

# SEA TURTLE DISENTANGLEMENT GUIDELINES

Updated: September 2007

## INITIAL REPORT:

When initial report is received, collect the following information from the caller:

- Name of reporting vessel
- Type of vessel
- Vessel cell phone number or radio call channel
- Observer name and home phone number
- Date/Time of report (and/or sighting event)
- Location (Latitude and Longitude)
- Description of turtle for species ID
- Status of turtle– alive or dead
- Description of entangling gear (rope, line, buoys, colors)
- Location of entangling gear on turtle (head, flippers, single wrap, multiple wraps)
- Description of any visible injuries
- Weather/sea conditions at the scene

Ask the caller the following questions:

- Are you still on scene with the turtle? [If not, when was it last seen?]
- How long can you stand by?
- Can you stand by until an authorized disentanglement responder\* arrives? [Provide an ETA for the responder]
- Are there other vessels nearby that could help with standing by [if needed]?
- Does the turtle appear to be anchored or making way? If making way, estimate swimming speed and direction.
- Can you take photographs or video of the turtle and the gear?

\*If the report is received from a commercial fisherman and they have prior experience dealing with entangled turtles, they should be encouraged to assist the disentanglement responder. Commercial fishermen are generally well equipped and often have experience in successfully releasing turtles safely. This is particularly advised if the responder is unable to get on scene in a timely manner. It is preferred that the turtle be released by the fishermen, with guidance from the responder, than to lose the opportunity to intervene, possibly resulting in the death of the turtle. The responder should request all information required to complete the Sea Turtle Entanglement Report Form.

## HOW TO APPROACH AN ENTANGLED SEA TURTLE:

- Look for moving or unusually clumped buoys and lines near the turtle.
- Approach turtle slowly and carefully until vessel is alongside, then stop the vessel.
- Record latitude/longitude and time at turtle's initial location.

## HOW TO ASSESS AND DOCUMENT THE ENTANGLEMENT:

- Is the turtle moving, attempting to swim away from the vessel or diving?
- How is the turtle entangled: flippers (front right, front left, etc.), head, or shell?

- Are there single or multiple wraps of line on the turtle?
- Are the wraps restricting the turtle's movement or cutting into the skin?
- Is the turtle bleeding?
- Are there any other new or old injuries (such as propeller wounds)?

## HOW TO DISENTANGLE:

### The goal is to release the turtle free of all gear

- Do not get into the water with the turtle or bring it aboard. Work from the vessel with the turtle in the water.
- Determine which line is under strain from anchoring or drifting gear.
- Grapple the anchoring line and maintain a firm hold to keep turtle close to the vessel without lifting the turtle above the water. To avoid losing the turtle before completely disentangled, ***do not release or cut this line before trying to remove all other gear.***
- Try to unravel the gear from the turtle without cutting. Be careful around powerful flippers, jaws, and claws.
- If the gear cannot be removed by unraveling and the turtle is at risk of strangulation, drowning, or further injury, try to cut the line.
- Avoid cutting the turtle by pulling line away from the turtle with a boat hook before cutting.
- If gear must be cut, tie it off to the boat or existing gear to avoid losing the gear. Save all cut off/removed gear for analysis on shore (see *Documentation*).
- If you cannot free the turtle of ***ALL gear***, report the last known location, area landmarks, wind and current speed and direction, and any identifying characteristics about the turtle or gear. Report this information to ***978-281-9531*** or ***VHF Channel 16***.

## HOW TO RELEASE:

- Leave engines in neutral and release the turtle from the last line (the anchoring line).
- Record the latitude/longitude and time of release.
- Ensure that the turtle is safely away from the vessel before starting the engines.
- Observe turtle behavior after release. Did it dive and/or swim away or did it remain relatively immobile at the surface?

