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## SSA, NOAA address Oceana's claim that shrimp fishery kills 90 pc of sea turtles.

UNITED STATES - Global advocacy group Oceana last month released a report claiming that the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery is illegally killing 90 per cent of threatened and endangered sea turtles by failing to use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs).

The Southern Shrimp Alliance (SSA) is working to deny the claims and keep the shrimp fishery operating.

These concerns on the part of environmental groups as well as senior government officials regarding the exceptionally high number of turtle strandings in 2010 and 2011 and TED compliance issues in the shrimp fishery have spawned two petitions to shut down the fishery.

The petitions comprise part of two letters of intent to file suit against the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to force regulatory measures on the shrimp fishery by several green groups led by the Centre for Biological Diversity and Oceana.

Soon after Oceana released its report, the SSA met with Assistant Secretary of Commerce Dr Larry Robinson, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries Eric Schwaab, NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator Roy Crabtree and several other National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) fisheries officials, as part of its wide-ranging effort to defend the shrimp fishery.

The SSA rebutted that the real cause of the turtle deaths is last year's BP oil spill disaster in the Mexican Gulf.

"These ENGO's seem to believe that it is just an incredible coincidence that an unusual number of sea turtles are showing up dead on Gulf coast beaches after the worst oil spill in the history of man," the SSA stated.

"They barely mention the historic volumes of spilled oil or toxic dispersants. They ignore the at-sea burns and the massive dredging project to build shoreline berms. They just want to hang the shrimp fishery," the SSA continued.

The Alliance warned that the situation constitutes a very serious threat to thousands of jobs throughout the Gulf region.



A sea turtle escapes from a fishing net equipped with a turtle excluder device. (Photo: NOAA)

On its part, NOAA has responded with a letter in response to the 4 April petition to the NMFS sent by Turtle Island Restoration Network Program Director Teri Shore and Campaigner and Marine Biologist Dr Chris Pincetich requesting "Emergency Action to Halt Sea Turtle Strandings in the Gulf of Mexico."

The letter also addressed the 31 May Notice of Intent to Sue and accompanying petition to NMFS sent by Oceans Program Director Miyoko Sakashita on behalf of the Centre for Biological Diversity, Restoration Network, Sea Turtle Conservancy and Defenders of Wildlife seeking emergency closure of the shrimp fishery and protective regulations for the sea turtles.

NOAA denied both petitions, which call for effort reduction, area closures and gear conversion among other actions necessary to conserve sea turtles.

"Because we have substantially accomplished or begun actions requested in your petitions and determined that emergency or interim measures or regulations are not warranted at this time, we are denying your petitions," the Administration wrote.

NOAA, however, admitted that its veterinary pathologist found "no visible external or internal oil [...] in these animals" and that several TED compliance violations had taken place.