



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES
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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CMR Approves Sea Turtle Study Resolution

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources (CMR) unanimously approved a Sea Turtle Study Resolution, which was presented to them for approval at the June 19, 2012, CMR meeting.

The approved resolution was submitted to the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and requested a comprehensive Gulf of Mexico sea turtle population and distribution study to provide vital baseline data on the status of current sea turtle populations and furthermore, to more fully investigate all possible causes of sea turtle mortality.

The Sea Turtle Study Resolution acknowledges that increased turtle strandings are occurring in the northern Gulf of Mexico states, and there is a need to explore all options because timing of increased strandings does not correlate with spatial distribution of shrimping effort. The resolution also acknowledges the numerous proactive precautionary measures that have been taken by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) to address fisheries interactions, which may affect sea turtles in state waters.

Additionally, the Sea Turtle Study Resolution states that the CMR's management of marine sea turtles is essential, and recognizes the need to know the status and distribution of the listed sea turtle species in the state and all Gulf of Mexico waters before enacting regulations, which may severely impact shrimp fisheries and dependent communities within the Mississippi Coast region.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the state by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the DMR online at www.dmr.ms.gov.

Attached: Sea Turtle Study Resolution

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COMMISSION ON MARINE RESOURCES

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources is a duly constituted governmental entity, created to serve the Great State of Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, said service includes the conservation and management of Mississippi's marine resources; and

WHEREAS, increased sea turtle strandings are occurring in the northern Gulf of Mexico states; and

WHEREAS, there is a need to explore all options because timing of increased strandings does not match spatial distribution of shrimping effort, with 135 dead strandings occurring from January 1 through May 30, 2012 when there was little or no shrimping and only eight dead strandings occurring in Mississippi since the opening of the shrimping season on May 31, 2012; and

WHEREAS, some are attributing increased strandings to shrimp harvesters; and

WHEREAS, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources has responded proactively and taken precautionary measures to address fisheries interactions which may affect sea turtles in state waters, including education, free TED gear distribution, increased monitoring and enforcement efforts and temporary tow time restrictions; and

WHEREAS, the Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources recognizes the economic and cultural importance of the shrimping industry from the Mississippi Sound and the public's inherent right to access the plentiful, fresh, wild, American shrimp food resource; and

WHEREAS, on April 17, 2012, the U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration issued a "Draft Environmental Impact Statement to Reduce Incidental Bycatch and Mortality of Sea Turtles in the Southeastern U.S. Shrimp Fisheries (DEIS)", and on May 8, 2012 issued "Proposed Requirements in the Southeastern Shrimp Fisheries and the New Shrimp Biological Opinion (Proposed Rule)", proposing to withdraw the tow time requirement and require all skimmer trawl, pusher-head trawl, and wing net (butterfly trawl) vessels rigged for fishing to use turtle excluder devices (TEDs) in their nets; and

WHEREAS, the Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources considers its role in the management of marine sea turtles essential and recognizes the need to know the status and distribution of the listed sea turtle species in the state and all Gulf of Mexico waters before enacting regulations which may severely impact shrimp fisheries and dependent communities, and recognizes the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission has recently begun a Kemp's Ridley stock assessment, which may take six months or more to accomplish.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, in a duly constituted and assembled meeting, that the Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources recommends that prior to the implementation of any new rules that the U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration first conduct a comprehensive Gulf of Mexico sea turtle population and distribution study to provide vital baseline data on the status of current populations of sea turtles and that the agency more fully investigate all possible causes of sea turtle mortality.

DONE AND RESOLVED in this duly constituted and assembled meeting on this the 19th day of June, 2012.

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON MARINE RESOURCES


Vernon Asper, Ph.D., Chairman


Jimmy Taylor, Vice-Chairman


Richard Gollott, Commissioner


Steve Bosarge, Commissioner


Shelby Drummond, Commissioner

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES


William W. Walker, Executive Director