

Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service ¥ Southeast Regional Office ¥ 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

David Bernhart
727-570-5312, FAX 727-570-5517
David.Bernhart@noaa.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

August 23, 2000
NR00-043
<http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov>

Authorization of Restricted Tow Times for Shrimp Trawlers in Galveston Bay

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has authorized for 30 days the use of limited tow times by shrimpers in the inland waters of Galveston Bay, Texas as an alternative to the required use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs). Limited tow time use is authorized in inshore waters of Galveston Bay, north of the Galveston jetties, east of the Galveston Island Interstate-45 Causeway, west of the "Shellfish Line" in East Bay (the line running from the entrance to Robinson Bayou to the tide gauge at Marsh Point), and, in Upper Galveston Bay, south of the overhead power lines crossing from near Evergreen Point to near Barbour's Cut, and, in Trinity Bay, south of the line running from the entrance of Double Bayou to Umbrella Point. Essentially, most of Galveston Bay, excluding the upper half of Trinity Bay and the eastern quarter of East Bay, is included in the exemption area.

Because of unusual prevailing environmental conditions affecting Galveston Bay, including drought, high water temperatures, and elevated salinities, a type of bryozoan, locally known as "sauerkraut weed," is proliferating in the bay. High concentrations of the spaghetti-like bryozoan can clog the TED, causing shrimp loss through the TED escape opening or preventing a turtle's escape if the opening is completely blocked.

This authorization is effective for 30 days, from August 23, 2000 through 11:59 p.m., September 22, 2000.

Fishermen who choose to trawl without TEDs installed

in their nets must abide by tow-time restrictions. Tow times must be limited to no more than 55 minutes measured from the time trawl doors enter the water until they are retrieved from the water.

The Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Coastal Fisheries Division (TPWD) sent NMFS a formal request for this exemption on August 18, 2000. The TPWD request described complaints received from shrimp fishermen about the spaghetti-like bryozoan being caught in large quantities during shrimp trawling operations within Galveston Bay, and clogging their TEDs. TPWD investigated the situation and provided NMFS with photographic evidence of the clogging problem. The Director's request specified the affected area in Galveston Bay. The TPWD will provide enforcement of the limited tow times. NMFS will coordinate with the TPWD on the continuing need for this exemption.

NMFS encourages shrimp trawlers in Galveston Bay to continue to use TEDs if possible. NMFS studies have shown that the problem of clogging by seagrass, algae, jellyfish, or other biogenic or man-made debris is not unique to TED-equipped nets. In fact, TEDs may help exclude certain types of debris and allow shrimpers to conduct longer tows. For information on recommendations that will increase the TED's performance in debris laden waters, contact NMFS Harvesting Branch gear specialists at the NMFS Pascagoula Laboratory at 228-762-4591.