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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/region/southeast>

Tab E, No. 6(a)

09/10/2021

F/SER24:PH

Mr. Dale Diaz, Chair
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
4107 West Spruce Street
Suite 200
Tampa, Florida 33607

Dear Dale,

NOAA Fisheries is requesting input from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) on shark and bottlenose dolphin interactions with commercial and recreational fishing activities. As you know, fishermen are reporting more frequent interactions with these species to the Gulf Council, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and NOAA Fisheries.

In addition, language in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, directs NOAA Fisheries to consult with the Gulf Council and other partners in undertaking:

"...a review to assess and better understand the occurrence of conflicts between dolphins and sharks and commercial, for-hire, and recreational fishing vessels in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. The review should provide: (1) a quantification, to the extent practicable within existing resources, of the degree to which dolphins and sharks interfere with commercial, charter, and recreational fishing; and (2) recommendations for non-lethal methods to deter dolphins and sharks from interfering with commercial, for-hire, and recreational fishing, in accordance with existing laws."

After reviewing available data and information, including those provided by the Councils and fishermen on this topic, we have identified the following focus areas for our review:

Types of Known Interactions

- Depredation
- Scavenging

Consequences of Interactions: Fisheries

- Economic losses
 - Lost/damaged gear
 - Lost/damaged catch
- Impacts to fishery populations
- Degraded fishing experience

Consequences of Interactions: Sharks and Dolphins

- Population-level impacts
- Entanglement/injury risk to animal
- Increased retaliation



Quantification of Shark and Dolphin Interactions

- Review of fishery and observer data
- Review of literature

Recommendations for Non-lethal Deterrents

- For marine mammals, NOAA Fisheries published a proposed rule that included guidelines for safely deterring marine mammals. The public comment period closed October 30, 2020. The Agency is considering public comments and preparing a final rule. Information from the rule will be included in the Congressional review. For more information, please visit our website.

Research Needs

Please take time to review these areas and provide input. For example, are there other types of interactions not captured here? Have we overlooked any consequences of interactions to fisheries? Are there other data or information sources quantifying shark or dolphin interactions that you would like to provide? Are there any studies on non-lethal deterrents that we should review? Do you have suggested research needs?

We also requested input from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, NOAA Fisheries’ Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Advisory Panel, and the Marine Mammal Commission. Additionally, my office has spoken with Dr. Carrie Simmons and NOAA Fisheries will be prepared to give a presentation on this topic at the October 2021, Gulf Council meeting. The title of this presentation is “Report to Congress on Shark and Dolphin Depredation.”

We greatly appreciate the Gulf Council staff and members’ time, assistance, and effort on this matter. Please provide us your input by November 5, 2021, and contact Peter Hood with any questions at 727-551-5728 or peter.hood@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,

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for Andrew J. Strelcheck
Regional Administrator

- cc: F/SEC - Clay Porch
 F/SER2 - Jack McGovern
 F/SER24 - Peter Hood
 F/SER3 - David Bernhart; Laura Engleby
 F/SF1 - Randy Blankinship
 GFMC - Carrie Simmons; John Froeschke