



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

Pacific Islands
Regional Office

Compliance
Guide

Reducing and Mitigating Interactions between Sea Turtles and Pelagic Fisheries in the Western Pacific

Handling, Resuscitation, and Release of Sea Turtles

revised August 2013

This guide summarizes how to comply with sea turtle regulations that were published in the *Federal Register* on November 15, 2005 (70 FR 69282). These measures are intended to reduce interactions between sea turtles and fisheries in the western Pacific region. This guide provides information only about the final rule published on November 15, 2005. There are additional requirements for sea turtle avoidance and mitigation. For the complete set of applicable federal fishing regulations, please refer to Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 600 and 665 (50 CFR parts 600 and 665).

Regulations are subject to change, so fishermen must familiarize themselves with the most recent changes and are responsible to comply with them. Any differences between this compliance guide and the regulations will be resolved in favor of the regulations published in the *Federal Register* (70 FR 69282, November 15, 2005). This compliance guide is issued in accordance with Section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996: title II of Public Law 104-121.

Q1. Who is affected by the regulations?

The regulations apply to fishing vessels that operate in federal waters (in the U.S. EEZ) around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and other U.S. remote island areas in the Pacific (Howland, Baker, Jarvis, Wake, and Palmyra Islands, Johnston Atoll and Kingman Reef), or that are used to land fish into the region. These measures apply to owners and operators of vessels that are registered for use with all western Pacific longline permits (western Pacific longline vessels), as well as owners and operators of domestic non-longline vessels, both commercial and recreational, that use hooks to target pelagic management unit species (PMUS), for example, tunas, marlins, mahimahi, some sharks, and related open-ocean species. A complete list of PMUS is found at 50 CFR 665.800. Non-longline fishing vessels include troll, handline and pole-and-line vessels.

Q2. When did the regulations take effect, and for how long are they effective?

The sea turtle regulations took effect on December 15, 2005, and will remain in effect until they are revised or removed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

Q3. What is the purpose of these regulations?

The regulations are intended to reduce interactions between sea turtles and fishing activities, and to increase the survival of any turtle that is accidentally caught. The regulations focus on the handling, resuscitation, and release of sea turtles. The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council recommended these sea turtle measures, and NMFS approved and implemented them.

Q4. What general types of requirements does this final rule contain?

- Equipment specified by NMFS for use on board longline fishing vessels;
- Sea turtle handling guidelines for all fishermen who target pelagic species;
- Protected species workshops for longline vessel owners and operators; and
- Gear requirements for shallow-set longline fishing.

Q5. What equipment must be aboard western Pacific longline vessels?

- With some exceptions, fishermen are required to carry and use the following specific equipment for handling and releasing sea turtles and to follow specific procedures if you hook or entangle a sea turtle. The NMFS specifications governing these gears can be found in 50 CFR 665.812 paragraphs (a)(5), (a)(6), and (a)(7), respectively. Vessels with freeboard of 3 ft (0.91 m) or less must carry line clippers capable of cutting fishing line or leaders within approximately 1 ft (0.3 m) of the eye of an embedded hook, and wire or bolt cutters capable of cutting through any of the hooks on the vessel. Freeboard is the distance between the vessel's deck and the sea surface.
- Vessels with freeboard more than 3 ft (0.91 m) must have the following turtle handling/dehooking gear on board (equipment specifications are located at 50 CFR 665.812):
 - Long-handled line clipper
 - Long-handled dip net
 - Long-handled dehooker for ingested hooks (replaces the need for the next item)
 - Long-handled dehooker for external hooks
 - Long-handled device to pull an "inverted V"
 - Car tire
 - Short-handled dehooker with bite guard for ingested hooks (replaces the need for the next item)
 - Short-handled dehooker for external hooks
 - Long-nose or needle-nose pliers
 - Wire or bolt cutters capable of cutting any hook used to fish on the vessel
 - Monofilament line cutters
 - At least two of the following mouth openers and gags:
 - Block of hard wood
 - Hank of rope
 - Large bird mouth opener (avian oral speculum)
 - Three canine mouth gags
 - Two sturdy canine chew bones
 - Two rope loops covered with hose
 - Four PVC splice couplings

Q6. Who is exempted from carrying and using this equipment?

Owners and operators (captains) of longline vessels with freeboards 3 ft or less in length are not required to carry the dip nets. Freeboard is the distance between the vessel's deck and the sea surface. Fishermen on handline, troll, pole-and-line, and other non-longline vessels that use hooks to target PMUS are not required to carry mitigation gear.

