

GULF FISHERY NEWS

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GULF FISHERY NEWS is a publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council for persons interested in the Gulf's fishery resources. Editor: Peter Hood.

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COUNCIL RECOMMENDS THAT THE 200-MILE CLOSURE OFF TEXAS BE MAINTAINED FOR 2003

At its January meeting, the Gulf Council recommended to maintain the closure for 2003 of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off Texas. The Council reached this decision after hearing an update on the conditions of the Texas shrimp industry, a biological review of the Texas shrimp stocks, an economic analysis of the 2001 Texas closure, and public comment. The purpose of the closure is to protect juvenile shrimp migrating from the bays to the Gulf of Mexico and allows the shrimp to grow to larger and more valuable sizes.

Dr. Michael Haby of Texas A&M University gave a report that reviewed the current economic conditions of

the Texas shrimp industry. He indicated that tariff changes, currency exchange rates, and food safety have channeled additional foreign shrimp imports into the U.S. and have caused prices to fall steeply. He pointed out that the expense ratio for the Texas shrimp fleet is currently about 98 cents per dollar earned indicating that

NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

March 11-14, 2003

Adam's Mark Hotel

67 South Water Street

Mobile, Alabama 36602



the Texas shrimp fishery is not a high-margin fishery and has little expense to defer. As a consequence, Texas shrimp fishermen are highly leveraged making it hard for them to handle increased risk. Processors with cold storage are confronted with prices below acquisition and holding costs.

Dr. James Nance from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) reviewed the biological conditions of the 2002 Texas Closure. He concluded that: (1) environmental conditions were the dominant factors that influenced catch in Texas and they were above average relative to good production; (2) actual brown shrimp catches off Texas in 2002 were about average; (3) brown shrimp size off Texas was well above average with only about 5% being >67 count; (4) distribution of the brown shrimp catch was similar to previous years; and 5) white shrimp catches were about average for July and August. Unfortunately, Dr. Nance could not do a yield-per-recruit analysis due to the unavailability of SEAMAP data.

Dr. Mike Travis of NOAA Fisheries presented an economic analysis of the 2002 Texas Closure. The economic assessment indicated that the fishery as a whole was better off without a closure. Landings, revenues, price per pound, producer surplus, and economic rent were all predicted to be higher Gulfwide if there was no closure. However, Dr. Travis cautioned that these analyses were looking at the overall fishery and that there might be some segments of the fishery that would benefit more with the closure, such as Alabama shrimp fishermen. Dr. Travis felt that economic advantages of the no closure policy were due to increased production in Louisiana, reduced effort off western Louisiana without the closure, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) regulations that close Gulf waters off Texas to shrimping inside of 5 nautical miles.

The Council also heard public comment regarding the Texas closure. Texas shrimp fishermen and processors who testified generally supported the closure. They felt that the larger sizes that were caught as a result of the closure were more competitive against foreign imports. Speakers representing the environmental community also supported the closure. The Kemp's Ridley turtle is one of the most endangered species of marine turtles and nests on south Texas beaches from April to July. The

closure may provide some protection to the turtles from being accidentally drown by shrimp trawls as they migrate to the beaches to lay their eggs.

REVISIONS TO RED GROUPER REBUILDING PLAN RECOMMENDED BY COUNCIL

At the January Council meeting, the Gulf Council reviewed a new (2002) red grouper stock assessment and a yellowedge grouper stock assessment. The red grouper stock in 2001 was found to be in an improved condition compared to 1997, due in part to improved biological information about red grouper fecundity and to a strong 1996 year class. However, it is not yet at a biomass level that will allow maximum sustainable yield (B_{MSY}). Consequently, the requirement to rebuild the stock to the B_{MSY} level by 2012 remains. Fortunately, this means that less restrictive measures are needed than previously proposed, and only about a 10% reduction in harvest is needed as opposed to the 45% reduction previously sought. Because the red grouper rebuilding plan is a Secretarial amendment rather than a Council amendment, a final decision on changes to the rebuilding plan will be made by NOAA Fisheries. The Council has made the following recommendations to NOAA Fisheries to modify the rebuilding plan in Reef Fish Secretarial Amendment 1.

