

§ 223.206 Exceptions to prohibitions relating to sea turtles.

(d) Exception for incidental taking. The prohibitions against taking in § 223.205(a) do not apply to the incidental take of any member of a threatened species of sea turtle (i.e., a take not directed toward such member) during fishing or scientific research activities, to the extent that those involved are in compliance with all applicable requirements of paragraphs (d)(1) through (d)(5) of this section, or in compliance with the terms and conditions of an incidental take permit issued pursuant to paragraph (a)(2) of this section.

(1) Handling and resuscitation requirements.

(i) Any specimen taken incidentally during the course of fishing or scientific research activities must be handled with due care to prevent injury to live specimens, observed for activity, and returned to the water according to the following procedures:

(A) Sea turtles that are dead or actively moving must be released over the stern of the boat. In addition, they must be released only when trawls are not in use, when the engine gears are in neutral position, and in areas where they are unlikely to be recaptured or injured by vessels.

(B) Resuscitation must be attempted on sea turtles that are comatose or inactive but not dead by:

(1) Placing the turtle on its back (carapace) and pumping its breastplate (plastron) with hand or foot; or

(2) Placing the turtle on its breastplate (plastron) and elevating its hindquarter several inches for a period of 1 up to 24 hours. The amount of the elevation depends on the size of the turtle; greater elevations are needed for larger turtles. Sea turtles being resuscitated must be shaded and kept wet or moist. Those that revive and become active must be released over the stern of the boat only when trawls are not in use, when the engine gears are in neutral position, and in areas where they are unlikely to be recaptured or injured by vessels. Similarly, sea turtles that fail to move within several hours (up to 24, if possible) must be returned to the water in the same manner.

(ii) Any specimen taken incidentally during the course of fishing or scientific research activities must not be consumed, sold, landed, offloaded, transshipped, or kept below deck.

(2) Gear requirements--(i) TED requirement for shrimp trawlers. Any shrimp trawler that is in the Atlantic Area or Gulf Area must have an approved TED installed in each net that is rigged for fishing. A net is rigged for fishing if it is in the water, or if it is shackled, tied, or otherwise connected to any trawl door or board, or to any tow rope, cable, pole or extension, either on board or attached in any manner to the shrimp trawler. Exceptions to the TED requirement for shrimp trawlers are provided in paragraph (d)(2)(ii) of this section.

(ii) Exemptions from the TED requirement--(A) Alternative tow-time restrictions. A shrimp trawler is exempt from the TED requirements of paragraph (d)(2)(i) of this section if it complies with the alternative tow-time restrictions in paragraph (d)(3)(i) of this section and if it:

(1) Has on board no power or mechanical-advantage trawl retrieval system (i.e., any device used to haul any part of the net aboard);

(2) Is a bait shrimper that retains all live shrimp on board in a container with a circulating seawater system, if it does not possess more than 32 pounds (14.5 kg) of dead shrimp on board, and if it has on board a valid original state bait-shrimp license (if in a state that requires such a license);

(3) Has only a pusher-head trawl, skimmer trawl, or wing net rigged for fishing; and

(4) Is in an area during a period for which tow-time restrictions apply under paragraphs (d)(3)(ii) or (iii) of this section, if it complies with all applicable provisions imposed under those paragraphs.

(B) Exempted gear or activities. The following fishing gear or activities are exempted from the TED requirements of paragraph (d)(2)(i) of this section:

(1) A single test net (try net) with a headrope length of 12 ft (3.6 m) or less and with a footrope length of 15 ft (4.6 m) or less, if it is either pulled immediately in front of another net or is not connected to another net in any way, if no more than one test net is used at a time, and if it is not towed as a primary net;

(2) A beam or roller trawl, if the frame is outfitted with rigid vertical bars, and if none of the spaces between the bars, or between the bars and the frame, exceeds 4 inches (10.2 cm); and

(3) A shrimp trawler fishing for, or possessing, royal red shrimp, if royal red shrimp constitutes at least 90 percent (by weight) of all shrimp either found on board, or offloaded from that shrimp trawler.

(iii) Gear requirement--summer flounder trawlers--(A) TED requirement. Any summer flounder trawler in the summer flounder fishery-sea turtle protection area must have an approved TED installed in each net that is rigged for fishing. A net is rigged for fishing if it is in the water, or if it is shackled, tied, or otherwise connected to any trawl door or board, or to any tow rope, cable, pole or extension, either on board or attached in any manner to the summer flounder trawler. Exceptions to the TED requirement for summer flounder trawlers are provided in paragraph (d)(2)(iii)(B) of this section.

(B) Exemptions from the TED requirement. Any summer flounder trawler north of 35°46.1' N. lat. (Oregon Inlet, NC) from January 15 through March 15 annually is exempt from the TED requirement of paragraph (d)(2)(iii)(A) of this section, unless the Assistant Administrator determines that TED use is necessary to protect sea turtles or ensure compliance, pursuant to the procedures of paragraph (d)(4) of this section.

