



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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

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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)

NOAA Fisheries Service is seeking comments on a proposed rule to strengthen sea turtle conservation efforts. The rule, if implemented, would require all skimmer trawls, pusher-head trawls, and wing nets (butterfly trawls) to use turtle excluder devices in their 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.

NOAA Fisheries Service 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 scientific methodology 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 on the aforementioned environments.

For more information on the proposed rule and the documents outlining the analysis, a list of frequently asked questions regarding the newly proposed requirements in the southeastern shrimp fisheries can be found on the NOAA Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office's website at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pr.htm>.

Request for Comments

The proposed rule will publish in the *Federal Register* on May 10, 2012. A notice of availability on the DEIS will be published in the *Federal Register* on May 18, 2012. Written comments on the proposed rule and DEIS must be received no later than July 9 and July 2, 2012, 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 at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pr.htm>.

Public Hearings

NOAA Fisheries Service has scheduled five public hearings in May and June 2012 to solicit public comment on the proposed rule. The dates, times, and locations of the hearings are as follows:

1. *Morehead City, NC* – May 30, 2012, 2pm-4pm, Crystal Coast Civic Center, 3505 Arendell Street, Morehead City, NC 28557.
2. *Larose, LA* – June 4, 2012, 6pm-8pm, Larose Regional Park and Civic Center, 307 East 5th Street, Larose, LA 70373.
3. *Belle Chasse, LA* – June 5, 2012, 4pm-6pm, Belle Chasse Community Center, 8398 Highway 23, Belle Chasse, LA 70037.
4. *D'Iberville, MS* – June 6, 2012, 4pm-6pm, L.H. "Red" Barnett Senior Center, 10450 Lamey Bridge Road, D'Iberville, MS 39540.
5. *Bayou La Batre, AL* – June 13, 2012, 2pm-4pm, Bayou La Batre Community Center, 12745 Padgett Switch Road, Bayou La Batre, AL 36509.

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-2012-0095.

- 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.