- Set the annual red grouper TAC at 6.55 million pounds gutted weight for the first three years 2003-2005. The TAC for subsequent years will be determined following a stock assessment in 2005.
- For the commercial sector, the Council recommended that a possession (trip) limit of shallow-water grouper to achieve a 10% red grouper harvest reduction appears to be the most promising approach. The issue of whether to move the longline/buoy gear boundary line will be considered as a separate action in Draft Reef Fish Amendment 18, which is currently being revised.
- For the recreational sector, the Council recommended a bag limit of 2 red grouper out of the 5 grouper aggregate bag limit.

- The yellowedge grouper stock assessment was inconclusive with respect to the status of the stock, but the Reef Fish Stock Assessment Panel stated that, due to its longevity, yellowedge grouper may be particularly susceptible to fishing. The Council continues to recommend a reduction in the deep-water grouper quota from 1.35 to 1.02 million pounds gutted weight in light of the new yellowedge grouper assessment information. Recreational landings of yellowedge grouper are very minor and do not need additional management measures at this time.

Once NOAA Fisheries revises the red grouper rebuilding plan, proposed rules will be published in the *Federal Register* and there will be a 60 day public comment period to NOAA Fisheries before a final decision is made.

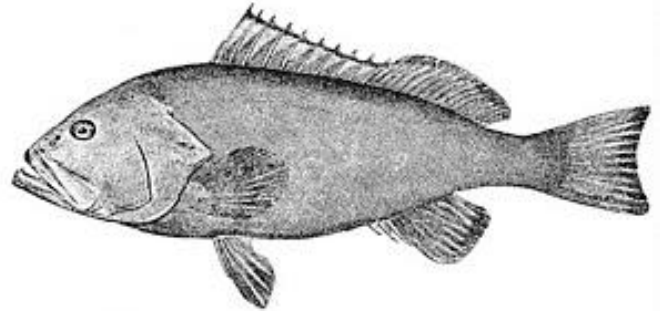
Note to commercial fishermen: Although the red grouper rebuilding plan contains a proposal to repeal the February 15-March 15 closed season on red grouper, gag and black grouper, and that proposal remains unchanged, the closed season will remain in effect for the current (2003) fishing season (see below), regardless of whether NOAA Fisheries decides to repeal it in future years.

GAG, RED GROUPEr, AND BLACK GROUPEr COMMERCIAL FISHERIES IN GULF OF MEXICO FEDERAL WATERS WILL CLOSE FEBRUARY 15 UNTIL MARCH 15, 2003

NOAA Fisheries announced that from February 15 until March 15, 2003, the sale or purchase of gag, red grouper, or black grouper harvested from Gulf Federal waters is prohibited, and no person aboard a vessel for which a valid Federal commercial Gulf reef fish permit has been issued may possess these species in the Gulf regardless of where harvested. The operator of a vessel with a valid Federal commercial Gulf reef fish permit having gag, red grouper, or black grouper aboard must have landed and sold such gag, red grouper, or black grouper prior to 12:01 AM, local time, February 15, 2003. This prohibition on sale/purchase does not apply to gag, red grouper, or black grouper that were harvested, landed ashore, and sold prior to February 15 and were held in cold storage by a dealer or processor. Additionally, during the closure, the recreational bag and

possession limits for gag, red grouper, and black grouper aboard those vessels which have been issued a valid Federal commercial Gulf reef fish permit is zero.

A person aboard a vessel for which the Federal permit indicates both charter vessel/headboat for Gulf reef fish and commercial Gulf reef fish may continue to retain gag, red grouper, and black grouper under the recreational bag and possession limit, provided the vessel is operating as a charter vessel or headboat. Reef fish caught under the recreational bag limit may not be sold. The commercial fishery will reopen at 12:01 AM on March 15, 2003.



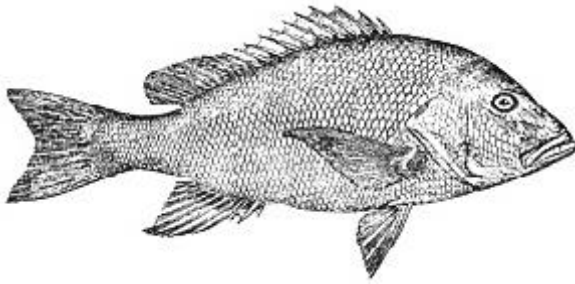
COUNCIL ASKS NOAA FISHERIES TO PROCEED WITH RED SNAPPER IFQ REFERENDUM

At its January meeting, the Gulf Council moved that NOAA Fisheries proceed with the initial referendum for the commercial red snapper individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. It will likely take several months for NOAA Fisheries to hold this referendum while the agency gets the Office of Management and Budget's approval of the referendum language and voting procedures.

