

OCEANA

PRESS RELEASE: Federal Government Maintains Protections for Sea Turtles Despite Local "Mistake"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington, DC -- Today, Oceana issued the following statement after learning that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will fully enforce the new rule requiring larger turtle excluder devices (TEDs) on shrimpers' nets in the Gulf of Mexico. Despite conflicting statements from the regional NMFS office reported by the Associated Press, the new rule has been implemented and will be enforced. TEDs act as escape hatches for mature sea turtles that get caught in shrimp nets.

"Oceana is happy to learn that NMFS intends to fully enforce the new TEDs rule in the Gulf of Mexico. Earlier in the year, Congress gave the Gulf States \$17.5 million that could be used to provide shrimpers with technical and financial assistance to ensure widespread use of larger TEDs," said Charlotte Gray Hudson, marine wildlife scientist at Oceana. "Also, NMFS delayed implementation in the Gulf by six months to help shrimpers get ready for the new rule. Because this rule has been in development for more than three years, there should have been adequate resources and time for shrimpers to prepare," said Hudson.

NMFS indicated that it will enforce the rule in the Gulf of Mexico the same way that it did when similar rules were introduced in the South Atlantic this past April. In the first few weeks of implementation, the agency may issue a warning for first violations and will treat any subsequent violations very seriously.

Information from states that already use the larger TEDs shows that these devices support productive fishing while protecting sea turtles. All sea turtles in U.S. waters are listed as either endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA).