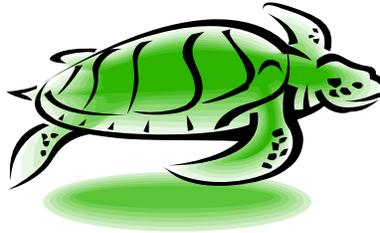


Gulf of Mexico Commercial Reef Fish Fishery

Amendment 31- Sea Turtle Bycatch Reduction

Frequently Asked Questions

April 2010



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO REDUCE SEA TURTLE BYCATCH IN THE BOTTOM LONGLINE COMPONENT OF THE GULF OF MEXICO REEF FISH FISHERY

What is Amendment 31 to the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico?

- Amendment 31 establishes a management strategy to reduce sea turtle bycatch in the bottom longline component of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) reef fish fishery.
- The strategy includes actions for time/area closures, gear restrictions, and limiting the number of vessels participating in the bottom longline component of the fishery.

Why is it important to reduce sea turtle take in the bottom longline component of the reef fish fishery?

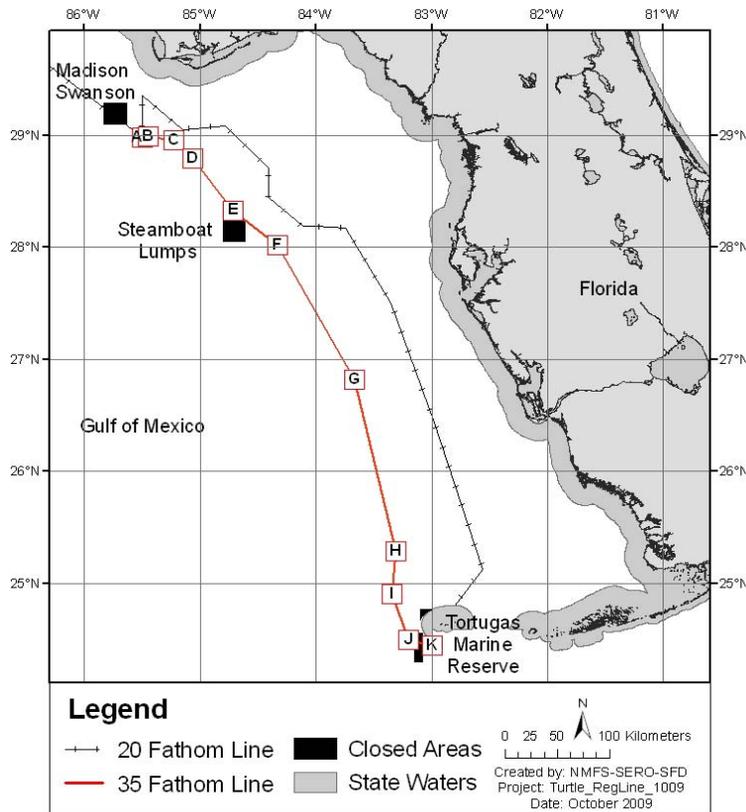
- Gulf reef fish bottom longline gear takes loggerhead sea turtles as bycatch. These turtles are listed as threatened under the ESA.
- A September 2008 NOAA Fisheries Service report indicated the bottom longline component of the Gulf reef fish fishery exceeded the level of loggerhead sea turtle take authorized by a 2005 Biological Opinion.
- The 2005 Biological Opinion authorized Gulf reef fish bottom longline vessels to take 85 loggerhead sea turtles over a 3-year period.
- The September 2008 report indicated Gulf reef fish bottom longline gear took between 339 and 1,884 loggerhead sea turtles (average of 800) over an 18-month period (07/06 - 12/07). Based on the estimated sea turtles takes, 401 were released alive, 301 were released dead, and 200 were released with an unknown condition.

What is the current status of Amendment 31 to the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico?

- Amendment 31 was approved on March 29, 2010.
- The Final Rule implementing Amendment 31 published in the *Federal Register* on April 26, 2010, and is effective May 26, 2010.
- Documents and public comments related to the amendment are available on the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Enter the following docket number into the “Search” box: **NOAA-NMFS-2008-0310**.