## DOCUMENTATION FOR LIVE OR DEAD ENTANGLED SEA TURTLES:

- Log critical information (time, location, sea turtle description, signs of injury, behavior of live turtles) when you encounter an entangled sea turtle. Please report the entanglement event to the NOAA Fisheries Service, Northeast Region Stranding Hotline at ***978-281-9531*** or ***VHF Channel 16***. Responders should fill out the Sea Turtle Entanglement Report Form and send to the address or fax number below. If you do not have a copy of this form, please call ***978-281-9300 x 6520*** to request one.
- Log information about gear (line type, color and diameter, buoy/float type and color, buoy/pot ID #s), and final location of gear (brought ashore, left at site, etc.). Retain all gear that is removed. Please call ***978-281-9300 x 6520*** to arrange for gear to be transferred for analysis. If gear cannot be brought ashore, please photograph and video the gear.
- If possible, obtain **photographic and/or video documentation** of the incident from

encounter to release. Photograph/video the turtle (head and shell), the gear, any wraps of line on the turtle and sites of injury. If the turtle is a leatherback, photograph the pink markings on the head for individual identification purposes. Please email or mail copies of photographs/video to the address below. We will return copies of the photos/video to you upon your request.

**Mailing Address for Photos, Video, and Report Forms:**

Sara McNulty, Sea Turtle Disentanglement Coordinator  
NOAA Fisheries Service, Northeast Region  
One Blackburn Drive  
Gloucester, MA 01930  
Ph: 978-281-9300 x6520

**Fax Number and Email for Report Forms:**

978-281-9394  
sara.mcnulty@noaa.gov

**Mailing Address for Gear Collected from Disentangled Sea Turtles:**

Al Blott, Gear Specialist  
NOAA Fisheries Service  
PO Box 1692, 113 Bruce Boyer St  
Kingston, RI 02852  
(401) 294-0442

The collection of information on sea turtle entanglement is necessary to ensure sea turtles are being conserved and protected, as mandated by the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. Your voluntary collection and submission of this information will help achieve this objective. The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average one hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Notwithstanding any other provision of the law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to penalty for failure to comply with, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act, unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB Control Number. NOAA Fisheries will retain control over the information and safeguard it from improper access, modification, and destruction, consistent with NOAA standards for confidentiality, privacy, and electronic information. The information collection is designed to yield data that meet all applicable information quality guidelines. Prior to dissemination, the information will be subjected to quality control measures and a pre-dissemination review pursuant to Section 515 of Public Law 106-554. Personal identifiers and any commercial information will be kept confidential to the extent permitted under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (5 U.S.C. 552), the Department of Commerce FOIA regulations (15 CFR Part 4, Subpart A), the Trade Secrets Act (18 U.S.C. 1905), and NOAA Administrative Order 216-100. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to (NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Region Protected Resources Division, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930).

OMB Control No.: 0648-0496; Expiration Date: 12/31/2007

**SEA TURTLE ENTANGLEMENT REPORT FORM**

FIELD #:

NMFS #:

**EVENT CONFIRMATION:**  Confirmed  Not Confirmed If Confirmed, How? \_\_\_\_\_**INITIAL OBSERVER** Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address/Affiliation: : \_\_\_\_\_

**EXAMINER / RESPONDER (if different from initial observer)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

**SPECIES (Check ONE)** DC = Leatherback  OK = Olive Ridley CC = Loggerhead  EI = Hawksbill LK = Kemp's Ridley  HY = Hybrid CM = Green  UN = Unidentified

# of Entangled Animals: \_\_\_\_\_

**LOCATION**

State: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

Nearest Port/Town: \_\_\_\_\_

Body of water: \_\_\_\_\_

Locality Details: \_\_\_\_\_

Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_

Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

Stranded ashore:  YES  NO**PHOTO DOCUMENTATION**Photos/Video Taken:  YES  NO

Disposition of Photos: \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE OF INITIAL REPORT:** Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Month: \_\_\_\_\_ Day: \_\_\_\_\_

CONDITION: (Check one)

