



Gulf Fishery News

Volume 28, Issue 5

November–December, 2006

Inside this issue:

PBS to air <i>A Fish Story</i>	2
VMS Reimbursement Available	2
January Council Agenda	4
Shrimp Permit Moratorium	6
Shrimp 13 FAQs	7
IFQ Training Workshops Set	8
Sea Turtle & Smalltooth Sawfish Release FAQs	9
VMS FAQs	10

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council *Protecting our marine resources*

NOAA Fisheries Proposes Interim Rule for Red Snapper

NOAA Fisheries has proposed an interim rule to set red snapper TAC at 6.5 million pounds; reduce recreational bag limit to two fish; set the for-hire captain and crew red snapper bag limit to zero; set the commercial size limit to 13-inches; and establish a target reduction of shrimp trawl by-catch mortality on red snapper that is 50% less than the benchmark years of 2001-2003.

The proposed actions will not change the 16-inch minimum recreational size limit or alter the April 21—October 31 recreational fishing season.

The interim rule is expected publish in the Federal Register December 14, 2006—public comment will be accepted until 5

p.m. EDT, January 26, 2007.

The Gulf Council is developing a joint reef fish/shrimp amendment that will adopt management measures to ensure the fishery meets the goals outlined in the red snapper rebuilding plan. But after lengthy deliberations and hearing hours of public testimony, the majority of the Council agreed to table the discussion until after the first of the year.

The Council is scheduled to resume discussions during its January meeting, when additional information regarding both the directed red snapper fishery and the shrimp fishery will be available.

For more information on the proposed rule visit <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

Newly appointed Council member,

Bob Gill, (left) takes his oath of office during the November Gulf Council meeting in Galveston, TX.



Dr. Roy Crabtree, (right) Council member and Regional Administrator, NOAA Fisheries performs the investiture. Gill was appointed to the Council in August.

Recreational Grouper Seasonal Closure Final Rule Publishes

Last year, as part of a red grouper regulatory amendment, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council approved several management measures designed to address the overfishing of red grouper, including a February 15—March 15 seasonal closure for recreational red grouper, black grouper, and gag. This month, NOAA Fisheries Service has announced the implementation of the closure.

The agency initially intended to implement the closure when it implemented a recreational bag limit for red grouper earlier this year. However, in response to fisher concerns expressed about the closure, coupled with the knowledge that a new gag assessment was pending, implementation was delayed.

“We thought it was a good idea to wait for the gag assessment before determining the need for a seasonal closure,” said Dr. Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries Service’s Southeast Regional Administrator.

The gag assessment, completed in August, shows the stock is undergoing overfishing.

See *Red Grouper*, page 5

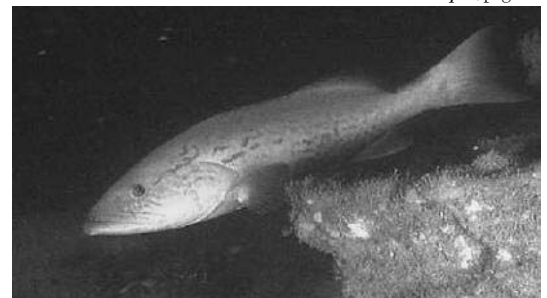


Photo Credit: NOAA Fisheries

PBS Presents *A Fish Story*

Boston, MA —

Angela Sanfilippo of Gloucester, Mass., and Shareen Davis of Chatham, Mass. were born into fishing families, and both married men who make a living from the ocean.

Fishing is a way of life for these women, and it has sustained their communities for generations. That way of life, however, is threatened when a powerful coalition of national environmental groups file a lawsuit that could put hundreds of fishermen out of business.

A Fish Story is a tale of two women who lead their communities in a battle for control of the ocean.

With heartache and humor, *A Fish Story* finds Angela and Shareen at the center of a political storm as they struggle to save both fish and fishermen.

Delving into the behind-the-scenes world of politicians, environmentalists, journalists, and fishermen, *A Fish Story* explores the complex tension between human need and the environment.



Photo by Candace Cochran
Shareen Davis, husband Ernie, and a crew member scoop fish from the weir. Davis is one of a very few women who has worked as a weir crew member.

The television premiere of *A Fish Story* will air on the Emmy Award-winning PBS series Independent Lens, hosted by Terrence Howard, January 2, 2007 at 10:00 p.m.

Dates and times vary, so check local listings, visit www.pbs.org/independentlens/fishstory, or contact Courtney Hayes at 617-426-2422 for more information.

IFQ Training Session Scheduled

NOAA Office for Law Enforcement has scheduled an IFQ training session for January 11, 2007. The session will be held at the National Marine Fisheries service Southeast Regional Office—263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

Staff will be available from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. to provide an interactive demonstration of the online red snapper IFQ system and to take comments and answer questions.

An online tutorial is also under development for use by anyone who is interested in the training, or who has been unable to participate in past workshops. Stakeholders will be notified once that training module goes online. In the meantime, an IFQ Help Desk has been established and can be reached by calling, toll free, 866-425-7627.

“Workshop participation has waned, so we’re trying other forms of outreach. These are just

some other ways to provide IFQ stakeholders and dealers an opportunity to learn how the system works,” said Dave McKinney, NOAA Enforcement.

Participants will learn how to set up an account and navigate through the online system.

