

Southeast Fisheries Science Center
Miami Laboratory
75 Virginia Beach Drive
Miami, FL 33149

February 06, 2006

TO: Sheryan Epperly,
Protected Resources Branch

FROM: Dennis Lee,
SEFSC Observer Coordinator

SUBJECT: Longline gear Incidental Take summary for quarter 4, 2005. **(Revised 02/06/2006)**

The Miami Laboratory Pelagic Observer Program (POP) is providing you with a summary report of the incidental take of marine turtles as well as mammals and birds that have been recorded by observers aboard longline vessels for October 1 to December 31, 2005. The POP was involved in the regular coverage (8% target) of the fleet, in addition to providing observer coverage for a Cooperative Research Program (CRP) for bycatch reduction project. Combining effort in sets from both observer events, the POP attained a coverage rate of 5.1%. (100 observed sets)

Regular (8% target) Coverage Summary:

The POP completed during quarter 4 a coverage rate of 4.9% (96 observed sets) during the regular selection (8%) of the pelagic longline fleet (Table 1). Observers recorded thirteen (15) sea turtles (9 leatherback-alive; 1-leatherback-dead, 5 loggerhead-alive), in addition to five (5) marine mammals (2-Pilot whale-alive; 1-dolphin species-alive, 1-spotted dolphin-alive, 1-Risso's dolphin-alive) and no (0) sea birds. A vessel that was selected for quarter 1, 2005 left port on December 22, 2005 and completed 2 sets prior to the end of the quarter. Because the vessel is a distant water vessel, the effort was not available until early into February.

CRP coverage summary:

During quarter 4, the POP was also responsible for providing observers for a special Cooperative Research Program (CRP) on bycatch reduction research involving six (6) U.S. pelagic longline vessels participating in an experimental designed project. In general, these six vessels were utilizing their regular gear and following their typical fishing operations within their geographical fishing areas. The experimental design was comparing different hook baiting techniques (bait threaded vs. single hooked) in an alternating pattern and crews were also attaching scientific equipment (time-depth recorders and hook timers) on the gear. Of the six (6) vessels participating in the CRP experimental design project, which required 100% observer coverage, only one (1) vessel was observed during quarter 4 to complete the four (4) remaining obligated sets. The observer recorded no (0) incidental takes of protected species during those 4 sets (Table 1) in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM).

Enclosed you will find the original Sea Turtle Life History (STLH) forms submitted by observers during the regular longline coverage only and no forms relating to the CRP project as no

animals were taken. These data forms should be reviewed by the Miami PR division for accuracy with the table provided. Also enclosed are the accompanying photographs of sea turtles. After review of the original STLH forms, please return the originals to the POP office files.

In addition to the POP reporting of Protected Resource (PR) species recorded during observed longline fishing, observers have been requested to inspect the turtle handling and dehooking gear available aboard the vessels as a requirement of the 2004 Biological Opinion (BO). As a requirement of the BO tasking for the Miami Laboratory, I am providing you with copies of the Miami PR Turtle Gear check list form either filled out by the observer or by POP staff during debriefing from quarter 4. A PDF file will be created and will be posted on the SEFSC-POP secured website. Although it is not clear how this information will be processed, the originals will remain on file in the observer office, room 314. Finally, neither the Turtle Take Estimates (TTE) nor the Net Mortality Ratio (NMR) mentioned in the 2004 BO are provided as our program staffing does not have the expertise to conduct these analyses.

Attachments

Table of the Incidental Take summary for fourth quarter of 2005 by geographical area and sets observed; the original STLH forms and associated turtle photographs for regular longline coverage; and copies of the Turtle Gear check list forms.

cc: Observer program files; Gerry Scott, Jim Bohnsack .

Table 1: Percent coverage (by sets), the incidental take of Protected Resource species (turtles, mammals, seabirds), and hook effort summarized by geographical area for October 1 - December 31, 2005. (A=Alive, D=Dead, LB=Leatherback, LH=Loggerhead, U=unknown). (Revised 02/06/2006)

AREA	REQUIRED		TURTLES				MAMMALS		BIRDS	
	TOTAL SETS OBSERVED	8% COVERAGE	A	D	LB/LH/U	A	D	A	D	
GOM-2	45(4+%)	94	4/	0/	0/	0	0	0	0	
FEC-3	2(8%)	0	0/	0/	0/	0	0	0	0	
MAB-5	27(4%)	47	0/	1/	0/	2	0	0	0	
NEC-6	3(8%)	0	0/	0/	0/	1	0	0	0	
NED-7	0(0%)	7	0/	0/	0/	0	0	0	0	
<u>SAR-8*</u>	<u>218+%</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>5/</u>	<u>4/</u>	<u>0/</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	
TOTAL	98(5%)	148	9/	5/	0/	5	0	0	0	

* This excludes 2 sets made prior to the end of the year as data is not yet available.

Hook effort Summary:

Area	Reg. 8% Coverage Hook effort	CRP Experiment Hook effort
GOM	32,379	2,350
FEC	696	0
MAB	21,717	0
NEC	3,035	0
SAR	<u>21,475</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTAL	79,302	2,350

2005 CRP Experiment Sets

AREA	SETS	COVERAGE	TURTLES			MAMMAL		BIRDS	
			LB/LH/UN	A	D	A	D	A	D
GOM-2	4	100%	0/	0/	0/	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	4		0/	0/	0/	0	0	0	0