of the purpose and need for evaluating the proposed action and other potential management alternatives;
- the science and data used in the analyses, background information on the physical, biological, human, and administrative environments; and
- a description of the effects of the proposed action and other potential management alternatives.

### Request for Comments

The proposed rule and a notice of availability on the DEIS were published in the *Federal Register* on December 16, 2016. Written comments on the DEIS and proposed rule must be received no later than

January 30 and February 14, 2017, respectively, to be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service. All comments received by NOAA Fisheries Service will be addressed in the final rule and final environmental impact statement. Electronic copies of the proposed rule or the DEIS may be obtained from the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov> and the NOAA Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office's website [http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/protected\\_resources/sea\\_turtle\\_protection\\_and\\_shrimp\\_fisheries/](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/protected_resources/sea_turtle_protection_and_shrimp_fisheries/).

### Public Hearings

We have scheduled six public hearings in January 2017 to solicit public comment on the proposed rule. The dates, times, and locations of the hearings are as follows:

1. *Larose, LA* – January 9, 2017, 4pm-6pm, Larose Regional Park and Civic Center, 307 East 5th Street, Larose, LA 70373.
2. *Gretna, LA* – January 10, 2017, 12pm-2pm, Coastal Communities Consulting, Inc., 925 Behrman Highway, Suite 15, Gretna, LA 70056.
3. *Belle Chasse, LA* – January 10, 2017, 4pm-6pm, Belle Chasse Community Center, 8398 Highway 23, Belle Chasse, LA 70037.
4. *Biloxi, MS* – January 11, 2017, 4pm-6pm, Biloxi Visitor's Center, 1050 Beach Boulevard, Biloxi MS 39530.
5. *Bayou La Batre, AL* – January 12, 2017, 10am-12pm, Bayou La Batre Community Center, 12745 Padgett Switch Road, Bayou La Batre, AL 36509.
6. *Morehead City, NC* – January 18, 2017, 12pm-2pm, Crystal Coast Civic Center, 3505 Arendell Street, Morehead City, NC 28557.

## How to Submit Comments

You may submit comments by either of the following methods. Comments received through other means may not be considered.

**Electronic Submissions:** Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>

- Enter the following docket number into the “Search” box: NOAA-NMFS-2016-0151.
- Select the appropriate title, and click “Submit a Comment.” This will display the comment webform.
- Attachments to electronic comments (up to 10 MB) will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

**Mail:** Michael C. Barnette, NOAA Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, Protected Resources Division, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701-5505.

All comments will be part of the public record, and generally posted for public viewing to <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter, may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. Anonymous comments will be accepted.