For more information, please contact John Reed at **727-551-5750** or john.reed@noaa.gov.

Reef Fish Amendment 26 establishes an IFQ system for commercial red snapper. The final rule published in the Federal Register November 22, 2006—the system becomes effective January 1, 2007.

Under the plan, individual quotas are assigned to shareholders based on historical landings. The intended effect of the amendment is to reduce overcapacity in the commercial fishery, lengthen the fishing season, lower operating costs by giving vessel owners more flexibility, improve market conditions, and increase safety at sea.

Gulf of Mexico fishery closures

Recreational Closures:

Red Snapper

NOAA Fisheries Service closed the recreational fishery for red snapper in Gulf of Mexico federal waters beginning at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 1, 2006. The recreational fishery will remain closed until 12:01 a.m., local time, April 21, 2007.

Commercial Closures:

King Mackerel

The daily vessel trip limit for commercial hook-and-line vessels fishing for Gulf group king mackerel in the **northern Florida west coast subzone** is reduced to 500 pounds beginning 12:01 a.m., Monday November 27, 2006. The 500 pound trip limit will remain in effect until the quota is reached and the fishery closes or until the end of the current fishing year (June 30, 2007), whichever comes first.

The commercial fishery for Gulf group king mackerel in the **western zone** is closed, effective 12:00 noon (local time) October 6, 2006, through June 30, 2007. NOAA Fisheries Service has determined the 2006/2007 **western zone** commercial quota of 1.01 million pounds of king mackerel has been reached.

Deep-water Grouper

NOAA Fisheries Service closed the commercial deep-water grouper fishery (misty grouper, snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, Warsaw grouper, and speckled hind) in the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone (EEZ) from 12:01 a.m., local time, June 27, 2006, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2007.

The operator of a vessel with a valid reef fish permit having deep-water grouper aboard must have landed and bartered, traded, or sold such deep-water grouper prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, June 27, 2006.

Tilefish

NOAA Fisheries Service has closed the commercial fishery for tilefish in Gulf of Mexico federal waters beginning at 12:01 a.m., local time, on July 22, 2006, when the tilefish quota of 440,000 pounds, gutted weight, was reached. The commercial fishery will remain closed until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2007. The operator of a vessel with a valid reef fish permit having tilefish aboard must have landed and sold such tilefish prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, July 22, 2006.

A Reminder about Fish Traps

Endorsements for fish traps in the Gulf of Mexico EEZ are applicable through February 7, 2007. No fish trap endorsements are valid after February 7, 2007.

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Wayne Swingle Richard Leard
Executive Director Deputy Director

Appointed Voting Members

DeGraaf Adams, III Julie Morris
Richmond, TX Sarasota, FL
(832) 476-5608 (941) 487-4527

William Daughdrill Harlon Pearce
Panama City, FL Kenner, LA
(850) 814-5468 (504) 467-3809

Robert P. Gill Robert Shipp
Crystal River, FL Mobile, AL
(352) 795-1916 (251) 460-6351

Joseph Hendrix, Jr. Susan Villere
Houston, TX Mandeville, LA
(281) 597-1620 (985) 845-3557

Philip Horn Bobbi Walker
Pascagoula, MS Orange Beach, AL
(228) 762-4511 (251) 981-6159

Thomas McIlwain
Ocean Springs, MS
(228) 818-8866

State/Federal Voting Members

Robin Riechers, Vernon Minton
Chair Gulf Shores, AL
Austin, TX (251) 968-7576
(512) 389-4864

Designee for Karen Foote
Larry McKinney Baton Rouge, LA
(225) 765-2383

Corky Perret, Designee for John Rousset
Vice Chair St. Petersburg, FL
Biloxi, MS (727) 824-5301
(228) 374-5000

Designee for William Walker
Roy Williams
Tallahassee, FL
(850) 487-0554
Designee for Ken Haddad

Non-voting Members

Sam Hamilton Larry Simpson
USF&WS GSMFC
(404) 679-4000 (228) 875-5912

Radm Robert Duncan David Hogan
Eighth Coast Guard Foreign Affairs
District Officer
(504) 589-6223 (202) 647-2335

**TENTATIVE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE
GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Grand Hotel Marriott
Point Clear, Alabama
January 22-24, 2007**

Monday, January 22, 2007**1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.**

Joint Reef Fish/Shrimp Management Committee

- Joint Reef Fish 27/Shrimp 14 Amendment
 - Committee Report from August
 - Set Public Hearing Locations
 - EIS and Interim Rule
- Potential Shrimp Actions
- Shrimp Effort Workgroup and AP Reports

5:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Budget/Personnel Committee

- Draft CY 207 Operating Budget w/Increases in State Funding
- Report on Council Chairs Budget Meeting

Tuesday, January 23, 2007**8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Reef Fish Management Committee

- Regulatory Amendment for Vermilion Snapper
 - Take Final Action
- Reef Fish Amendment 30 Scoping Document (gag, amberjack, triggerfish, red grouper)
 - Review Document
 - Set Scoping Hearings Locations
- Reef Fish Amendment 29 (Grouper IFQ)
- Goliath Grouper Scientific Harvest

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Reef Fish Management Committee (Continued)

3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Shrimp Management Committee

- Report of the Shrimp AP
- Texas Shrimp Closure Analysis
- Shrimp Amendment 15 Options

4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Stone Crab/Spiny Lobster Committee

- Actions to Amend Spiny Lobster FMP to Provide for Size Limits of Imported Spiny Lobster

Wednesday, January 24, 2007**8:30 a.m.–10:30 a.m.**

Data Collection Committee

- Committee Charge (SOPPS)
- Consider action to require recreational saltwater license for EEZ and reporting requirements for recreational-for-hire sector
- State licensing and reporting requirements

10:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Mackerel Management Committee

- Updated Status Criteria and ABC Projections

1:30 p.m.–4:00 p.m.

Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum Committees

- Options Paper for Aquaculture Amendment

4:00 p.m.–4:30 p.m. (Closed Council Session)

- SSC Selection Committee Recommendations

**TENTATIVE COUNCIL AGENDA
GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Grand Hotel Marriott
Point Clear, Alabama
January 25-26, 2007**

Thursday, January 25, 2007

- I. Call to Order and Introductions – Riechers (8:30 a.m. – 8:35 a.m.)
- II. Adoption of Agenda – Riechers (8:35 a.m. – 8:40 a.m.)
- III. Approval of Minutes – Riechers (8:40 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.)
- IV. Public Testimony ^{1 2}–Riechers
 - a. Exempted Fishing Permits (if any)
 - b. Vermilion Snapper Regulatory Amendment (8:45 a.m.–10:00 a.m.)
- V. Open Public Comment ³- Riechers (10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.)
- VI. Committee Reports
 - a. Joint Reef Fish/Shrimp–Minton/Perret (1:30 p.m.–2:00 p.m.)
 - b. Budget/Personnel Committee–Shipp (2:00 p.m.–2:15 p.m.)
 - c. Reef Fish Management Committee - Minton (2:15 p.m.–3:45 p.m.)
 - d. Shrimp Management–Perret (3:45 p.m.– 4:15 p.m.)
 - e. Stone Crab/Spiny Lobster Management Committee Shipp (4:15 p.m.– 4:30 p.m.)
 - f. Data Collection Committee–Adams (4:30 p.m.– 5:00 p.m.)

Friday, January 26, 2007

- VI. Committee Reports–**Continued**
 - g. Mackerel Management–Adams (8:30 a.m.– 8:45 a.m.)
 - h. SSC Selection–Simpson (8:45 a.m.– 9:00 a.m.)
 - i. Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum–Minton/Adams/Foote (9:00 a.m.–9:30 a.m.)
- VII. Other Business - Riechers (9:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m.)
 - a. See Tabs Q, R, S, and T for Written Reports
 - b. Special Announcements
 - c. Other Business Items

¹Persons wishing to testify must turn in a registration card before the beginning of the public testimony period.

²Persons wishing Council members to have copies of written testimony or information should provide 30 copies to staff for distribution to members. All written information shall include a statement of the source and date of such information. Oral or written statements shall include a brief description of the background and interests of the person testifying.

³The Council has set aside this time for open public comment regarding any fishery issue or concern. People wishing to speak before the Council should complete a public comment card, making sure to check the box marked *Open Public Comment*.

A note about open public comment: In the interest of giving everyone an opportunity to speak, speakers are asked to limit comments to three minutes. If your sentiments are reflected in comments made by others, please state so and allow the next speaker to address the Council. Individuals may be asked to reduce speaking time even further in order to accommodate all those who wish to speak.

Red Grouper *continued*

“Now there is no question the closure is needed to protect and conserve these grouper populations.”

This closure, which will occur annually and coincides with the commercial grouper fishery closure established in 2000, is one of many management measures recently proposed by the Gulf Council and approved by the Secretary of Commerce.

These management measures are the Council’s response to a red grouper 10-year rebuilding plan implemented in 2004 to address overfishing and rebuild the Gulf red grouper population by 2012.

Other measures already implemented include: a 6,000-pound commercial grouper trip limit; a one fish recreational bag limit within the five grouper aggregate bag limit; and a zero bag limit for captains and crews of for-hire vessels while under charter.

These management actions will help reduce red grouper landings to levels specified in the rebuilding plan.

Additionally, the management actions will help address overfishing of gag. Implementing a seasonal closure for all three species, which represent over 90 percent of the recreational grouper harvest, will also reduce bycatch and discard mortality of these species.

Although the current status of the black grouper population has not been assessed, it’s included in the seasonal closure because of its resemblance to gag, making it difficult for fishers to distinguish between the two.

The Council is also considering the need for additional reductions in fishing mortality on gag. The process for developing management alternatives will provide many opportunities for public participation and input before the Council recommends any regulatory changes to NOAA Fisheries Service and the Secretary of Commerce.

Also, a new red grouper assessment is scheduled for completion in early 2007.

Anyone with an interest in the fishery is encouraged to stay informed and involved in the rule-making process.

Information regarding Council meetings, agendas, public workshops or hearings, and frequently asked questions is available at the Web sites listed below.