 0. Alive 1. Fresh dead 2. Moderate decomposition 3. Severe decomposition 4. Dried carcass

Sea/Weather Conditions: \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE OF ASSESSMENT/DISENTANGLEMENT:**

Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Month: \_\_\_\_\_ Day: \_\_\_\_\_

CONDITION: (Check one)

 0. Alive 1. Fresh dead 2. Moderate decomposition 3. Severe decomposition 4. Dried carcass

Sea/Weather Conditions: \_\_\_\_\_

**HUMAN INTERACTION INFORMATION**Fishery Interaction:  YES - Describe the Interaction: \_\_\_\_\_Signs of Boat Strike:  YES  NO  CBD  Not Examined - Describe: \_\_\_\_\_Other Human Interaction:  YES  NO  CBD  Not Examined - Describe: \_\_\_\_\_**GEAR DESCRIPTION** 1. Lobster Pot(s) 4. Fish Pot(s) 7. Unknown Pot Gear 2. Whelk/Conch Pot(s) 5. Fish Trap (Pound net/Weir) 8. Unknown Gear/Line 3. Crab Pot(s) 6. Gillnet Gear 8. Other \_\_\_\_\_If Pot Gear, Indicate the type of set:  single  double  trawl  unknownIf Gillnet Gear, Indicate the entangling portion of gear:  end line/ buoy  netting  unknown**LINE DESCRIPTION**Line 1 diameter: \_\_\_\_\_  cm  in  actual  estimated type: \_\_\_\_\_ color: \_\_\_\_\_Line 2 diameter: \_\_\_\_\_  cm  in  actual  estimated type: \_\_\_\_\_ color: \_\_\_\_\_Line 3 diameter: \_\_\_\_\_  cm  in  actual  estimated type: \_\_\_\_\_ color: \_\_\_\_\_**BUOY DESCRIPTION**

Number of Buoys: \_\_\_\_\_

Buoy 1 - Color(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Shape/Style: \_\_\_\_\_ Buoy ID number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Buoy 2 - Color(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Shape/Style: \_\_\_\_\_ Buoy ID number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Buoy 3 - Color(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Shape/Style: \_\_\_\_\_ Buoy ID number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

GEAR COLLECTED:  YES  NO Disposition of gear: \_\_\_\_\_Was all the gear removed:  YES  NO

If NO, Describe remaining gear and its position on the turtle: \_\_\_\_\_

**LIVE TURTLE DISPOSITION** 1. Left at site, no action taken 2. Disentangled and released on site 3. Partially disentangled and released on site 4. Lost during disentanglement 5. Euthanized (consult NMFS/USFWS) 6. Collected for treatment 6. Relocated to: \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Other: \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Unknown**CARCASS DISPOSITION** 1. Left at site 2. Towed ashore 3. Buried:  on beach  
 off beach 4. Scientific collection 5. Educational collection 6. Other: \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Unknown**SAMPLE INFORMATION**NECROPSIED:  YES  NO

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Necropsied by: \_\_\_\_\_

BIOPSIED:  YES  NO

Disposition of biopsy: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Sampling: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Instructions for Completing the Sea Turtle Entanglement Report Form For distribution to STDN Response Agencies**

**Field #:** Indicate the Field Number given to the animal/event by the response organization. This should be a unique ID, which will never change. It is possible for more than one agency to respond to an individual animal, in which case a single event may have more than one Field #.

**NMFS ID #:** NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will assign a regional number to each entanglement event. Please leave this section blank.

**Event Confirmation:** Check box for Confirmed or Not Confirmed, and describe how the event has been confirmed. Confirmed events are those in which at least one of the following applies:

- 1) A trained Sea Turtle Disentanglement Network (STDN) responder was on scene to witness the event,
- 2) Photos or video were taken to document the entanglement event, or
- 3) An experienced or reliable source eye witnessed the event and is able to clearly and definitively detail the entanglement, the gear, and the sea turtle involved\*

\*Confirmation of an event based on #3 is subject to NMFS discretion.