During the early-to-mid 1990's the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council devoted more than three years to the development of an individual transferrable quota program (ITQ) (similar to an IFQ program) for the commercial red snapper fishery. It was to be implemented in 1996. However, congressional action in late 1995 prohibited implementation of any new ITQ programs in any U.S. fishery, including the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery, before October 2000. This moratorium was subsequently extended until October 1, 2002. In addition to the moratorium, Congress specified that a referendum among license holders be conducted prior to any ITQ plan development and that a second referendum be held following plan preparation but prior to submission of the plan to the Secretary of Commerce.

RED SNAPPER COMMERCIAL FISHERY IN GULF OF MEXICO FEDERAL WATERS WILL OPEN AT NOON, FEBRUARY 1, 2003

NOAA Fisheries announces that the commercial fishery for red snapper in Gulf of Mexico Federal waters will open at noon, local time, on February 1, 2003, and close at noon, local time, on February 10, 2003. The 2003 Gulf of Mexico red snapper quota is 4.65-million pounds. The commercial fishing season is divided into spring and fall seasons. The spring season begins at noon, local time, on February 1, with 3.10 million pounds available, and the fall season begins at noon, local time, on October 1, with the remainder of the annual quota available. During the spring and fall seasons fishing will be allowed during the first 10 days of each month until the quota is caught. The operator of a vessel with a valid reef fish permit and a Class 1 or Class 2 red snapper license having red snapper aboard must have landed and sold such red snapper before noon, local time, on February 10, 2003. The minimum size limit for the commercial fishery is 15-inches total length.



APPLY NOW FOR APPOINTMENT TO COUNCIL'S ADVISORY PANELS AND/OR SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEES

In March 2003, the Council will review the membership in its Advisory Panels (APs), Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs), Stock Assessment Panels (SAPs), and Socioeconomic Panel (SEP), and will appoint new members for two-year terms. This is an opportunity for those who are interested to become more directly involved in the management decision-making process. These positions are unpaid, but travel expenses are reimbursed. Depending upon the level of activity for a given fishery management plan, each panel or committee may meet from zero to 3 or 4 times per year except for the standing SSC, which may meet 4 or more times per year. (The standing SSC meets for all SSC meetings, while the species SSCs meet jointly with the standing

SSC for issues specific to the species SSC).

- ! APs are comprised of recreational and commercial fishermen, charterboat operators, buyers, sellers, consumers, and others who are knowledgeable about a particular fishery. APs include Billfish, Butterfish, Coastal Migratory Pelagics, Coral, Habitat Protection (3 panels for Florida/Alabama, Mississippi/Louisiana, and Texas), Highly Migratory Species, Red Drum, Red Snapper, Reef Fish, Shrimp, Spiny Lobster, and Stone Crab.
- ! SSCs are comprised of economists, biologists, sociologists, and natural resource attorneys who are knowledgeable about the technical aspects of fisheries in the Gulf. Besides the standing SSC, special SSCs include Butterfish, Coral, Mackerel, Special Oceanic Migratory Species, Red Drum, Reef Fish, Shark, Shrimp, Spiny Lobster, and Stone Crab.
- ! SAPs are comprised of biologists who are trained in the specialized field of population dynamics, and who assess the available biological data and advise the Council on the status of stocks and level of acceptable biological catch. SAPs include Ad Hoc Crustacean, Mackerel, Red Drum, Reef Fish, and Shrimp.
- ! The SEP is comprised of economists and sociologists who are trained to evaluate the economic and social costs associated with various management measures and advise the Council of the economic and social costs associated with these measures.

Persons applying to serve on a committee or panel should indicate in a letter or e-mail to the Council office which committee or panel they wish to serve on and should include a current resume or description of their background in the fishery. Applications can be for as many panels or committees as a person wishes, but for APs, a person can be appointed to a maximum of two standing APs. Applications must be received by February 21, 2003. Mailing address: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 3018 North U.S. Highway 301, Suite 1000, Tampa, Florida 33619-2272. E-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

EMERGENCY RULE EXTENDS PERMIT-RELATED DEADLINES CONTAINED IN FINAL RULE IMPLEMENTING THE FOR-HIRE (CHARTER VESSEL OR HEADBOAT) PERMIT MORATORIUM FOR THE REEF FISH FISHERY AND COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGICS FISHERY IN FEDERAL WATERS OF THE GULF OF MEXICO

NOAA Fisheries has published in the Federal Register (67 FR, 77193, December 17, 2002) an emergency rule that will extend certain permit-related deadlines contained in the final rule implementing the for-hire (charter vessel/headboat) permit moratorium for reef fish and coastal migratory pelagic fish in the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf).