On the Web:

Frequently Asked Questions – Red Grouper, Black Grouper, and Gag Management
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/grouper/gomGrouper2.htm>

Red Grouper and Gag Stock Assessments
<http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/>

NOAA Fisheries Service
www.noaa.nmfs.gov

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
<http://www.gulfcouncil.org/>

Council Defines Charge of the Shrimp Effort Management AP

At its November meeting, the Gulf Council defined the charge of the Ad Hoc Shrimp Effort Management Advisory Panel—to develop management recommendations for the shrimp fishery to manage effort to reduce red snapper bycatch mortality in the shrimp fishery by 50% from the 2001-2003 baseline in 2007, and to develop additional management measures that will aid in the reduction of red snapper bycatch mortality in order to meet the goals established in the red snapper rebuilding plan.



Red Grouper Photo Courtesy of Dixie Divers

A Reminder About the Shrimp Permit Moratorium—Shrimp 13

The final rule implementing actions contained within Amendment 13 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan for the Gulf of Mexico has published. The intended effect of the final rule is to stabilize participation in the shrimp fishery, and to provide better information by which to manage the fishery.

The rule, which establishes a 10-year moratorium on the issuance of new federal shrimp vessel permits, published in the Federal Register September 26, 2006. Permits under the moratorium are fully transferable, giving permit holders the flexibility to enter or exit the fishery as they choose.

To be eligible for a commercial shrimp vessel permit under the moratorium, vessels must have been issued a valid commercial shrimp vessel permit by December 6, 2003. In addition, an owner who either sold a qualified vessel, had a qualified vessel repossessed, or otherwise lost use of a qualified vessel (i.e., damage, sinking, unaffordable repairs), but who obtained a valid commercial shrimp vessel permit for the same vessel, or another vessel equipped for offshore shrimp fishing of at least five net tons and documented by the Coast Guard prior to September 26, 2006, is eligible for a permit under the moratorium.

Vessel owners who meet eligibility and desire a commercial vessel permit for Gulf shrimp must submit an application postmarked or hand delivered no later than **October 26, 2007** to the National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office Permits Branch, 63 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701, (727) 824-5301.

No applications for commercial vessel permits for Gulf shrimp will be accepted after October 26, 2007. Failure to apply before October 26, 2007, precludes permit issuance even when the applicant otherwise meets the permit eligibility criteria. While there is a one-year period to obtain a moratorium permit, the permit is needed if the vessel is shrimping in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico beginning March 26, 2007.

Commercial vessel permits for Gulf shrimp are fully transferable, with or without the sale of the vessel. To request a transfer of a commercial vessel permit for Gulf shrimp, the owner of a vessel who is to receive the transferred permit must complete the transfer information on the reverse of the permit and return the permit and a completed application for transfer to the Permits Branch. Transfer documents must be notarized.

Renewal of a commercial vessel moratorium permit for Gulf shrimp is contingent upon compliance with the recordkeeping and reporting requirements also established by this final rule. If a commercial vessel permit for Gulf shrimp is not renewed, the permit will be terminated and will not be reissued during the moratorium. A permit is considered "not renewed" when an application for renewal, as required, is not received within 1 year of the permit expiration date.

For more information contact: Steve Branstetter, (727) 551-5796; fax: (727) 824-5308; or e-mail: Steve.branstetter@noaa.gov.

See next page for *Frequently Asked Questions about Shrimp Amendment 13*

New Reef Fish Amendment 30 Under Development

As a result of the most recent stock assessments for gag grouper, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish, the Gulf Council is moving forward with Reef Fish Amendment 30, which will address the overfishing of each of those stocks.

Council staff is currently developing a draft scoping document that will be reviewed by the Council at its January meeting. Some of the proposed alternatives expected to become part of the document include setting Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA) parameters—maximum fishing mortality threshold, minimum stock size threshold, optimum yield—and reducing discard mortality for gag, as well as implementing management measures,

such as vessel, trip, and size limits for greater amberjack and gray triggerfish.

The Council is expected to schedule a series of scoping meetings in early 2007, at which they will solicit input from the public. For more information, call 888-833-1844.

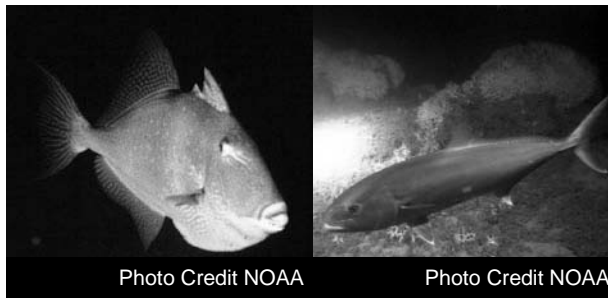


Photo Credit NOAA

Photo Credit NOAA

Shrimp Amendment 13 Frequently Asked Questions

What does Amendment 13 do?

Amendment 13 establishes an endorsement for royal red shrimp to the existing federal shrimp vessel permit; defines maximum sustainable yield, optimum yield, overfishing threshold and overfished condition for the royal red and penaeid shrimp stocks of the Gulf of Mexico; establishes standardized bycatch reporting methods; requires the completion of a Gulf Shrimp Vessel and Gear Characterization Form; establishes a 10-year moratorium on the issuance of commercial shrimp vessel permits capping the number of vessels in the federal fishery; and requires reporting and certification of landings during the moratorium.

When were permits required in the Gulf of Mexico federal shrimp fishery?

The commercial shrimp permit in the Gulf of Mexico EEZ was implemented December 5, 2002. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council established December 6, 2003, as the control date since it is one year after the commercial shrimp permit requirement was implemented. The Council agreed a one year period was ample time for fishermen to obtain the necessary permit. A control date alerts the public that the Council may consider limited entry into a fishery and may use the control date as qualifying criteria for participation into the fishery.

