

# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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### ***FISHERIES SERVICE REQUESTS VOLUNTARY USE OF TURTLE EXCLUDER DEVICES MODIFIED TO RELEASE LEATHERBACK SEA TURTLES***

The National Marine Fisheries Service requests that all shrimp trawlers required to use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) in all Atlantic Ocean and Atlantic inshore waters, out to 10 nautical miles from shore, along the east coast of Florida to the Georgia/Florida border use TEDs modified to release leatherback sea turtles through the end of March 2001.

In the fall and winter of 1999 NMFS had to issue emergency rules requiring the use of the leatherback modification in Florida waters due to an unusually high number of leatherback strandings. Unlike the springtime, when leatherbacks along the Atlantic coast are migrating rapidly northward, they tend to stay in this area until the start of the spring migration. This makes them vulnerable to death or injury during the winter Florida shrimp season.

NMFS is making this request to help protect leatherback sea turtles that may be in the area and to

insure as little disruption as possible to fishing activities brought on as a result of possible closures caused if stranding levels were to increase as they did last year.

Leatherback TED modifications can be made to standard, single-grid hard TEDs or to Parker soft TEDs. For instructions on making these modifications, please contact the NMFS Southeast Regional Office at the phone number above. For more specific assistance with making any gear modifications, please contact the NMFS Harvesting and Engineering Branch at 228-762-4591.

NMFS will continue to monitor the presence of leatherback sea turtles within the area. Fishermen should monitor NOAA weather radio for announcements. They may also contact the NMFS Southeast Regional Office at the phone number above for updated information.