(C) Monitoring. Summer flounder trawlers must carry onboard a NMFS-approved observer if requested by the Southeast Regional Administrator or the Northeast Regional Administrator. A written notification will be sent to the address specified for the vessel in either the NMFS or state fishing permit application, or to the address specified for registration or documentation purposes, or upon written notification otherwise served on the owner or operator of the vessel. Owners and operators must comply with the terms and conditions specified in such written notification. All NMFS-approved observers will report any violations of this section, or other applicable regulations and laws. Information collected by observers may be used for enforcement purposes.

(D) Additional sea turtle conservation measures. The Assistant Administrator may impose other such restrictions upon summer flounder trawlers as the Assistant Administrator deems necessary or appropriate to protect sea turtles and ensure compliance, pursuant to the procedures of paragraph (d)(4) of this section. Such measures may include, but are not limited to, a requirement to use TEDs in areas other than summer flounder fishery-sea turtle protection area, a requirement to use limited tow-times, and closure of the fishery.

(iv) Gear requirement--leatherback conservation zone--(A) Leatherback surveys. From January 1 through June 30 of each year, weekly aerial surveys will be conducted in the leatherback conservation zone by NMFS or state agents, contingent upon weather conditions. If sighting rates of greater than 10 leatherback turtles per 50 nautical miles (92.6 km) of trackline are observed, the aerial surveys of that area will be replicated within 24 hours, or as soon as practicable

thereafter.

(B) TED requirements and registration. If surveys pursuant to paragraph (d)(2)(iv)(A) of this section indicate a sighting rate within the leatherback conservation zone of greater than 10 leatherback sea turtles per 50 nautical miles (92.6 km) of trackline, NMFS will close an area of the leatherback conservation zone encompassing all, or a portion of, inshore waters and offshore waters 10 nautical miles (18.5 km) seaward of the COLREGS demarcation line, bounded by 1° lat. coinciding with the trackline, within the leatherback conservation zone. This closure will be for a 2-week period. Within such closed area, fishing by any shrimp trawler required to have a NMFS-approved TED installed in each net rigged for fishing is prohibited, unless the TED installed is one described at § 223.207(a)(7)(ii)(B) or, prior to October 13, 1999, § 223.207(c)(1)(iv)(B), and the owner or operator of the shrimp trawler has notified the Southeast Regional Administrator of his or her intention to fish in that area, in accordance with the procedure provided in paragraph (d)(5) of this section. If requested in writing from the Southeast Regional Administrator, owners and operators of shrimp trawlers in the leatherback conservation zone must carry NMFS-approved observers aboard such vessel(s). A shrimp trawler in the leatherback conservation zone must comply with the terms and conditions specified in such written request, as well as provide information on trawling hours, gear modifications, and turtle captures.

(C) Notification. NMFS will immediately announce specific area closures on the NOAA weather radio channel, in newspapers, and other media. Specific area closures will be effective upon filing for public inspection at the Office of the Federal Register. Owners and operators of shrimp trawl vessels in the leatherback conservation zone are responsible for monitoring the NOAA weather radio channel for closure announcements. Shrimp trawlers may also call the Southeast Regional Office at (813) 570-5312 to receive updated area closure information.

(3) Tow-time restrictions--(i) Duration of tows. If tow-time restrictions are utilized pursuant to paragraph (d)(2)(ii), (d)(3)(ii), or (d)(3)(iii) of this section, a shrimp trawler must limit tow times. The tow time is measured from the time that the trawl door enters the water until it is removed from the water. For a trawl that is not attached to a door, the tow time is measured from the time the codend enters the water until it is removed from the water. Tow times may not exceed:

(A) 55 minutes from April 1 through October 31; and

(B) 75 minutes from November 1 through March 31.

(ii) Alternative--special environmental conditions. The Assistant Administrator may allow compliance with tow-time restrictions, as an alternative to the TED requirement of paragraph (d)(2)(i) of this section, if the Assistant Administrator determines that the presence of algae, seaweed, debris or other special environmental conditions in a particular area makes trawling with TED-equipped nets impracticable.

(iii) Substitute--ineffectiveness of TEDs. The Assistant Administrator may require compliance with tow-time restrictions, as a substitute for the TED requirement of paragraph (d)(2)(i) of this section, if the Assistant Administrator determines that TEDs are ineffective in protecting sea turtles.

