

# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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

## FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

Eric Hawk  
727-570-5312, FAX 727-570-5517  
[Eric.Hawk@noaa.gov](mailto:Eric.Hawk@noaa.gov)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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<http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov>

## Authorization of Restricted Tow Times By Shrimp Trawlers in Matagorda Bay, Texas Waters

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has authorized for 30 days the use of limited tow times by shrimpers in the inland waters of Matagorda Bay, Texas as an alternative to the required use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs). TEDs prevent sea turtles from drowning in shrimp trawls. Limited tow time use is authorized only in the area bounded on the west by a line running from the Matagorda Jetties north along the Matagorda Ship Channel to Mile Marker 54 and east to Sand Point. The exemption area includes Carancahua and Tres Palacios Bays within Matagorda Bay, but not Lavaca Bay. The TPWD will provide enforcement of the limited tow times.

This action is necessitated by unusual prevailing environmental conditions affecting Matagorda Bay, including the south Texas drought, high water temperatures, and elevated salinities, which have lead to a proliferation of the bryozoan *Bugula sp.* in Matagorda Bay waters. High concentrations of the spaghetti-like bryozoan can clog the TED, preventing shrimp from passing into the tail bag, and resulting in shrimp loss through the TED escape opening.

This action is effective for 30 days, from October 19, 1999 through 11:59 p.m., November 18, 1999. Fishermen choosing to trawl without TEDs installed in their nets must abide by tow-time restrictions. From October 19, 1999 through October 31, 1999, 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. From November 1, 1999 until the notice expires, tow times must be limited to no more than 75 minutes.

The Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Coastal Fisheries Division (TPWD) sent NMFS a formal request for this exemption on September 22, 1999. The TPWD request described complaints received from shrimp fishermen about biogenic debris, specifically, a spaghetti-like bryozoan, *Bugula sp.*, being caught in large quantities during shrimp trawling operations within Matagorda Bay, and clogging their TEDs. The Director's request specified the affected area in Matagorda Bay. TPWD provided NMFS with photographic evidence of the clogging problem. A NMFS gear technician sent to investigate verified the large amounts of *Bugula sp.* being caught and the TED-clogging problem during short sample trawls made aboard a commercial shrimp vessel operating within Matagorda Bay.

NMFS will coordinate with the TPWD on the continuing need for this exemption or for any new actions affecting the inshore fishery. However, NMFS encourages shrimp trawlers in Matagorda 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.

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Southeast Regional Office, F/SER3  
9721 Executive Center Drive North  
St. Petersburg, FL 33702

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