**Initial Observer:** The initial observer is the individual who encountered the entangled turtle first hand and reported it to the STDN either directly or through another individual or agency. Please record the full name and contact information including phone number and address for the initial observer. If the report was relayed to your organization by the USCG or another intermediate source, do not put the intermediate source as the Initial Observer. If name/address info is not available or was not collected, please indicate a general description of the initial observer (i.e. recreational boater or commercial fisherman).

**Examiner/Responder:** The examiner/responder is the person who handled, disentangled, and collected data on the turtle in the field, or attempted to do so, but was unable to relocate the animal. Please include the full name and provide a complete address and phone number where the responder can be reached. This may be the Initial Observer, if the initial observer also disentangled the turtle, either on their own or by direction from the STDN. Please indicate if the initial observer disentangled the turtle based on verbal direction from the STDN.

**Species:** Check only one box. Refer to a species identification guide to determine the species. When possible, take photos of the turtle for species verification. Photos of the carapace and head are most useful. If you are unsure about the species ID, take several photos from different angles. Do not guess. Please contact NMFS if you need sea turtle identification materials.

**Location:** Fill in all fields in this section.

**State/County:** Indicate the state and county where the event occurred. If the event occurred in the EEZ, indicate EEZ waters off X-state.

**Nearest Port/Town:** Indicate the nearest port or town.

**Body of water:** Note the body of water, be as specific as possible, but only reference places that can be readily found on maps, do not use "local" names. It may be necessary to detail multiple bodies of water (i.e. X-Harbor, in Y-Bay).

**Locality Details:** Include a general description of the event location, including proximity to land (i.e. 2 miles south of Monomoy Light House, Nantucket Sound). Please only reference places that can be readily found on maps, do not use "local" names. **Latitude/Longitude:** Make every effort to collect the GPS location for all entanglement events. If you are given Loran units by the Initial Observer, please make an effort to convert that location to Lat/long, but also provide the Loran location.

**Stranded Ashore:** Please check "yes" if the animal stranded on a beach or other land mass naturally. Please check "no" if the disentanglement occurred in the water and the animal was not brought to shore. Also check "no" if the animal was collected from the water and brought to a rehab facility. If this is the case, make sure you indicate that the animal was collected for treatment under "Live Turtle Disposition".

**Date of Initial Report:** Please indicate the date the turtle was first encountered. This date should indicate when the Initial Observer encountered the turtle.

**Condition:** Check the box for the condition code that best describes the turtle. If the turtle is dead and seems intermediate between two codes, pick the one that fits the best. If the turtle smells at all, it is not fresh dead. If uncertain about the condition, provide a description of the animals condition (the look and feel of the skin, smells, and amount of bloating) in “Event Summary and Additional Remarks”.

**Sea/Weather Conditions:** Indicate briefly the weather conditions; this may include the winds, sea state, precipitation, and temperature.

**Date of Assessment Disentanglement**

Please indicate the date the turtle was disentangled or assessed. This date should indicate when the person listed as the Examiner/Responder was on scene.

**Condition:** Check the box for the condition code that best describes the turtle. If the turtle is dead and seems intermediate between two codes, pick the one that fits the best. If the turtle smells at all, it is not fresh dead. If uncertain about the condition, provide a description of the animals condition (the look and feel of the skin, smells, and amount of bloating) in “Event Summary and Additional Remarks”.

**Sea/Weather Conditions:** Indicate briefly the weather conditions; this may include the winds, sea state, precipitation, and temperature.

**Photo Documentation**

Please indicate if photos or video were taken. Photos should be taken of the sea turtle for ID confirmation, the gear, and the overall entanglement. Under disposition, please indicate where the photos are located and if they were sent to NMFS.

**NOTE:** All photos should be sent to NMFS for inclusion in the event record.

**Human Interaction Information:** In this section we are looking for information on any visible human interactions, including: fishery interactions, vessel/boat strikes, marine debris ingestion/entanglement, mutilation, or others. However, the main purpose for this form is to collect information on Fixed Gear Fishery Interactions.

