



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Silver Spring, MD 20910

NMFS Announces a Final Rule to Implement Management Measures for Caribbean Closures and Dehooking Requirements for the Atlantic Shark Fishery

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is implementing additional requirements for handling and release of sea turtles and other non-target species in the shark bottom longline (BLL) fishery consistent with requirements for the pelagic longline (PLL) fishery (July 6, 2004, 69 FR 40734).

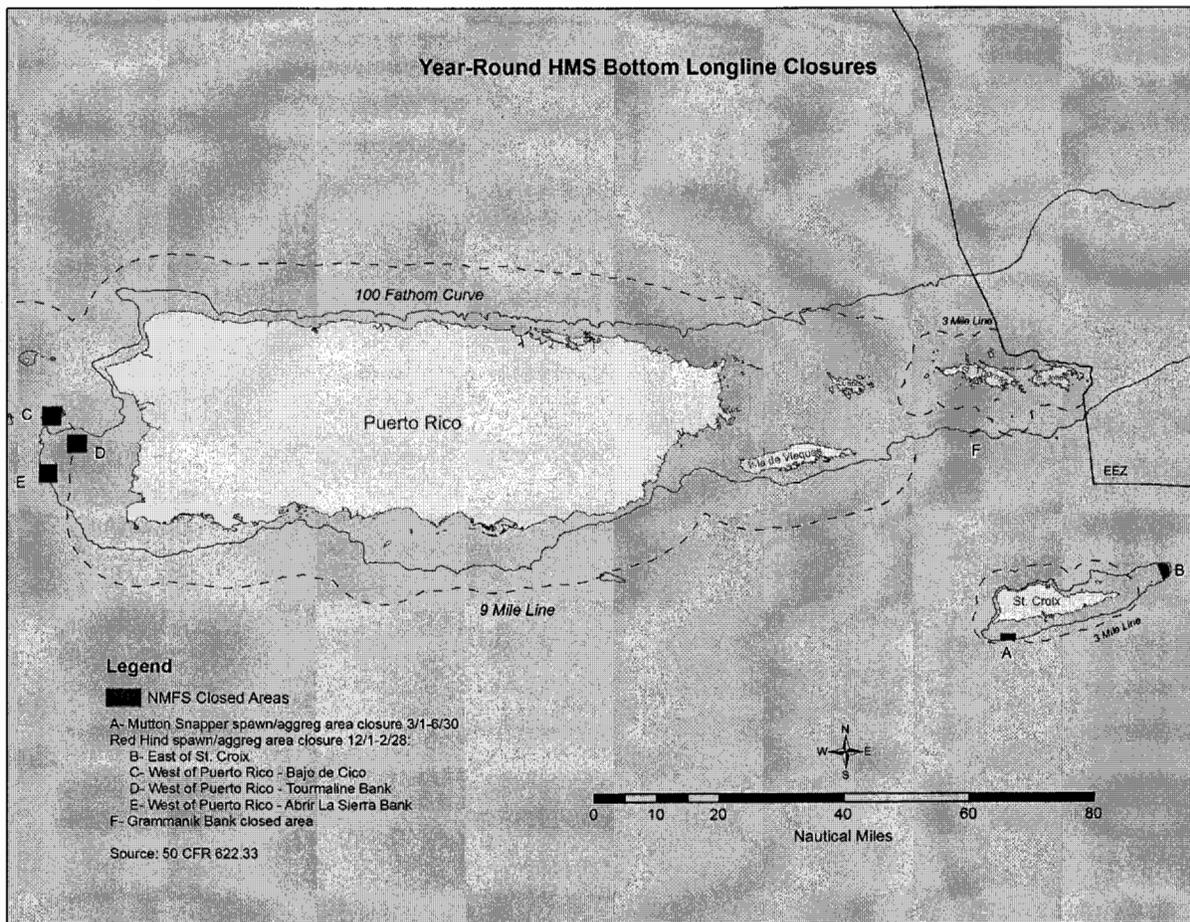
This final rule would require Atlantic shark fishermen aboard all Federally permitted vessels for Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) with BLL gear onboard to possess, maintain, and utilize equipment and protocols consistent with the requirements for the pelagic longline (PLL) fishery.

All BLL vessels with commercial shark permits would be required to have NMFS-approved equipment onboard, including, but not limited to: short and long handled dehookers, a standard automobile tire (or comparable cushioned surface), needle nose pliers, a long handled device to pull an inverted "V," monofilament line cutters, boltcutters, two different mouth openers/gags, and a copy of the Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury.

Design specifications for all the new required equipment for BLL vessels are the same as those for the PLL fishery. Fishermen would be able to construct the equipment themselves as long as it meets the design specifications described at 50 CFR § 635.21. Appendix A1 of the Final Environmental Assessment prepared for this rule describes the design specifications, approximate costs, and suppliers.

This rulemaking will also implement measures for Atlantic HMS fisheries that complement those implemented by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) on October 28, 2005 (70 FR 62073). The purpose of this action is to implement consistent measures between Council-managed and Atlantic HMS fisheries, with the intent of minimizing adverse impacts to Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and reducing fishing mortality on mutton snapper, red hind, and other reef-dwelling species. The final rule would prohibit all vessels issued HMS permits with BLL gear onboard from fishing with, or deploying, any fishing gear in six distinct areas off the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, year-round. Fishing with other bottom-tending gear (pots, traps, gillnets, and trammel nets) is already prohibited in these areas to minimize adverse impacts to coral or hard bottom habitats. These areas are defined 50 CFR § 622.33 (a) (1), (a) (2), and (a) (3) and shown on the included map.





This notice is a courtesy to the HMS fishery participants to help keep you informed about your fishery. Official notice of Federal fishing actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of Federal Register. For further information on this final rule and its requirements, contact LeAnn Southward Hogan or Karyl Brewster-Geisz at 301-713-2347. Copies of the final rule and Final Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review/Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis are available upon request from the Highly Migratory Species Management Division, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (phone: 301-713-2347, fax: 301-713-1917). The information will also be posted on the HMS website at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>.

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Date