

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
SOUTHEAST REGION**

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**NOAA FISHERIES TAKES EMERGENCY ACTION TO PROTECT MIGRATING SEA  
TURTLES FROM MONKFISH GILLNETS OFF NC AND VA**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries), an agency of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, has implemented an interim final rule that immediately closes two areas to fishing with large mesh gillnets off the coast of NC to protect migrating sea turtle populations. One area, defined below, has been closed permanently. A second closure became effective on March 15, 2002. That area and three others are seasonal closures, based on historic sea surface temperatures of the Mid-Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and affect fishing with gillnets with a mesh size larger than 8 inch (20.3 cm) stretched mesh.

“The use of gillnets off North Carolina and Virginia in the spring poses a major threat to migrating sea turtles, particularly if gear is set in or near temperature fronts where turtles may congregate,” said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries. “This action will protect those turtle populations from becoming entangled in gillnets.”

In April and May of 2000, the largest ever U.S. fisheries related sea turtle stranding occurred: 280 sea turtles were found dead on beaches in North Carolina and Virginia. Four of the carcasses were still carrying monkfish gillnet gear. Conservation measures implemented for the 2001 season eliminated sea turtle mortality. Those measures included major effort limitations, 100 percent observer monitoring, and a

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framework closure rule for sea turtles. Since those measures will not be in place for the 2002 season, NOAA Fisheries is implementing this interim final rule to close the following areas:

- Waters north of 33° 51.0' N (North Carolina/South Carolina border at the coast) and south of 35° 46.0' N (Oregon Inlet) are closed at all times
- Waters north of 35° 46.0' N (Oregon Inlet) and south of 36° 22.5' N (Currituck Beach Light, N.C.) are closed from March 16 through January 14
- Waters north of 36° 22.5' N (Currituck Beach Light, N.C.) and south of 37° 34.6' N (Wachapreague Inlet, Va.) are closed from April 1 through January 14
- Waters north of 37° 34.6' N (Wachapreague Inlet, Va.) and south of 37° 56.0' N (Chincoteague, Va.) are closed from April 16 through January 14
- Waters north of 37° 56.0' N (Chincoteague, Va.) will not be affected by this interim final rule

Comments on this interim final rule must be postmarked or transmitted by facsimile by 5 p.m., EST, on June 15, 2002. Written comments should be sent to: NOAA Fisheries Office of Protected Resources, Att: Don Knowles, SSMC3 Room 13821, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3282.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

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Printed copies of the Environmental Assessment prepared for this rule are available from NOAA Fisheries at the above address or by calling Phil Williams at (301) 713-2332.