

NOAA Fisheries Bans “J” Hooks in Atlantic Longline Fisheries in a Move to Protect Sea Turtles;

New Gear Allows Agency to Re-open Atlantic Fishing Grounds to U.S. Longline Fleet

Scientific advancements have led to the development of fishing techniques that allow longline vessels to avoid sea turtles and protect them from becoming hooked on gear.

Based on these advancements, the agency has re-opened the Northeast Distant fishing area, known as the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, to the American pelagic longline fleet. The area had been closed to fishermen from the United States for three years because of high concentrations of sea turtles in the area. During this 3-year closure, the agency worked cooperatively with the longline industry to develop technology and fishing methods that reduce sea turtle “interactions” in this fishery. Vessels with pelagic longline gear onboard may now fish in the Grand Banks, but are limited at all times to possessing and/or using 18/0 or larger circle hooks with an offset not to exceed 10 degrees. In addition, only whole finfish and squid baits may be possessed and/or used.

Effective August 5, 2004, “J” hooks will be banned in all Atlantic longline fisheries (including the Gulf of Mexico and U.S. Caribbean). This step will provide tremendous conservation benefits for sea turtles since the majority of sea turtle mortalities in longline fisheries are caused by ingestion of “J” hooks. Waters outside the Grand Banks may only possess and/or use 16/0 or larger non-offset circle hooks and 18/0 or larger circle hooks with an offset not to exceed 10 degrees. Only whole finfish and squid baits may be possessed and/or used.

The new regulation also requires pelagic longline vessels to possess and use sea turtle handling and release gear consistent with NOAA Fisheries’ careful release protocols. The required gear is described in **[“NOAA Fisheries - Approved Models For Equipment Needed For The Careful Release of Sea Turtles Caught In Hook And Line Fisheries.”](#)** The initial list of approved models is available on the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Division’s Web site at: **<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms>** and upon request at (727) 570- 5447.

Click here to retrieve the Technical Memorandum (NMFS-SEFSC-524) containing the **[careful release protocols](#)**. A **[training video](#)** on release and disentanglement techniques is also available. For further information, Rick Pearson, Russell Dunn or Greg Fairclough (727) 570-5447.