

*Science, Service, Stewardship*



**Update on the Atlantic Trawl Rule**  
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
June 11, 2009

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## Overview

- Status of Sea Turtles
- Current Conservation Measures Protecting Sea Turtles
- Purpose and Approach of the Strategy for Sea Turtle Conservation and Recovery in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico (“Strategy”)
- Trawl Phases of the Strategy
- Review of Regulatory Measures Associated with the Strategy
- Overview of the Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS and conduct public scoping meetings



## Listed Sea Turtle Species



- Six species of sea turtles are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)
  - Endangered
    - Leatherbacks (*Dermochelys coricea*)
    - Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*)
    - Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)
  - Threatened
    - Olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)\*
    - Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*)
    - Green (*Chelonia mydas*)^

\*Mexican breeding population of olive ridleys are listed as endangered

^ Florida and Mexico breeding populations of green turtles are listed as endangered



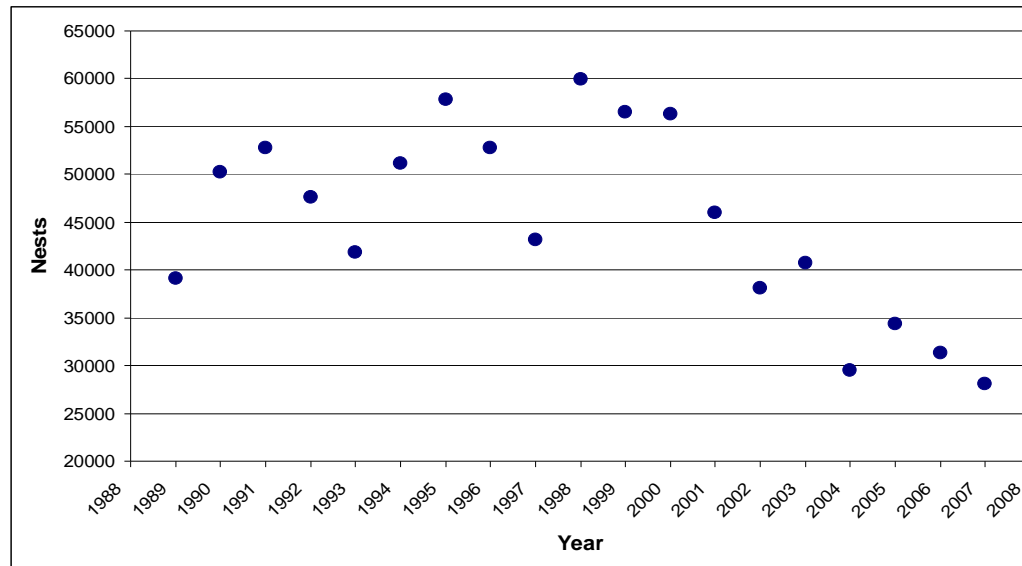
## Sea Turtle Status

- In 2007, U.S. FWS and NMFS released the five-year reviews for all listed sea turtle species
  - Recommended no changes in current listings.
- In 2007, NMFS received petitions to designate the Northwest Atlantic loggerhead and the North Pacific loggerhead as "Distinct Population Segments" and list them as endangered.



## Sea Turtle Status

Annual total nest counts for loggerheads on Florida Index beaches, 1989-2008



Source: Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute



## Examples of Current Conservation Measures to Protect Sea Turtles

- Gillnet restrictions in Pamlico Sound, NC
- Requirement to use Turtle Excluder Devices in shrimp trawl fisheries and flounder fisheries south of the North Carolina border
- Observer Rule will allow observer coverage in state and Federal waters for sea turtle interactions
- Requirement of a chain mat in the Federal Atlantic sea scallop fishery
- Requirements to use sea turtle release gear and follow sea turtle/smalltooth sawfish handling guidelines in the Gulf of Mexico reef fish fishery and South Atlantic snapper-grouper fishery.



## Purpose and Approach of the Strategy

### Purpose:

- Conserve and recover sea turtles consistent with the ESA

### Approach:

- Comprehensively address sea turtle bycatch across similar gear types in state and Federal waters, rather than fishery by fishery.

### Key elements of Strategy's work over the last several years:

- Characterize state and Federal fisheries in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico
- Evaluate and prioritize gear types.
- Priority gear types include:
  - Trawls
  - Gillnets
  - Traps and Pots
  - Hook and Line (including longline)





## Additional Key Elements of the Strategy

Additional key elements over the last several years:

- Analyze existing information on regulations addressing sea turtle bycatch, sea turtle distribution, fishing effort, bycatch and oceanographic conditions
- Develop and test gear modifications
- Enhance bycatch monitoring
- Develop and implement solutions to reduce sea turtle bycatch





## Sea Turtle Bycatch in Atlantic Trawl Fisheries

- Estimated average annual bycatch of loggerhead turtles in Mid-Atlantic bottom otter trawl gear (Cape Hatteras, NC to Long Island Sound, NY) during 1996-2004 was 616 animals (Murray 2006)
- Estimated average annual bycatch of loggerhead sea turtles in Mid-Atlantic scallop trawl fishery is 134 (based on estimates for 2004-2005) (Biop on Scallop Fishery, March 2008 and Murray 2007)



## Trawl Phases of the Strategy

- Trawl Phase One – summer flounder, Atlantic sea scallop, whelk, calico scallop and the flynet fisheries for croaker and weakfish
- Trawl Phase Two – Sheepshead/black drum/king whiting, porgy, skimmer, Spanish sardine/scad/ladyfish/butterfish, squid/mackerel/butterfish, and multispecies (large and small mesh)
- Trawl Phase Three – Skate, horseshoe crab, monkfish, bluefish, spiny dogfish, and the herring trawl fisheries



## Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

Published on February 15, 2007

- Open for 90 days of public comment
- Received 165 comments

Announced NMFS' plans to consider expansion of turtle excluder device (TED) requirements to new fisheries and areas

- Flynet
- Whelk
- Scallop
- Summer flounder (require larger TED opening)
- Potentially others



## Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS and Conduct Scoping Meetings

- May 8, 2009 – NMFS announced in the Federal Register its intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Atlantic Trawl Rule and to conduct scoping meetings.
- Alternatives for this rule include:
  - Status quo
  - Temporal and spatial application of the rule
  - Requirements to use turtle excluder devices
  - Closed areas



## Dates of Scoping Meetings

- May 15, 2009 – 10am to 12pm – Silver Spring, MD
- June 9, 2009 – 7-9pm – MAFMC Meeting – NY, NY
- **June 15, 2009 – 7-9pm – Brunswick, GA**
- June 20, 2009 – 2-4pm – Manteo, NC
- June 23, 2009 – 7-9pm – NEFMC – Portland, ME

*Questions?*

