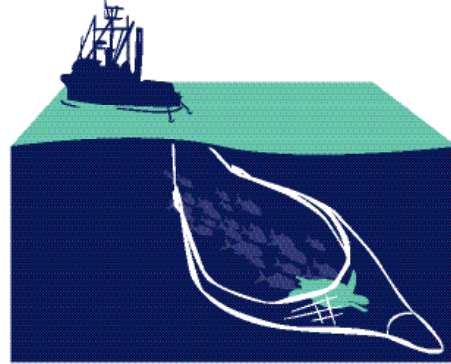


# U.S. OCEANS AT RISK

## SOUTHEASTERN TRAWLERS PRODUCE WORST REGION IN THE U.S.

The Southeast region contains some of the largest shrimp fisheries in the world. Unfortunately, the main method of catching shrimp—trawling—has the worst wasted catch problem. Shrimp trawlers cruise the ocean, dragging behind an enormous gaping net that catches everything in its path. Shrimpers often throw back up to 10 pounds of unwanted catch for every one pound of shrimp caught, making wasted catch a problem of enormous proportions in the Southeast.

The information available on the extent of wasted catch in the fisheries of the Southeast Region is the worst of any region in the country. Less than one percent of the southeast shrimp trawl fishery is observed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who spot-checks fisheries and counts and weighs wasted catch. However, estimates made in 1998 from the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery point to a huge problem of wasted catch, with more than 766 million pounds of fish alone being discarded each year.



*Here we should put in a caption about trawls that help people make sense of the illustration.*

### SEA TURTLES

In the Gulf of Mexico, the endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtles must cross the Texas shrimp fishing grounds to get to their primary nesting beaches. In the South Atlantic, endangered leatherback turtles migrate along the Atlantic Seaboard during shrimping season. Both of these turtle species are frequently caught in shrimp trawl nets.



In 1978, a device was invented that would allow small turtles to escape the trawl nets. At first, these were required only during certain seasons. In fact, it was not until 1994 that NMFS required trawl boats to use these turtle excluder devices (TEDs) year-round. However, the agency has been aware for some time that the escape opening on the TEDs is too small for adult loggerhead, green, and leatherback sea turtles. NMFS has proposed a larger sized TED, but has not yet taken any action to require the use of the larger device, and has not responded to critics who say that the device is still not large enough.

### SMALLTOOTH SAWFISH

Although the smalltooth sawfish is well known to those who catch it in their nets, no one catches it on purpose. Up to 18 feet long and resembling a shark, the smalltooth sawfish formerly inhabited the entire span of coastal waters from Texas to North Carolina. Today, the species population has declined to such low levels that its current range is limited to peninsular Florida.

**Bycatch has caused the smalltooth sawfish population to such low levels that its current range is limited to peninsular Florida.**

Despite the fact that NMFS knew for years that large numbers of smalltooth sawfish were being caught in fishing nets, it took no action until The Ocean Conservancy petitioned the agency to list it under the Endangered Species Act. In 2001, NMFS proposed that the smalltooth sawfish be listed as endangered. If approved, it would be the first marine species ever to be listed as endangered in the United States. The decline of the smalltooth sawfish can be placed squarely on its frequent entanglement in the mesh nets used to fish for other species off the Atlantic Coast.



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