What if I didn't get a permit or qualify for one?

Only vessels active in the shrimp fishery prior to December 6, 2003, will be allowed to continue participating. Moratorium permits are fully transferable, allowing fishermen the flexibility to enter or

exit the fishery as they choose. Permit owners wishing to sell a moratorium permit may do so. Fishermen who do not have a moratorium permit may gain access to the fishery by purchasing a permit from a willing seller.

How many fishermen are impacted?

Approximately 2,666 vessels currently active in the fishery meet the qualifying criteria for the moratorium permit. NOAA Fisheries Service identified an additional 285 vessels that either had a permit at one time but let it expire, or obtained a permit after the December 6, 2003, control date. Of these 285 ineligible vessels, 126 were not found to be active in the fishery during 2002 (the last year of data available during the time the Council deliberated this issue), and may no longer be in the fishery. Of the remaining 159 active vessels, 87 of the vessels were identified as operating entirely in state waters and will not be affected by the permit moratorium. Therefore, NOAA Fisheries Service estimates 72 vessels active in the federal fishery will be excluded under the moratorium. Of those, most of the impacts will be imposed on the 45 larger vessels. The smaller vessels will be impacted less since they are more likely to operate in state waters.

Why is a moratorium necessary?

There is excess capacity in the fishery and fewer vessels can harvest the available shrimp resources at a more profitable level. Basically, the number of vessels and the fishing power of the vessels have increased, while the level of landings has been stable resulting in each participant "having a smaller piece of the pie." The moratorium will assist the economic recovery of the fishery by addressing latent effort. For example, should an unexpected increase in profitability occur in the near future due to decreased fuel costs or a substantial rise in shrimp prices, the moratorium permit will prevent latent effort from entering back into the fishery, allowing those with a moratorium permit to be more profitable.

How has the 2005 hurricane season impacted the Gulf shrimp industry?

The shrimp industry has been severely impacted by the 2005 hurricane season. Preliminary results indicate effort in the shrimp fishery is down since



NOAA Photo Credit

Double-rigged shrimp trawler dumping the catch from the bag of one net on deck

Council Committee Assignments for 2007

Administrative Policy

Julie Morris, Chair
Susan Villere, Vice Chair
Columbus Brown
Roy Crabtree
Phil Horn
Thomas McIlwain
Joe Hendrix

AP Selection

Phil Horn, Chair
Corky Perret, Vice Chair
Bob Gill
Vernon Minton
Joe Hendrix
Harlon Pearce
Roy Williams/Bill Teehan

Artificial Reef

Joe Hendrix, Chair
Degraaf Adams, Vice Chair
Thomas McIlwain
Bob Shipp
Susan Villere
Bobbi Walker
Columbus Brown

Budget/Personnel

Bob Shipp, Chair
Bob Gill, Vice Chair
Karen Foote
Vernon Minton
Joe Hendrix
Bobbi Walker
Harlon Pearce

Data Collection

Degraaf Adams, Chair
Vernon Minton, Vice Chair
Roy Crabtree
Karen Foote
Phil Horn
Roy Williams/Bill Teehan
Bill Daughdrill

Habitat Protection

Columbus Brown, Chair
Joe Hendrix, Vice Chair
Degraaf Adams
Susan Villere
Karen Foote
Julie Morris

Law Enforcement

Bobbi Walker, Chair
Harlon Pearce, Vice Chair
Vernon Minton
Scott Rogers/Chad Brick
Degraaf Adams
Duncan/Keister

Pension Plan Trustees

Robin Riechers
Corky Perret
Julie Morris
Cathy Readinger

SSC Selection

Larry Simpson, Chair
Corky Perret, Vice Chair
Roy Crabtree
Vernon Minton
Karen Foote
Roy Williams/Bill Teehan
Phil Horn

Management Committees

Coral

Bill Teehan, Chair
Bob Shipp, Vice Chair
Columbus Brown
Julie Morris
Bobbi Walker

Mackere!

Degraaf Adams, Chair
Vernon Minton, Vice Chair
Roy Crabtree
Karen Foote
Phil Horn
Roy Williams/Bill Teehan
Bill Daughdrill

Migratory Species

Bill Daughdrill, Chair
Bobbi Walker, Vice Chair
Degraaf Adams
Susan Villere
Phil Horn
Duncan/Keister
Larry Simpson

Marine Reserves

Joe Hendrix, Chair
Columbus Brown, Vice Chair

Bob Gill
Julie Morris
Bob Shipp

Operator Permits

Bobbi Walker, Chair
Larry Simpson, Vice Chair
Bill Daughdrill
Scott Rogers/Chad Brick
Thomas McIlwain

Red Drum

Karen Foote, Chair
Thomas McIlwain, Vice Chair
Roy Crabtree
Karen Foote
Phil Horn
Roy Williams/Bill Teehan
Bill Daughdrill

Reef Fish

Vernon Minton, Chair
Degraaf Adams, Vice Chair
Bob Gill
Roy Crabtree
Julie Morris
Bobbi Walker
Roy Williams/Bill Teehan

Shrimp

Corky Perret, Chair
Karen Foote, Vice Chair
Roy Crabtree
Joe Hendrix
Bob Shipp
Harlon Pearce
Bob Gill

Stone Crab/Spiny Lobster

Bob Shipp, Chair
Bill Daughdrill, Vice Chair
Columbus Brown
Bill Teehan
Corky Perret
Larry Simpson

Sustainable Fisheries/ Ecosystem

Julie Morris, Chair
Karen Foote, Vice Chair
Columbus Brown
Roy Crabtree
Degraaf Adams
Bob Shipp

VMS Reimbursement Available

A reimbursement program for vessel owners and/or operators of vessels who have purchased a VMS unit in order to comply with Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Amendment 18A has been approved.

