

New Study Says Bush Administration Puts Sea Turtles at Risk Of Extinction

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Science is Being Manipulated and Industry Allowed to Write New Rules to Reopen Longline Fishery (Forest Knolls, CA)—New rules that have reopened US waters to longline fishing for swordfish and tuna have been corrupted by faulty science and political influence, says a new study released today by the Sea Turtle Restoration Project. The report, *Techno-Fixing Sea Turtles: How the Bush Administration's Manipulation of Science is Driving the Leatherback Sea Turtle Towards Extinction*, documents how an admittedly flawed and incomplete report by government scientists has provided the basis to reopen the hotly contested fisheries which have been closed as a result of recent lawsuits by the Sea Turtle Restoration Project and other conservation groups.

According to Todd Steiner, executive director of the Sea Turtle Restoration Project, which sued to close the Pacific longline fishery in 1999, "The new policies were put into place before the research was even published as a report let alone peer reviewed and tested." To date, the report only exists in the form of a powerpoint presentation on the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) website.

By the admission of one of the NMFS authors of the report, the data has not even been checked for factual errors. "Chalk this one up as yet another example of junk science driving fisheries policy," said Steiner.

Industry's fingerprints are all over the science and new rule. "When longline lobbyists failed in their effort to sue the government to prevent it from regulating their industry, they co-sponsored the study on their own boats, got the Bush administration to lock out the public from the process, and then got the final rule watered down," explains Robert Ovetz, PhD, Save the Leatherback Campaign Coordinator and author of the report.

"The study has failed to solve the threat of extinction for the endangered Pacific leatherback which cannot sustain even the reduced bycatch claimed to be achieved by the gear modifications," warns Ovetz.

Scientists warn that the Pacific leatherback, a critically endangered species that migrates across the Pacific to feed and lays its eggs, will go extinct within the next 5-30 years if its adult mortality is not drastically reduced. The Pacific leatherback's nesting population has plummeted from 91,000 in 1980 to fewer than 5,000 in 2002. The highest sources of adult mortality are due to industrialized longline fishing targeting swordfish, tuna, and shark.

The report lays out in detail how science is plagued by the following problems which raise strong doubt as to its legitimacy:

- * Science is untested, incomplete and not peer reviewed
- * Best science not being used for policymaking
- * Study rushed and incomplete
- * Data set inconsistent and incomplete
- * New rule does not satisfy the Biological Opinion
- * Observer coverage was extremely low
- * Data for sharks incomplete
- * Offsetting circle hooks defeats purpose
- * Gear already being exported and used abroad
- * New gear will increase catch of sharks
- * New rule changed in response to industry pressure
- * Bush administration cut off public comment on new rules
- * New rules favors lobby group that sued government to block regulation
- * The best case scenario of sea turtle bycatch reduction won't prevent the extinction of the Pacific leatherback

For a copy of the report go to: <http://www.seaturtles.org/pdf/ACF4E.pdf>

The Sea Turtle Restoration Project is an international marine environmental organization with headquarters in Forest Knolls, CA and with offices in Costa Rica and Texas. The organization focuses on protecting and restoring marine wildlife in ways that address the needs of local communities. The Sea Turtle Restoration Project (www.seaturtles.org) is a project of Turtle Island Restoration Network, which also sponsors the Salmon Protection and Watershed Network (www.spawnusa.org) to protect endangered coho salmon.

The Sea Turtle Restoration Project is a NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

