



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/region/southeast>

July 29, 2026

Gulf Fishery Management Council
4107 W. Spruce St., Suite 200
Tampa, FL 33607

Subject: Sea Turtle Release Gear Review

Dear Mr. Dugas,

Thank you for your letter dated June 15, 2026, requesting the National Marine Fisheries Service to review the current sea turtle release gear regulations for the Gulf of America reef fish fishery. We appreciate the Council's interest in exploring options for simplified gear requirements that reflect the most recent research on sea turtle interactions, while striving to streamline the regulatory burden on commercial and charter fleets. We agree this effort aligns with the objectives of Executive Order 14192 (Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation) and Executive Order 14276 (Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness).

In response to your request, NMFS is initiating a formal review of these regulations. Because the sea turtle release gear regulations for permitted reef fish fishermen are identical to those of the South Atlantic region's permitted snapper-grouper fishermen¹, we are expanding the scope of the review to include the commercial and for-hire South Atlantic snapper-grouper fishery regulations.

The Southeast Regional Office and Southeast Fisheries Science Center will coordinate with Dr. John Froeschke and Mr. John Carmichael throughout the process. We intend to provide formal recommendations for updating and streamlining the sea turtle release gear regulations to the Councils by the end of 2026.

In the interim, a recently published paper may be of interest to the Council: [Evaluating Patterns in Fishing Gear Removal From Incidentally Captured Leatherback and Loggerhead Sea Turtles in the US Atlantic Pelagic Longline Fishery](#). Although this research was conducted for the pelagic longline fishery—which has different operational characteristics than the reef fish and snapper-grouper fleets—it provides insights into the real-world challenges of sea turtle handling. Understanding how factors like training and willingness affect the use of release tools will be helpful as we work to identify simplified gear requirements.

¹ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/resources-fishing/frequently-asked-questions-release-protocols-endangered-species-act>



We appreciate your continued partnership in managing our region's marine resources.

Sincerely,

Andrew J. Strelcheck
Regional Administrator

cc: SERO: Noah Silverman, Heather Blough, Frank Helies, Rick DeVactor
Gulf Council: Carrie Simmons, John Froeschke
SAFMC: John Carmichael, Myra Brouwer, Chip Collier