NOAA Fisheries Service Office for Law Enforcement (OLE) announced earlier this month the availability of reimbursement funds. The reimbursable expense is the purchase price of the least expensive VMS unit type-approved for the Reef Fish Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico, which is \$3,095.

To be eligible for reimbursement, vessel owners and/or operators who possess a valid commercial permit must purchase a VMS type-approved for the Reef Fish Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico; have the VMS installed and activated using a type-approved communication provider; contact the VMS Support Center by calling 888-219-9228 to ensure the vessel is properly registered in the VMS system; and not have any outstanding civil monetary penalties owed to NOAA Fisheries Service.

If you are a vessel owner and/or operator who has purchased a VMS unit and have validated compliance through OLE, you may submit an application for reimbursement, along with proof of eligibility, to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC).

Proof of eligibility includes a copy of a valid commercial reef fish permit, purchase price and proof of purchase for the VMS unit, and a valid compliance confirmation code issued by OLE. Applications for reimbursement can be obtained by calling the PSMFC at 503-595-3100.

While only those vessel owners and/or operators purchasing a VMS for compliance with Amendment 18A are eligible for this funding, new VMS programs are being implemented around the US, and these programs will be eligible for reimbursement from the same funds.

“That means the same pot of money will be shared by a greater number of people - the money could run out,” said Dr. Richard Leard, Deputy Director, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

For that reason, NOAA Fisheries recommends early compliance.

For more information contact the VMS Support Center at 888-219-9228. Please see page 12 for **Frequently Asked Questions about VMS.**

Shrimp 13 FAQs *continued*

the storms, yet the decline in effort may not have led to a decline in landings. It's logical to presume that hurricane damage coupled with the increasing cost of fuel will result in a higher percentage of vessels going bankrupt. Still, fishing effort could increase as areas along the northern Gulf coast are revitalized. Amendment 13 is the first step in rationalizing the shrimp fishery.

But even before the 2005 hurricane season the shrimp industry and its supporting infrastructure were undergoing economic hardships caused by increased fuel costs and reduced shrimp prices. Many vessel owners stopped fishing or went bankrupt, and while government actions regarding imported shrimp products have helped, additional measures must be taken to stabilize the fishery. Stabilizing the number of vessels in the fishery will allow fishermen the opportunity to harvest a greater proportion of the annual shrimp crop, in turn increasing economic returns, and allowing the Council to better achieve optimum yield in the fishery.

What happens after the 10-year moratorium?

The Council may at any time change the moratorium time frame through another amendment to the fishery management plan, and it will take into account, among many factors, the status of the stocks, profitability of the fishery, and impacted communities.

VMS Deadline Extended

March 7, 2007 is the new deadline for all commercially permitted reef fish vessels and charter vessels with commercial reef fish permits to have purchased and installed a type-approved VMS.

After hearing lengthy testimony regarding problems associated with the purchase and installation of vessel monitoring systems, the Gulf Council, by a unanimous vote, requested that NMFS extend the December 7, 2006 deadline by ninety days. NMFS has granted that request.

NOAA Fisheries Accepting Nominations for Sustainable Fisheries Leadership Awards

NOAA's Sustainable Fisheries Leadership Awards

In recognition of outstanding performance, achievements and leadership that promote best stewardship practices for the sustained use of our living marine resources.

These awards are given for the following six categories:

- Stewardship & Sustainability
- Conservation Partnership
- Coastal Habitat Restoration
- Science, Research & Technology
- Public Education, Community Service & Media
- Special Recognition

NOAA Fisheries has announced that it is now accepting nominations for the 2007 Sustainable Fisheries Leadership Awards.

The Sustainable Fisheries Leadership Awards recognize outstanding performance, achievements and leadership contributions to science and management that have served to promote best stewardship practices for the sustained use of the Nation's living marine resources.

Leadership Awards are open to fishing industry sectors, organizations, individuals, states, local and federal government agencies and their employees. Self-nominations will not be accepted.

NOAA Fisheries has partnered with the Fish for the Future Foundation to administer and host the Awards Ceremony.

For detailed information on the nomination process, please visit www.fish4thefuturefoundation.org.

For further information please contact: Michele Shea, Program Manager, Fish for the Future Foundation, at (703) 379-6101, or Michele.Shea@fish4thefuturefoundation.org. Nominations must be received by January 8, 2007.

Information regarding last year's award recipients can be viewed in an online video by visiting www.nmfs/noaa.gov/awards/2006.htm.

Sea Turtle & Smalltooth Sawfish Release FAQs

Who needs sea turtle release gear onboard a vessel?

