

HONOLULU CIVIL BEAT

Sea Turtles Prevail In 9th Circuit Court Decision

March 15, 2012

A federal appeals court has sided with sea turtles over swordfish fishermen in a lawsuit that sought to invalidate an agreement over how many endangered loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles could be caught as part of the longline fishery. The settlement was part of a lawsuit by Hawaii-based conservation groups Earthjustice and KAHEA among others that challenged a National Marine Fisheries Service decision to let swordfish fishermen increase the number of turtles that could be taken.

Environmental groups still aren't happy with NMFS' increase in the sea turtle limit, but were glad the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals sided with them in the meantime. NMFS agreed to let longline fishermen take as many as 46 endangered sea turtles in a year — up from 17 — before being required to shut down. NMFS is still deciding whether to increase turtle protection under the Endangered Species Act.