The final rule implementing the for-hire permit moratorium contained an error regarding eligibility that must be resolved as soon as possible. In addition, the regulations that implemented the moratorium require all for-hire vessels operating in the Gulf reef fish or coastal migratory pelagic fisheries in federal waters to have a valid "moratorium permit," as opposed to the prior open access charter permit, beginning December 26, 2002. This emergency rule:

- 1) defers the date for having a "moratorium permit" aboard vessels operating in these fisheries until June 16, 2003;
- 2) automatically extends the expiration date of valid or renewable "open access" permits for these fisheries until June 16, 2003;
- 3) extends the deadline for issuance of "moratorium permits" to no later than June 6, 2003; and
- 4) extends the deadline for resolution of appeals to February 18, 2003, or 30 days after an oral hearing, if applicable.

In addition, NOAA Fisheries intends to issue limited access Gulf for-hire permits to those who qualify under the existing final rule as soon as possible. These emergency actions are necessary to ensure that participants with valid permits in these fisheries are able to continue to participate until NOAA Fisheries can readdress the issue of initial eligibility requirements in the

amendment and final rule implementing the permit moratorium. The issue of eligibility will be addressed as soon as possible through the normal rulemaking process that will include opportunities for the public to comment.

This emergency rule is effective from December 17, 2002, through June 16, 2003.

COUNCIL RECEIVES STATUS UPDATE ON EFH LAWSUIT

NOAA Fisheries informed the Gulf Council at its January meeting that the parties in the essential fish habitat (EFH) lawsuit have agreed to an eight-month extension for the EFH environmental impact statement (EIS), although the judge has not approved the extension yet. When the judge rules on this issue, NOAA Fisheries will notify the Council of the decision.

In 1998, the Gulf Council developed a single Generic EFH Amendment to apply to all seven Gulf FMPs. This amendment was partially approved by NOAA Fisheries. However, NOAA Fisheries felt that the amendment did not consider and assess all managed species or all fishing gears that could potentially damage fish habitat. Additionally, a Federal Court Joint Stipulation and Order (American Oceans Campaign (AOC) et al. v. Daley et al., Civ. No. 99-982 [D.D.C.]) determined the amendment did not comply with National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) requirements, and established a schedule for new EIS to be developed. Therefore, the Gulf Council is developing a new EIS that will assess a range of potential alternatives to designate EFH; identify habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC); and prevent, mitigate, or minimize the adverse effects of fishing on EFH to the extent practicable, using the best available scientific information.

NOAA General Counsel stated that the draft EIS will be published by August 29, 2003 with a public review period open through November 29, 2003. The final EIS will be published June 25, 2004 with a record of decision by July 26, 2004. The Gulf Council will review EIS alternatives at their March meeting, review the full draft EIS at the May Council meeting, and move for final approval of the EIS at the July Council meeting. The Gulf Council's review panels will examine the EIS in April.

NOAA FISHERIES APPOINTS NEW SOUTHEAST REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

William T. Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries, announced the appointment of Roy E. Crabtree as the Administrator of NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region. Dr. Crabtree brings more than 20 years of scientific, teaching, and managerial experience to his new position.

“We are delighted that Roy has accepted this appointment,” said Dr. Hogarth. “His considerable experience as a scientist, businessman, marine fisheries manager, and leader make him uniquely well qualified to serve the diverse constituencies and meet the many challenges he’ll face in this vast region.”

Dr. Crabtree has served as research fishery biologist for the South Carolina Marine Resources Center, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, and the Florida Marine Research Institute. His managerial experience includes operating his own fishing guide business in the Florida Keys and Everglades National Park, service as a fishery management specialist with NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region and, most recently, as the Director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s (FWC) Division of Marine Fisheries.

“This is really a homecoming for me and I look forward to working with my colleagues at the regional office again as well as the fine staffs at our science center in Miami and our laboratories,” said Dr. Crabtree. “I’m committed to delivering the best possible scientific and management services by nurturing the strong relationships we already enjoy with three fishery management councils and our many partners in the public and private sectors.”