Turtle release gear is required on all vessels with commercial and for-hire reef fish vessel permits in the Gulf of Mexico. This includes between 1,100 and 1,200 commercial reef fish vessels and between 1,500 and 1,600 for-hire reef fish vessels, some of which also have commercial reef fish permits.

When did the ESA-listed sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish release protocol become mandatory?

Vessels with commercial and for-hire reef fish permits were required to have the proper equipment and protocols onboard September 8, 2006. This protocol must be posted at all times inside the wheelhouse, or in an easily viewable area if the vessel has no wheelhouse.

What specific release gear is required?

A permitted vessel must have onboard a:

- Dipnet
- Short-handled dehooker for vessels with a freeboard height of four feet or less
- Short-handled and long-handled dehooker for vessels with a freeboard height greater than four feet
- Long-handled line clipper for vessels with a freeboard height greater than four feet
- Long-nose or needle-nose pliers
- Bolt cutters
- Monofilament line cutters
- At least two types of mouth openers/mouth gags

All vessels must also have an auto tire or some other cushioned surface to rest a boated sea turtle on. Other cushioned surfaces include life rings, seat cushions, life jackets, or life vests.

How much will the gear cost and where can I get it?

The total cost for release gear for a vessel is estimated to cost between \$267 and \$459. However, these costs may be less for some vessels because some of the equipment may already be onboard. For example, life rings and life vests are already required items.

Descriptions of turtle release gear and a list of NOAA Fisheries Service-approved gear can be found in the

final rule implementing sea turtle bycatch and bycatch mortality mitigation measures for Atlantic pelagic longline vessels (69 FR 40734).

How do I release a sea turtle that is hooked or entangled with my gear?

Vessels with commercial and for-hire reef fish vessel permits must possess, and the crew must use, approved sea turtle handling and release gear in compliance with NOAA Fisheries Service careful release protocols. The required handling and release gear are fully described in a document titled "[Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury.](#)" In addition, there must be sea turtle handling and release guidelines (provided by NOAA Fisheries Service) posted inside the wheelhouse or in an easily viewable area if the vessel has no wheelhouse.

When should I boat a sea turtle?

A sea turtle should not be boated if it is too large to be safely brought onto the vessel, or if sea conditions prevent the turtle from being safely boated. Turtles should be boated using a NOAA Fisheries Service approved dipnet and not pulled into the vessel using the line the turtle has been caught with. Pulling on the line could cause serious injury to the turtle, particularly if the turtle has swallowed the hook. Handling the turtle once boated should follow procedures provided in the document "[Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury.](#)"

What do I do if I encounter a dead sea turtle in my gear?

If a sea turtle dies from gear interaction, the animal should be released or removed from the gear as if it were alive. The sea turtle should not be kept onboard.

What do I do if I catch a smalltooth sawfish?

Smalltooth sawfish should be released by keeping the fish in the water and cutting the line as close to the hook as possible. If it can be done safely, untangle the line if it is wrapped around the saw. Do not handle the animal or attempt to remove any hooks on the saw, except with the long-handled dehooker.

Who can I contact for more?

Contact the Sustainable Fisheries Division, Southeast Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida; phone (727) 824-5305; fax: (727) 824-5308.

Frequently Asked Questions about VMS

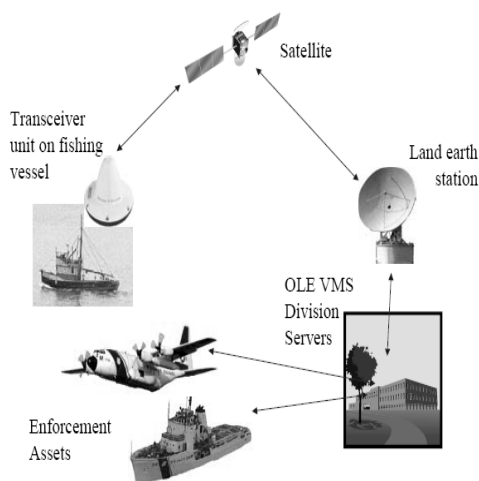
Management measures for Gulf reef fish fisheries include several area-specific regulations where reef fish fishing is restricted or prohibited. Unlike size, bag, and trip limits, where catch can be monitored onshore, area restrictions require at-sea enforcement.

VMS allows NOAA Fisheries Service Office for Law Enforcement (OLE) to monitor vessels over vast expanses of open-water, while maintaining the confidentiality of fishing operations. VMS allows OLE to use modern-day technology to monitor compliance, track violations, and provide substantial evidence for prosecution, while maintaining the integrity of the individual fisherman's effort.

In addition, some VMS provide an optional safety mechanism with a 'panic button' that can be activated during a vessel emergency, and United States Coast Guard assets can be directed to the vessel's last known position.

What is VMS?

VMS is a satellite-based vessel-monitoring program. It consists of a mobile transceiver unit placed on the vessel, a communications service provider that supplies the wireless link between the unit on the vessel and the OLE, and a secure OLE facility where staff can monitor compliance.



NMFS Graphic/VMS

Why is VMS needed?

VMS enhances enforcement of area restrictions. The Reef Fish FMP contains several area-specific regulations in which fishing is restricted or prohibited to protect habitat, protect spawning aggregations, or reduce fishing pressure. Unlike size, bag, and trip limits, where the catch can be monitored when a vessel returns to port, area restrictions require at-sea enforcement.

Who is required to have VMS onboard?