***Fishery Interaction:***

This form should ONLY be used if the answer to this question is YES. Therefore, it is the only possible choice. If any gear is present on or inside an animal, then you have a confirmed fishery interaction.

On the line provided, please detail the location of the gear on the animal and any injuries associated with the presence of the gear.

***Signs of Boat Strike:*** Please indicate if there are signs of a boat strike. The injuries do not have to be new or associated with the entanglement.

- “Yes” indicates that the animal was checked for injuries and signs of a boat strike were found.
- “No” indicates that the animal has been fully checked for injuries and no signs of boat strike could be found.
- “CBD” stands for Could not Be Determined, this indicates one of the following: (1) you have examined the animal and Could not Determine whether the marks you saw were signs of boat strike, or (2) you could not properly and fully examine the animal.
- “Not Examined” indicates that the animal was not checked for these injuries. This may be the case if the turtle is disentangled by a boater and the report is relayed to the STDN.

One the line provided, please describe the injuries and their current state (open wound, bleeding, beginning to heal, scarring).

***Other Human Interaction:*** Please indicate if there are signs of human interaction *other than* a boat strike or fishery interaction. The injuries do not have to be new or associated with the entanglement.

- “Yes” indicates that the animal was checked for injuries and signs of human interaction were found.
- “No” indicates that the animal has been fully checked for injuries and no signs of human interaction could be found.
- “CBD” stands for Could not Be Determined, this indicates one of the following: (1) you have examined the animal and Could not Determine whether the marks you saw were signs of human interaction, or (2) you could not properly and fully examine the animal.
- “Not Examined” indicates that the animal was not checked for these injuries. This may be the case if the turtle is disentangled by a boater and the report is relayed to the STDN.

One the line provided, please describe the injuries and their current state (open wound, bleeding, beginning to heal, scarring).

**Gear Description:** Check one box to indicate the type of gear involved in the entanglement.

- If a *buoy, line, and pot* are present on the animal – please check Unknown Pot Gear; do not guess at the fishery involved. You may check a specific fishery *if* you have confirmation of the target species by the gear owner, or some other experience that positively determines the gear type. If there is an identifying number on the buoy or trap, NMFS may be able to later determine the associated fishery. At that time, NMFS will update the form with the correct gear classification.
- If only a *buoy and line* are present on the animal - please check Unknown Gear/Line not Unknown Pot Gear; do not assume it is from a pot fishery unless you are absolutely positive. If there is an identifying number on the buoy, NMFS may be able to later determine the associated gear type and fishery. At that time, NMFS will update the form with the correct gear classification.
- If *only line* is present on the animal, please indicate Unknown Gear/Line.

*If pot gear*, indicate the number of pots involved. Check Unknown if you do not know if it was a single or multiple pot trawl.

*If gillnet gear*, indicate the portion of gear that was entangling the turtle.

***Line Description:*** Provide the line diameter, type, and color for all sections of line involved in the entangling gear.

***Buoy Description:*** Provide the color, shape, and ID numbers for all buoys or floats involved in the entangling gear.

***Gear Collected:*** Indicate if the gear was collected, and where the gear is currently located. This field should indicate the location of the gear at the time the form is submitted to NMFS. If the location of the gear changes after the form is submitted, please contact the Sea Turtle Disentanglement Coordinator with the updated gear location. If the gear has been transferred to NMFS, please indicate the method and date of transfer (i.e. Fed Ex'd on 6/7/07). The transfer and collection of all gear taken off an endangered or threatened sea turtle requires a Chain of Custody form. Please contact the Sea Turtle Stranding Coordinator for more information on Chain of Custody.

