

RESOLUTION REGARDING U.S. SMALLTOOTH SAWFISH

American Elasmobranch Society
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Spokane, Washington

WHEREAS the smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*) is listed and protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act with associated federal recovery actions led by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS);

WHEREAS incidental catch is the greatest threat to the U.S. smalltooth sawfish population;

WHEREAS sawfish caught in shrimp trawls are typically dragged for hours, resulting in substantially higher mortality than that associated with stationary nets and hooks;

WHEREAS a recent paper by Graham *et al.*¹ finds that female sawfish have greater overlap with and therefore higher risk from shrimp trawl bycatch than males and recommends a year-round closure of shrimp trawling off much of Southwest Florida;

WHEREAS observer coverage for Gulf of Mexico shrimpers is extremely low (1-2%) and NMFS' bycatch reporting requirements are insufficient to prompt sawfish encounter data from vessels without observers;

WHEREAS the latest NMFS biological opinion for this fishery has extrapolated the highest annual sawfish capture estimates from already questionable observer data to calculate new levels of authorized capture (1806 over five years) at *five times* the previous limit;

WHEREAS studies^{2,3} show that entire U.S. population of smalltooth sawfish may be dependent on as few as 126 females, which -- under the new limit -- could be legally removed in just one year.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the American Elasmobranch Society urges the U.S. NMFS to:

- Expand the areas off Southwest Florida that are closed to commercial shrimping;
- Increase observer coverage/video monitoring of shrimp trawl vessels fishing off Florida;
- Reinitiate consultation on the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery biological opinion with respect to authorized take of smalltooth sawfish; and
- Require detailed reporting of all commercial fishery encounters with sawfish.

¹ Graham, J., Kroetz, A.M., Poulakis, G.R., Scharer, R.M., Carlson, J.K., Lowerre-Barbieri, S.K. et al. (2022). Commercial fishery bycatch risk for large juvenile and adult smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*) in Florida waters. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*, 32 (3), 401–416. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aqc.3777>.

² Feldheim, K.A., A.T. Fields, D.D. Chapman, R.M. Scharer, and G.R. Poulakis. 2017. Insights into the reproduction and behavior of the smalltooth sawfish *Pristis pectinata*. *Endangered Species Research* 34:463-471.

³ Smith, K.L., K. Feldheim, J.K. Carlson, T.R. Wiley, S.S. Taylor. 2021. Female philopatry in smalltooth sawfish *Pristis pectinata*: Conservation and Management Implications. *Endangered Species Research*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3354/esr01122>.