

1.1 Action 5. Modify Sea Turtle Release Gear Requirements for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

Alternative 1. No Action. Maintain current sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish release gear requirements for the

Snapper grouper fishery in federal waters of the South Atlantic. Currently, required gear (regardless of freeboard height) includes:

- a long-handled line clipper or cutter,
- a long-handled dehooker for ingested hooks,
- a long-handled dehooker for external hooks,
- a long-handled device to pull an “inverted V”,
- a dipnet,
- a tire (or other comparable cushioned, elevated surface that immobilizes boated sea turtles),
- a short-handled dehooker for ingested hooks,
- a short-handled dehooker for external hooks,
- long-nose or needle-nose pliers,
- bolt cutters,
- monofilament line cutters, and
- at least two types of mouth openers/mouth gags.

This equipment must meet the specifications described in 50 CFR 635.21(c)(5)(i)(A-L) with the following modification: any other comparable, cushioned, elevated surface that allows boated sea turtles to be immobilized, may be used as an alternative to the requirement in 50 CFR 635.21(c)(5)(i)(F) to have a tire on board.

***NOTE:** The de-hookers specified here apply to heavy tackle as used in the longline fishery.*

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Alternative 2. Require all federally-permitted hook-and-line vessels with no longline gear onboard to have and use a tool capable of cutting the fishing line and a tool capable of removing a hook from a sea turtle or smalltooth sawfish. The design specifications of required gear and the handling and release techniques employed must comply with those described in the NOAA Fisheries Service document entitled “Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury.”

~~Fishermen would still be required to comply with all current sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish release guidelines.~~

Alternative 3. Require all sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish release gear listed under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** for federally permitted snapper grouper vessels using longline gear, and require ~~[insert specific sea turtle release gear]~~ line cutting device, short handled de-hooker, long-handled de-hooker (for hook-and-line vessels with freeboard height of 4 feet or more) and a dip net for federally permitted vessels fishing with hook-and-line gear. The design specifications of required gear and the handling and release techniques employed must comply with those described in the NOAA Fisheries Service document entitled “Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury.”

Alternative 4. Modify sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish release gear based on freeboard height. Track the same sea turtle release gear requirements for the Gulf of Mexico, which are dependent upon freeboard heights of 4 feet or less (see Appendix C). Fishermen would still be required to comply with all current sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish release guidelines. The design specifications of required gear and the handling and release techniques employed must comply with those described in the NOAA Fisheries Service document entitled “Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury.”

Sub-Alternative 4a. ~~Modify the gear specifications for line cutters, dehookers, and bolt cutters for vessels with freeboard height of 4 feet or less. Vessels with freeboard height of 4 feet or less would be required to carry and use:~~

- a short-handled dehooker
- long-nose or needle-nose pliers,
- bolt-cutters
- mono-filament line cutters
- cushion/support device (i.e., boat cushion)
- a dipnet
- at least two types of mouth openers/mouth gags

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Sub-Alternative 4b. ~~Modify the gear specifications for line cutters, dehookers, and bolt cutters for all federally permitted snapper grouper vessels. Vessels with freeboard height of 4 feet or more (and/or using longline gear) would be required to carry and use:~~

- a long-handled line cutter,
- a long-handled dehooker,
- a long-handled device to pull an “inverted V”,
- a dipnet,
- cushion/support device (i.e., boat cushion),
- a short-handled dehooker for ingested hooks,
- long-nose or needle-nose pliers,
- bolt cutters,
- monofilament line cutters, and
- at least two types of mouth openers/mouth gags.

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Alternative 5. Modify the design specifications of the current sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish release gear equipment for all federally permitted non-longline snapper grouper vessels with hook-and-line gear on board to match the specifications described in the NOAA Fisheries Service document entitled “Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury.”

NOTE: This alternative would modify the existing requirements based on tackle size and would not account for freeboard height.

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These new design criteria allow for less “heavy-duty” gears more appropriate for lighter tackle used by snapper-grouper fishers (see **Appendix D** for specification on each gear type):

~~Council may select one or more sub-alternatives.~~

~~NOTE: Sub-alternative 5a is recommended by the Southeast Region’s Office of Protected Resources Division as the minimum requirement necessary to remain in compliance with the biological opinion. Choosing additional sub-alternatives would be especially beneficial for species conservation, but not required to remain in compliance with the biological opinion.~~

Sub-Alternative 5a. Require all federally permitted non-longline snapper grouper vessels with hook-and-line gear on board (see **Appendix D**) for specification on each gear type):

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- a short-handled dehooker for ingested hooks, or a short-handled dehooker for external hooks,
- cushion/support device (i.e., standard automobile tire or boat cushion)
- long-nose or needle-nose pliers,
- bolt-cutters
- mono-filament line cutters
- a dipnet
- at least two types of mouth openers/mouth gags

Sub-Alternative 5b. Also require:

- a long-handled dehooker for ingested hooks, or a long-handled dehooker for external hooks,

Sub-Alternative 5c. Also require:

- a long-handled line clipper or cutter,

Sub-Alternative 5d. Also require:

- a long-handled device to pull an “inverted V”

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