(iv) Notice; applicability; conditions. The Assistant Administrator will publish notification concerning any tow-time restriction imposed under paragraph (d)(3)(ii) or (iii) of this section in the Federal Register and will announce it in summary form on channel 16 of the marine VHF radio. A notification of tow-time restrictions will include findings in support of these restrictions as an alternative to, or as substitute for, the TED requirements. The notification will specify the

effective dates, the geographic area where tow-time restrictions apply, and any applicable conditions or restrictions that the Assistant Administrator determines are necessary or appropriate to protect sea turtles and ensure compliance, including, but not limited to, a requirement to carry observers, to register vessels in accordance with procedures at paragraph (d)(5) of this section, or for all shrimp trawlers in the area to synchronize their tow times so that all trawl gear remains out of the water during certain times. A notification withdrawing tow-time restrictions will include findings in support of that action.

(v) Procedures. The Assistant Administrator will consult with the appropriate fishery officials (state or Federal) where the affected shrimp fishery is located in issuing a notification concerning tow-time restrictions. An emergency notification can be effective for a period of up to 30 days and may be renewed for additional periods of up to 30 days each if the Assistant Administrator finds that the conditions necessitating the imposition of tow-time restrictions continue to exist. The Assistant Administrator may invite comments on such an action, and may withdraw or modify the action by following procedures similar to those for implementation. The Assistant Administrator will implement any permanent tow-time restriction through rulemaking.

(4) Limitations on incidental takings during fishing activities--(i) Limitations. The exemption for incidental takings of sea turtles in paragraph

(d) of this section does not authorize incidental takings during fishing activities if the takings:

(A) Would violate the restrictions, terms, or conditions of an incidental take statement or biological opinion;

(B) Would violate the restrictions, terms, or conditions of an incidental take permit; or

(C) May be likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a species listed under the Act.

(ii) Determination; restrictions on fishing activities. The Assistant Administrator may issue a determination that incidental takings during fishing activities are unauthorized. Pursuant thereto, the Assistant Administrator may restrict fishing activities in order to conserve a species listed under the Act, including, but not limited to, restrictions on the fishing activities of vessels subject to paragraph (d)(2) of this section. The Assistant Administrator will take such action if the Assistant Administrator determines that restrictions are necessary to avoid unauthorized takings that may be likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species. The Assistant Administrator may withdraw or modify a determination concerning unauthorized takings or any restriction on fishing activities if the Assistant Administrator determines that such action is warranted.

(iii) Notice; applicability; conditions. The Assistant Administrator will publish a notification of a determination concerning unauthorized takings or a notification concerning the restriction of fishing activities in the Federal Register. The Assistant Administrator will provide as much advance notice as possible, consistent with the requirements of the Act, and will announce the notification in summary form on channel 16 of the marine VHF radio. Notification of a determination concerning unauthorized takings will include findings in support of that determination; specify the fishery, including the target species and gear used by the fishery, the area, and the times, for which incidental takings are not authorized; and include such other conditions and restrictions as the Assistant Administrator determines are necessary or appropriate to protect sea turtles and ensure compliance. Notification of restriction of fishing activities will include findings in support of the restriction, will specify the time and area where the restriction is applicable, and will specify any applicable conditions or restrictions that the Assistant Administrator determines are necessary or appropriate to protect sea turtles and ensure

compliance. Such conditions and restrictions may include, but are not limited to, limitations on the types of fishing gear that may be used, tow-time restrictions, alteration or extension of the periods of time during which particular tow-time requirements apply, requirements to use TEDs, registration of vessels in accordance with procedures at paragraph (d)(5) of this section, and requirements to provide observers. Notification of withdrawal or modification will include findings in support of that action.

(iv) Procedures. The Assistant Administrator will consult with the appropriate fisheries officials (state or Federal) where the fishing activities are located in issuing notification of a determination concerning unauthorized takings or notification concerning the restriction of fishing activities. An emergency notification will be effective for a period of up to 30 days and may be renewed for additional periods of up to 30 days each. The Assistant Administrator may invite comments on such action, and may withdraw or modify the action by following procedures similar to those for implementation. The Assistant Administrator will implement any permanent determination or restriction through rulemaking.

(5) Registration. If the Assistant Administrator imposes restrictions under paragraph (d)(2)(iv), (d)(3)(ii), (d)(3)(iii), or (d)(4)(ii) of this section, the Assistant Administrator may require the owner and operator of a vessel to register before entering an area where, and during the time when, the restrictions apply. If registration is required, the vessel's owner and operator must submit the following information to the NMFS Regional Office:

- (i) The name and official number (or registration number) of the vessel;
- (ii) The names, mailing and street addresses, and telephone numbers of the vessel owner and operator;
- (iii) The permit number or other identification of relevant state or Federal fishing permit(s);
- (iv) Where and when the vessel intends to fish;
- (v) Where and when the vessel will depart on any fishing trip, with sufficient specificity to allow for an observer to embark on the trip; and
- (vi) Any changes in the information submitted under paragraphs (d)(5)(i) through (d)(5)(v) of this section. Failure to do so immediately will void the registration, rendering unlawful any subsequent entry of the fishing vessel into the area where and during the time when the restrictions apply.