



SHRIMP BOATS like these two at Holden Beach would have to pull TEDs year-round in inshore waters under a rule change proposed by the federal government.

STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

New TED Rules Would Affect Shrimpers

BY DOUG RUTTER
Shrimpers would be required to use turtle excluders in their trawl nets year-round inshore and offshore if federal officials approve a set of proposed rule changes.

"The day of reckoning is probably here," said Jim Bahen, marine advisory agent with UNC Sea Grant at Kure Beach who has worked with local shrimpers since turtle excluder device requirements took effect in 1989.

Turtle excluder devices, or TEDs, are contraptions made out of metal or webbing that are inserted into trawl nets. They allow sea turtles to escape while smaller shrimp are caught in the tailbag.

After much debate, federal officials started requiring shrimpers to use TEDs three years ago in certain areas during certain seasons.

Shrimpers have complained about the cost of the TEDs and the fact that they cut down on the harvest, but others say the devices are needed to prevent sea turtles from getting caught in shrimp nets and drowning.

Requiring TEDs year-round in all waters is one of 12 proposed rule changes issued last week by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

Bahen said requiring turtle excluders year-round inshore would have a big impact in North Carolina, where 80 percent of the shrimp are caught in inshore waters like Pamlico Sound and the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway.

Under existing rules, shrimpers who work in the Atlantic Ocean already have to use turtle excluders year-round.

From May 1 to Aug. 31, shrimpers working inshore in boats less than 25 feet long must either use TEDs or limit their tow time to 90 minutes. Larger boats must use the TEDs.

Bahen said it will likely be September or later before a new set of rules is approved, which means area shrimpers won't be affected much this year.

Another proposed rule that would have an impact in Brunswick

assistance to pull in their nets. "It's going to really hit them hard because sometimes the designs don't fit in these little nets," Bahen said.

Among the other proposals, the new rules would allow officials to impose seasonal closures to protect turtles and allow authorities to seize shrimp that are caught in violation of the rules.

TED rules also could be temporarily lifted in certain areas if there is a large amount of seaweed or officials find other conditions that don't permit the use of turtle excluders.

Skimmer trawls, beam trawls and wing nets would be exempt from the rules because officials have no evidence that they capture sea turtles.

Bahen said environmental groups concerned about endangered sea turtles have plenty of ammunition to support the proposed rules.

They say the impact of TEDs on the shrimping industry isn't as bad as shrimpers claim. Studies show that sea turtle deaths have declined since the advent of excluders.

At the same time, commercial shrimp landings have increased each of the last two years and turtle nesting activity has increased.

"You can pretty well believe that the environmental community and the people who are pushing for these regulations want to see these come about," Bahen said.

Fishermen and others interested in the rules have until July 26 to submit comments. Bahen says local shrimpers should send in their opinions if they want to have an impact on what's approved.

"It's important that they do com-

ment," he said. "Sometimes the comments of the public do affect and promote change in the proposed rules."

Bahen said a series of public hearings will be conducted before the rules are adopted and at least one hearing will be held in North Carolina.

Written comments can be mailed to Dr. Nancy Foster, Office of Protected Resources, 1335 E. West Highway, Silver Springs, Md. 20910.

For more information on the proposed rules, call Bahen at 919-458-5498 or Roddy Moscoso at 301-713-2370 or 703-503-5017.

Learn About Wetland Rules

The Center for Marine and Wetland Studies at USC Coastal Carolina College is offering a special four-day course, Basic Wetland Delineation, both May 14 to 17 and May 21 to 24.

The non-credit course is \$450, with today (May 7) is the deadline to register for either session.

The course is suitable for those in the private sector as well as for academic and government personnel. Each session offers a combination classroom and field program designed to provide a basic understanding of current regulatory and technical criteria used by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in determining jurisdictional wetland boundaries.

For more information call 803-349-2202.

Marine Fisheries Board To Meet

Reviewing draft rules for 1992 will be among the items addressed when the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission meets this week on Hatteras Island.

The commission will decide which rules it wants to take to public hearing in July. Subjects of some of

The commission meeting is today (Thursday) and Friday at the Hatteras Angler's Club in Buxton. The Thursday workshop begins at 9 a.m. and the Friday business meeting will start at 9 a.m.

At the workshop, commission members will hear about sea turtle protection, fishery management

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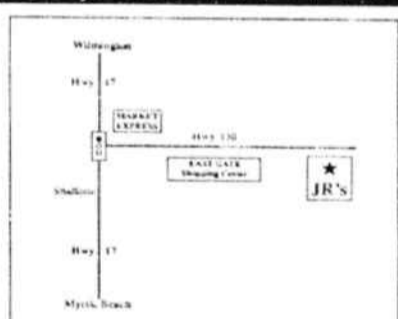


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