What are the new regulations in Amendment 31 that are implemented in the final rule? Measures in the rule:

- Prohibit the use of bottom longline gear in the reef fish fishery east of Cape San Blas, Florida, shoreward of a line approximating the 35-fathom depth contour (**see map and table**) from June through August;
- Reduce the number of bottom longline vessels operating in the fishery through a longline endorsement provided only to federally-permitted vessels with demonstrated average annual landings of 40,000 pounds of reef fish taken by fish traps or longlines during 1999-2007; and
- Restrict the number of hooks that may be possessed onboard each reef fish bottom longline vessel to 1,000 hooks total, only 750 of which may be fished or rigged for fishing at any given time.



	Longitude West	Latitude North
Waypoint	Degree Decimal Minute	Degree Decimal Minute
A	85°30.00'	28°58.70'
B	85°26.70'	28°59.25'
C	85°13.80'	28°57.00'
D	85°03.90'	28°47.40'
E	84°43.00'	28°19.50'
F	84°20.00'	28°00.80'
G	83°40.00'	26°48.80'
H	83°19.00'	25°17.00'
I	83°21.00'	24°54.00'
J	83°12.30'	24°29.50'
K	83°00.00'	24°26.50'

What do I need to do to get my reef fish bottom longline endorsement?

- NOAA Fisheries Service is reviewing the logbook data and will mail each eligible permittee a reef fish bottom longline endorsement via certified mail by May 26, 2010.
- This endorsement must be renewed annually and may only be renewed if the associated vessel has a valid commercial vessel permit for Gulf reef fish or if the endorsement and associated permit are being concurrently renewed.
- An eligible permittee who does not receive an endorsement from the Regional Administrator (RA) must contact the RA no later than June 25, 2010 to clarify his/her endorsement status.

How do I appeal for the reef fish bottom longline endorsement?

- The only items subject to appeal are initial eligibility for the reef fish bottom longline endorsement based on ownership of a qualifying reef fish permit, the accuracy of the amount of landings, and correct assignment of landings to the permittee.
- Appeals based on hardship factors will not be considered.
- Appeals must be submitted to the RA postmarked no later than August 25, 2010, and must contain documentation supporting the basis for the appeal.
 - Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator
Southeast Regional Office
National Marine Fisheries Service
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701-5505
- The RA will review all appeals, render final decisions on the appeals, and advise the appellant of the final decision.

Can I transfer my reef fish bottom longline endorsement?

- Yes, an owner of a vessel with a valid eastern Gulf reef fish bottom longline endorsement may transfer that endorsement to an owner of a vessel that has a valid commercial vessel permit for Gulf reef fish.

Are the replacement measures sufficiently protective?

- Based on NMFS best scientific information available, the opinion concluded the continued authorization of the Gulf reef fish fishery under the Council's long-term management strategy is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of sea turtles or other listed species.
- The overall reduction in effective effort based on the combination of the preferred actions is 48-67 percent. This met the Council's goal of meeting recommended reductions in effort, which is anticipated to result in similar reductions in sea turtle interactions.
- The potential reductions in effective fishing effort for the actions are approximately 14-16 percent for the time/area closure, 18-37 percent for the qualifying endorsement, and 27-39 percent for the gear restriction. These reductions are not additive, and are dependent on various scenarios of effort shifting because of the regulatory restrictions that will be imposed from this action.

How many commercial fishermen will Amendment 31 affect?

- Amendment 31 and the implementing regulations will affect commercial fishermen in the bottom longline component of the Gulf reef fish fishery.
- About 120 bottom longline vessels participate in the Gulf reef fish fishery to varying degrees.
- The restrictive endorsement is expected to allow approximately 60 vessels to continue participating in the bottom longline component of the reef fish fishery.

Where can I find more information on Amendment 31?

- Additional information can be found on the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Web site: www.gulfcouncil.org