Q7. Who is required to follow sea turtle handling, resuscitation, and release procedures for accidentally hooked or entangled sea turtles?

All fishermen who use hooks to target PMUS are required to follow these procedures. This includes all commercial and recreational longline, trolling, and handline vessels, and pole-and-line fishermen.

Q8. What are the requirements for sea turtle handling?

If a sea turtle is hooked or entangled in fishing gear, owners and operators of longline vessels must use the required mitigation gear, and longline and other non-longline fishermen must follow the handling guidelines. Any hooked or entangled sea turtle must be handled in a manner that minimizes injury and promotes survival.

Sea turtles that cannot be brought aboard the vessel: When a turtle is too large to bring aboard (for example, a large leatherback sea turtle), or the turtle cannot be brought aboard without causing it further injury, fishermen must disentangle and remove the gear, or cut the line as close as possible to the hook or entanglement to remove as much gear as possible from the turtle.

Sea turtles that can be brought aboard the vessel: When a sea turtle is small enough to bring aboard, or the sea turtle can be brought aboard without causing further injury to it, fishermen must do the following:

- Immediately bring the sea turtle aboard;
- Disentangle and remove the gear, or cut the line as close as possible to the hook or entanglement, to remove as much gear as possible from the turtle; and
- Resuscitate and release the sea turtle.

Q9. What are the requirements for resuscitating a sea turtle?

If a sea turtle appears dead, comatose, or otherwise inactive, the following actions must be taken:

- Place the turtle on its belly so that its rear flippers are elevated at least 6 inches from the ground for a period of no less than 4 hours and no more than 24 hours;
- Administer a reflex test at least once every 3 hours. Perform this test by gently touching the eye and pinching the tail of the turtle in order to determine if it is responsive and potentially recovering;
- Keep the turtle shaded, and moist with a wet towel on the shell and flippers; and
- Return a revived turtle to the sea after 4 hours have passed. Turtles that fail to revive within 24 hours must also be returned to the sea in the same manner as if they were alive. Turtles that appear alive or active when captured do not have to remain on board for a specific time period after fishing gear has been removed from the turtle.

Q10. What are the requirements for releasing a sea turtle?

The turtle species must be identified after handling, as required and returned to the ocean, unless NMFS requests the retention of a dead turtle for research. When a turtle is released into the ocean, fishermen must:

- Place the vessel engine in neutral gear so that the propeller is disengaged and the vessel is stopped. Release the turtle away from any deployed fishing gear.
- Observe that the turtle is safely away from the vessel before engaging the propeller and continuing operations.

Q11. What other requirements are there for sea turtles?

No sea turtle, including a dead turtle, may be consumed or sold, regardless of its condition. A turtle that is caught during fishing operations may be landed, offloaded, transshipped or kept below deck, only if NMFS requests the retention of a dead turtle.

Q12. Who is required to attend the protected species workshops conducted by NMFS and how often?

Each calendar year, both the owner and operator of any vessel registered for use under any western Pacific longline permit must attend, and receive a certification of completion of a protected species workshop conducted by NMFS. This annual requirement is intended to make sure that fishermen have the most current information about protected resources. A valid protected species workshop certificate issued to the operator, or legible copy, must be on board the vessel while fishing and made available for inspection by a NOAA enforcement agent or U.S. Coast Guard officer.

Q13. What are the gear requirements when shallow-set longline fishing?

When shallow-setting north of the Equator, fishermen must use size 18/0 or larger circle hooks with no more than a 10 degree offset, mackerel-type fish bait (mackerel, sanma, sardines OK – no squid bait), and specified turtle dehooking equipment.

Q14. Who is affected by these restrictions on shallow-setting?

All operators of U.S. longline vessels fishing around or landing fish in the western Pacific.

Q15. What are the penalties for the operator or owner of a vessel who does not follow these regulations?

Penalties are determined on a case-by-case basis, and they can include significant administrative, civil, or criminal penalties.

Q16. Where can I obtain additional copies of this guide or receive more information on these regulations?

Sustainable Fisheries
Pacific Islands Regional Office
NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service
1601 Kapiolani Blvd., Suite 1110
Honolulu, HI 96814
Phone: (808) 944-2200
www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD_regs_2.html

You can also read the this rule in the *Federal Register* vol. 70, no. 219, pp. 69282-69285, November 15, 2005.

Search the *Federal Register* at www.gpo.gov/fdsys and click on Federal Register on the right side of the screen.

Search the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations at www.ecfr.gov.