

interactions with sea turtles. The PFMC will discuss this matter at its March 2003 meeting and may reconsider its decision on this measure in June 2003.

4. Southwest Region: Pelagic Longlining and Sea Turtles

In June 2002, NMFS issued a final rule implementing a regulatory amendment under the Fishery Management Plan for the Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region intended to minimize or prevent injury to and mortality of sea turtles accidentally caught by hook-and-line fishing. The intent of the rule is to reduce interactions between endangered and threatened sea turtles and pelagic fishing gear and to mitigate the harmful effects of interactions that occur. The rule applies to the owners and operators of all vessels fishing for pelagic species under Federal western Pacific limited access longline permits (longline vessels) within the U.S. EEZ and the high seas around Hawaii, as well as those fishing for pelagic species with other types of hook-and-line gear (non-longline pelagic vessels) within the EEZ around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Midway, Johnston and Palmyra Atolls, Kingman Reef, and Wake, Jarvis, Baker, and Howland Islands (western Pacific region). This rule: (1) prohibits targeting swordfish north of the equator by longline vessels; (2) closes all fishing to longline vessels during April and May in waters south of the Hawaiian Islands (from 15° N. lat. to the equator, and from 145° W. long. to 180° long.); (3) prohibits the landing or possession of more than 10 swordfish per fishing trip by longline vessels fishing north of the equator; (4) allows the re-registration of vessels to Hawaii longline limited access permits only during the month of October; (5) requires all longline vessel operators to annually attend a protected species workshop; and (6) requires utilization of sea turtle handling and resuscitation measures on both longline vessels and non-longline pelagic vessels using hook-and-line gear.

5. Southeast Region: Gulf Shrimp Bycatch

Shrimp trawls have a significant, inadvertent bycatch of non-target finfish and invertebrates. Important fish species in the shrimp fishery bycatch include juveniles of red snapper, king and Spanish mackerel, and sharks. Current estimates indicate that roughly 34 million juvenile red snappers are caught annually by shrimp trawlers, with approximately an 88-percent mortality rate. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery

Management Council (GMFMC) developed Amendment 9 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Shrimp Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf Shrimp FMP) which went into effect in 1998 to reduce the bycatch of juvenile red snappers while, to the extent practicable, minimizing adverse effects on the shrimp fishery. Amendment 9 requires the use of NMFS-certified bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) in shrimp trawls towed in certain areas of the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone. To be certified, these BRDs, in conjunction with a vessels turtle excluder device (TED), must reduce the shrimp trawl bycatch mortality of age 0 and 1 red snapper by a minimum of 44 percent from the average level of mortality on these age groups during 1984–89.

The Gulf Fishery and Jones-Davis BRDs, which were developed by commercial fishermen, met this criterion and were certified for use when the final rule implementing Amendment 9 became effective in 1998. Since 1998, shrimp trawl bycatch mortality of finfish has been reduced by 40 percent, and a 50 percent reduction appears reasonable with refinements to the Gulf Fishery BRD or more extensive use of the Jones-Davis BRD. Since development of the recovery plan in 1989, directed landings of red snapper have increased from 3.9 million lbs. (1,769 mt) in 1990 to 9.12 million lbs. (4,136.8 mt) in 2001. Shrimp landings have increased since 1998 from 230 million lbs. (104,328 mt) to 256 million lbs. (116,121.6 mt) in 2001. In addition to reducing the shrimp trawl bycatch of red snapper, use of the Gulf Fishery BRD also reduce the shrimp trawl bycatch of Atlantic croaker, spot, and butterflyfish significantly.

6. Northwest Region

In March 2002, NMFS implemented a final rule for its groundfish annual specifications and management measures. This regulatory package notably revised the PFMC approach to managing of fisheries to reduce bycatch and discard of overfished groundfish species. This new approach calculated the co-occurrence of overfished species taken in fisheries for more abundant stocks. In analyzing these co-occurrences, analysts found seasonal variations in the rates at which overfished species were taken in fisheries for more abundant species. The PFMC then used this co-occurrence analysis to set trip limits and other management measures such that the groundfish fisheries had more access to abundant stocks during periods when overfished species co-occurrence rates

were low. Further, the co-occurrence ratios were used to guide the PFMC's recommendations during the year so that no changes to management measures would result in increased bycatch and/or discard of overfished species.

In May 2002, NMFS implemented a bycatch allowance for Pacific halibut in the commercial, limited entry primary sablefish fishery in Federal waters between the U.S./Canada border and Pt. Chehalis, Washington. Retention of incidental halibut caught in the primary sablefish fishery is only allowable when the overall Washington, Oregon, California total allowable catch for Pacific halibut is above 900,000 lbs. (408.2 mt) which it was in both 2001 and 2002. For 2002, a quota of 88,389 lbs. (40.1 mt) of halibut was allocated to the limited entry primary sablefish fishery as a bycatch allowance.

In September 2002, NMFS implemented new depth-based management measures in the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery for September–December 2002. These depth-based management measures are designed to allow the harvest of healthy groundfish stocks while protecting areas where overfished species are commonly found. An emergency rule established a darkblotched rockfish conservation area (DBCA) extending from the U.S./Canada border to 40°10' N. lat. and between approximately 100 fathoms and 250 fathoms. This emergency rule maintained the closure to trawling with groundfish gear where darkblotched rockfish are commonly found, but allowed limited entry trawl access to healthy deepwater groundfish (seaward of 250 fathoms) and nearshore groundfish (shoreward of 100 fathoms) stocks outside of the DBCA.

Throughout 2002, NMFS has also supported a number of exempted fishing permits (EFPs) in the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery with the goal of these EFPs being used to develop fishing technologies that can be applied on a fleet-wide basis to minimize the bycatch of overfished species. These EFPs test fishing strategies and/or gear types in an effort to harvest healthy groundfish stocks while minimizing bycatch of overfished species. Additionally, many of the EFPs have full retention programs that allow overages to be forfeited to the states for charitable donations.

7. Northeast Region

Under the sea scallop Fishery Management Plan, bycatch of finfish has been reduced by establishing minimum mesh requirements for the net material on the top of a scallop dredge (referred to as the "twine top"). The twine top is