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Gulf of Mexico - Alternative Measures to Protect Turtles in Effect Until Nov 10

In the wake of Hurricane Rita, NOAA Fisheries has received requests from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to allow the use of tow times as an alternative to turtle excluder devices (TEDs) in state and federal waters because of the presence of excessive storm-related debris on the fishing grounds. A TED that is clogged with debris can no longer catch shrimp effectively, nor can it effectively exclude turtles. NOAA Fisheries has confirmed that debris washed into state and Federal waters by Hurricane Rita has created special environmental conditions that make trawling with TED-equipped nets impracticable.

In response, NOAA Fisheries has published a temporary rule that allows shrimp fishermen to use limited tow times as an alternative to TEDs in **state and Federal waters off Cameron Parish, LA, westward to the boundary shared by Matagorda and Brazoria Counties, TX, and extending offshore 50 nautical miles.** This is in addition to a similar action taken in response to Hurricane Katrina, which applies to state and Federal waters from the Florida/Alabama border, westward to the boundary of Cameron Parish, Louisiana, through October 24. **The new rule is effective through November 10.**

Each tow may be no more than 55 minutes until October 31 and no more than 75 minutes from November 1 through November 10, as measured from the time that the trawl doors enter the water until they are removed from the water. These tow time limits are designed to avoid deaths of sea turtles that are captured by trawl nets not equipped with TEDs.

In addition, NOAA gear experts have provided several operational recommendations that may allow some fishermen to continue using TEDs without resorting to restricted tow times. All of these recommendations represent legal configurations of TEDs for shrimpers fishing in the affected areas. This rule does not authorize any other departure from the TED requirements, including any illegal modifications to TEDs. In particular, TEDs installed in trawl nets may not be sewn shut.

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