All commercially permitted reef fish vessels and charter vessels with commercial reef fish permits are required to have VMS. Reef fish vessels exclusively using fish traps are exempt because fish traps will no longer be an allowable gear type after February 7, 2007.

When will VMS become mandatory?

The effective date has been extended to March 7, 2007.

Who will pay for VMS?

The cost of the vessel equipment is reimbursable. Please see page 9 for details. Installation, maintenance, and month-to-month communications will be paid or arranged for by the vessel owners. NOAA Fisheries Service will maintain and publish in the *Federal Register* a list of type-approved units and communications protocols.

When do I have to run the VMS?

The VMS must send a signal at least once an hour, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, throughout the year. The VMS system can be turned off under certain circumstances, in which case a power-down exemption must be applied for by the vessel permit holder.

When can I apply for a power-down exemption?

A vessel owner can apply for a power-down exemption from OLE if: the vessel will be continuously out of the water for more than 72 consecutive hours, or; vessels fishing with both a valid commercial and for-hire reef fish permit can sign out of the VMS program for a minimum period of 1 calendar month. The vessel can not conduct commercial fishing until the VMS is turned back on and OLE personnel verify consistent position reports.

See VMS, next page

VMS FAQs *continued*

Will the VMS send a signal only once per hour?

No. NOAA Fisheries Service will define buffer zones of one nautical mile around some restricted fishing areas. Once a vessel enters a defined buffer zone, the VMS reporting rate will increase to every 15 minutes at the expense of NOAA Fisheries Service. If the vessel departs the buffer zone and enters the restricted area, the VMS reporting rate increases to every 10 minutes until the vessel departs the restricted area and/or buffer zone.

The VMS then resumes its hourly reporting. In some cases, NOAA Fisheries Service may initiate at its discretion and expense, the transmission of a signal indicating a vessel's accurate position, at least six times per hour, 24 hours a day.

Must I declare the type of fishing trip planned prior to leaving the dock?

Yes. Prior to departure, the vessel owner or operator must report planned fishing activities and the gear onboard.

NOAA Fisheries Service-defined codes for fishing activity and gear can be sent via the VMS terminal or through a NOAA Fisheries Service call-in system accessed by calling the VMS Support Center 24-hour toll-free number at 888-219-9228. Fishing activity codes will be supplied when the system becomes operational. If multiple trips are planned, the declaration must be submitted prior to each trip.

How much do units cost?

Current estimates, including installation by a qualified marine electrician, range from \$3,000—\$3,500. Annual communication costs range from \$432—\$617.

Is there a reimbursement program?

Yes. Please see page 9 for details.

How do I get VMS installed and operational?

Only NOAA approved VMS may be used, and it must be installed by a qualified marine electrician. When installing and activating the VMS, the vessel owner or operator must:

- Follow procedures indicated on the installation and activation checklist available from OLE

- Submit to OLE a statement certifying compliance with the checklist, as prescribed on the checklist
- Submit to OLE a vendor-completed installation certification checklist, which is available from OLE

Checklists may be received from and submissions made to:

NOAA Fisheries Service
Office for Law Enforcement, Southeast Region
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
Phone: 800-758-4833

What if I need to transfer my VMS from one vessel to another, or sell my VMS to another reef fish permit holder?

The same procedure for installing and operating a VMS as previously outlined must be followed. OLE must be able to confirm to which vessel a VMS has been transferred.

Are data regarding my vessel location confidential?

Yes. Location data for your vessel is confidential and will not be shared with anyone without written authorization for its release by you.

Exceptions: location data can be disclosed to those responsible for Federal Fisheries Management and/or Enforcement, or when required by a court order. Individuals can request their location data only for their permitted vessel. Computers and monitors showing vessel location data are kept in secured rooms with restricted access to authorized personnel.

What do I do if I am out fishing and my VMS stops working?

Contact OLE for assistance with troubleshooting. If you continue to have problems and OLE cannot receive a signal from your vessel, they will provide the captain of the vessel with the appropriate guidance. The VMS Support Center can be contacted either through the VMS terminal or by calling the 24-hour toll-free number at 888-219-9228.

For answers to other VMS questions contact:

Office for Law Enforcement at 800-758-4833.

GMFMC wants your news and views

The Gulf Council would like to hear from you! Please contact us regarding fishery questions, comments, or concerns you would like to see covered in the *Gulf Fishery News*. Anyone interested in submitting information, such as articles, editorials, or photographs pertaining to fishing or fisheries management are encouraged to do so. Submissions may be mailed to Charlene Ponce, Public Information Officer, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 2203 Lois Avenue, Suite 1100, Tampa, FL 33607. Materials can also be sent via fax to 813-348-1711, or e-mail; charlene.ponce@gulfcouncil.org.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council is responsible for the development and modification of fishery management plans (FMPs) that are designed to manage fishery resources in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Gulf of Mexico from state boundaries to the 200-mile limit.

Gulf Fishery News is a publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Any material in this newsletter may be reprinted or reproduced; however, please credit the Council when reprinting articles from this newsletter.

A publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NA05NMF4410003

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Protecting our marine resources

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
PERMIT NO. G-19

2203 Lois Avenue
Suite 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

Phone: 813-348-1630
Fax: 813-348-1711
E-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

We're on the Web
www.gulfcouncil.org