*Was all gear removed?* Please indicate if the turtle was fully or partially disentangled. If unsure, please do not state that all the gear was removed. Gear remaining on an animal may be life threatening, therefore, please provide as much information as possible on the location and nature of the gear remaining on the animal. If a buoy is attached to the remaining gear, include the color, type, and any ID numbers for comparison to future entanglement reports.

**Live Turtle Disposition:** This section pertains to live animals only. If the event involves a dead sea turtle leave this section blank and see “Carcass Disposition”. Please check the box that applies to disposition of the live animal immediately after the disentanglement response effort. If the animal was relocated to a different location for release, please indicate the release location. If the animal was collected for treatment, please indicate where the animal was taken.

**Carcass Disposition:** This section pertains to dead animals only, if the event involves a live sea turtle, please leave this section blank and see “Live Turtle Disposition”. Please check the box that applies to the location of the carcass after the response effort.

**Sample Information:** This section pertains to both live and dead sea turtle sampling. For all dead animals, the necropsy section must be filled out by checking either yes or no. Please also indicate if a biopsy was taken from a live or dead animal for genetics or other sampling purposes, and any other samples that were taken (i.e. aging samples).

**Morphological Data:** Immature sea turtles can not be sexed externally, so please check unknown if dealing with a live immature turtle. Adult male turtles will have a tail that extends well beyond the posterior tip of the carapace. If you document a turtle with a long tail, please measure the length of the tail beyond the carapace and record the measurement. Please be aware that juvenile males may not show this characteristic, therefore, if unsure about the age of the animal, do not use tail length for sex determination.

Carapace measurements for leatherback sea turtles are always notch to tip. Please indicate the carapace straight and curved lengths. Please also estimate the weight of the animal; in most cases you will be unable to determine an actual weight, so this field will depend on your experience with the weights of similar sized animals. This will



likely be an extremely rough estimate, please leave blank if unsure. Please indicate if the reporting source provides a total length rather than a carapace length.

**Tag/Mark Data:**

*Existing tags:* Check all four flippers of the turtle for flipper tags or evidence of lost tags (tear-out scars). Please indicate if the animal was checked for existing PIT or flipper tags. If tags are found, record all tag numbers, where the tags were located, and the return address inscribed on the tag.

*Applied Tags:* Tagging should only be done by trained and authorized responders. Please detail the number, type, and placement of all tags placed on the animal.

*Carcass Painting:* If the event involves a dead animal, indicate if the carcass was painted and what color. NMFS recommends painting all dead floating carcasses by either spray paint or grease sticks. Painted carcasses can help eliminate recounting the same animal if it is resighted.

**Release Information:** This section applies only to live animals that are released on site or relocated and immediately released. This section does not apply to live animals collected for treatment that are released after a period of time in rehab.

Please classify the behavior of the animal when released as active, moderately active, or inactive. Please also further describe the behaviors in your own words (animal dove immediately, or the animal lingered at the surface for a couple of minutes then dove out of sight). Behavior descriptions help us to further determine the health of the animal at the time of disentanglement and release.

**Entanglement Diagram Area:** Please use the drawings provided to diagram the nature of the entanglement and the placement of the gear on the turtle. Also mark any new or healed wounds, abnormalities, and tag locations.

**Event Summary and Additional Remarks:** DO NOT LEAVE THIS SECTION BLANK! Please provide a summary of the disentanglement event, including: progression of events, overall behavior of the animal, and time on scene. Provide any other unusual circumstances, wounds, or injuries to the turtle. If not already provided, please indicate how the animal was entangled, number of wraps on each appendage, any wounds caused by the wraps. Please indicate if the owner of the gear was somehow involved in the disentanglement event. Any other remarks on the case are welcome.

**Please send the Entanglement Report via email, mail or fax to:**

**Sara McNulty  
Sea Turtle Stranding and Disentanglement Coordinator  
NOAA Fisheries Service, Northeast Region  
One Blackburn Drive  
Gloucester, MA 01930**

**sara.mcnulty@noaa.gov  
Fax: 978-281-9394**

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