



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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FISHERIES SERVICE ANNOUNCES THE AUTHORIZED USE OF RESTRICTED TOW TIMES IN CERTAIN STATE WATERS OF ALABAMA, MISSISSIPPI, AND LOUISIANA

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) announces that it will publish in the Federal Register, a temporary authorization affecting shrimp trawlers who are required to use turtle excluder devices (TEDs) in certain state waters of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. These authorizations will allow shrimp trawlers in the affected areas to use restricted tow times instead of TEDs. These authorizations are necessary due to the special environmental conditions caused by excessive amounts of debris left by Tropical Storm Isidore and Hurricane Lili which make trawling with TED-equipped nets impracticable.

NOAA Fisheries received requests from the affected state's marine resources managers requesting these authorizations because their investigations indicated that increased amounts of debris on the shrimping grounds were causing TEDs to become clogged and ineffective. Additional investigations conducted by NOAA Fisheries Harvesting Systems Branch confirmed the need for these authorizations. This authorization will be enforced by the combined efforts of the marine enforcement agencies of the three states affected and NOAA enforcement.

These authorizations are now in effect in the following areas:

- The authorized area of Alabama includes the inshore waters of Bon Secour Bay west to the Alabama/Mississippi border south of the Intracoastal Waterway.
- The authorized area of Mississippi is from the coastline of Mississippi at its intersection with the line of longitude 89 30' W., thence southward to its intersection with the line of latitude 30 10' N., thence eastward to the line of longitude 89 05.5' W. (approximately even with the southern tip of Cat Island), thence northward to the line of

latitude 30 13.8' N. (approximately even with the western tip of Cat Island), thence westward to the line of longitude 89 10' W., thence northward to its intersection with the coastline of Mississippi, thence continuing along the coastline to the original point.

- The authorized area of Louisiana is all state waters east of a line at 92° 20' W. longitude (approximately at Fresh Water Bayou in Vermilion Parish, Louisiana).

These authorizations are valid until 11:59 pm on November 21, 2002, in Mississippi and until 11:59 pm on December 1, 2002, in Alabama and Louisiana.

In these areas shrimp trawlers can trawl without TEDs but must limit their tow times to 75 minutes, measured from the time the trawl doors enter the water until they are removed from the water. However, NOAA Fisheries encourages shrimp trawlers in the affected areas to continue to use TEDs if possible, even though they are authorized under this action to use restricted tow times. NOAA Fisheries studies have shown that the problem of clogging by seagrass, algae or by other debris is not unique to TED-equipped nets. When fishermen trawl in problem areas, they may experience clogging with or without TEDs. The 75 minute tow time restriction does not pertain to shrimp trawlers who continue to use TEDs in the affected areas.

NOAA Fisheries will continue to monitor this situation. If monitoring indicates that debris is no longer a problem, then these authorizations will be shortened. If debris continues to be a problem after the dates above, these authorization may be extended. Fishermen should monitor NOAA weather radio for announcements. They may also contact the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office at the phone number above for updated information.