CANDIDATES SELECTED FOR NATIONAL MPA FEDERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Department of Commerce, with assistance from the Department of the Interior, named final candidates for the NOAA National Marine Protected Area Federal Advisory Committee. Required as part of Presidential Executive Order 13158 dealing with Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), the 30-person committee represents a broad stakeholder community, including scientists, academia, commercial and recreational fishermen, resource users and managers, and environmentalists.

The advisory committee’s duties include providing advice and recommendations to the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior on implementation of aspects of the MPA Executive Order. The members may establish working groups, subcommittees, or task forces as needed to fulfill the committee’s goals. They also will create a scientific working group of experts in marine and ocean science fields, which will assess the conditions of natural and submerged cultural resources within the nation’s MPAs. The members will serve for two or three-year terms, and will elect a chairperson from the group.

“Marine protected areas are important resource management tools,” said Commerce Secretary Don Evans. “We look forward to strong leadership from these individuals in helping us determine how best to continue our efforts, balancing conservation needs with commercial and recreational interests as we move forward to protect the marine environment for present and future generations.”

The committee will be supported by the National Marine Protected Areas Center, established by NOAA in cooperation with the Department of the Interior, as required by Executive Order. The MPA Center is charged with providing federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local governments with the information, technologies, training, and strategies to coordinate federal activities related to MPAs.

Final candidates for the MPA Federal Advisory Committee from the Gulf region are:

- ! Ms. H. Kay Williams, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; Vancleave, Mississippi.
- ! Mr. Robert Bendick, Jr., The Nature Conservancy; Altamonte Springs, Florida.
- ! Ms. Carol Dinkins, Vinson & Elkins Attorneys At Law; Houston, Texas
- ! Dr. John Ogden, Florida Institute of Oceanography; St. Petersburg, Florida.
- ! Dr. Daniel Suman, University of Miami; Miami, Florida.
- ! Mr. Robert Zales, II, Bob Zales Charters; Panama City, Florida.

Committee members were nominated by organizations and individuals. Potential members are offered membership into the committee and then must undergo a

background check. These candidates were selected by a panel of experts from both agencies seeking to ensure that the committee's membership represented the broad spectrum of interested parties throughout the nation.

Marine protected areas are one of several management tools NOAA Fisheries can use protect marine fishes, marine mammals, and sea turtles that fall under the agency's stewardship responsibilities.

LARGE COASTAL SHARK STOCK ASSESSMENT PEER REVIEWS COMPLETE

NOAA Fisheries' latest stock assessment for Atlantic large coastal sharks, including sandbar, blacktip, tiger, hammerhead, spinner, and silky sharks, got three thumbs up from independent reviewers of Natural Resource Consultants, Inc. NOAA Fisheries agreed to peer reviews of the 2002 large coastal shark stock assessment as part of a court-approved settlement agreement with commercial fishermen over shark science and management.

"My review of the 2002 assessment of large coastal sharks suggests that a state-of-the-art [assessment] was performed using the best scientific information available," wrote Dr. Terry Quinn II. "The 2002 Shark Evaluation Workshop and the Stock Assessment are scientifically rigorous bodies of work," said Dr. Kim Holland. "...in my opinion, the works of the 2002 Shark Evaluation Workshop and are highly professional in character, ... based on appropriate fisheries stock assessment techniques and that the scientists based their conclusions on relevant available science," wrote Dr. Dayton Alverson.

The assessment indicates good news for blacktip sharks, which are now fully rebuilt. Regulations also have been working to rebuild sandbar sharks, which are no longer overfished, although they are not yet fully rebuilt and fishing effort remains too high. The large coastal shark aggregate, which includes tiger, hammerhead, spinner and silky sharks, is still overfished. The assessment is based on numerous indices, including fishing logbooks, observer data, and fishery independent surveys as well as five different population models and a number of scenarios. One peer reviewer noted that recent management restrictions may have halted the decline in these stocks but current exploitation rates will not stabilize or rebuild them to maximum sustainable yield levels.

NOAA Fisheries published an emergency rule on December 27 that established fishing quotas for large coastal sharks. The agency is currently seeking public input for additional options to manage large coastal shark species. Over the next year, NOAA Fisheries will be working on an amendment to shark regulations and will soon hold scoping meetings.

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Panel will meet February 10-12, 2003, in Silver Spring, MD, to review the assessment and make recommendations for large coastal shark management.

NEW, ONE-STEP REGISTRATION SYSTEM REDUCES PAPERWORK AND FINANCIAL BURDEN ON SOUTHEAST FISHERMEN

In continued efforts to streamline procedures and eliminate redundant paperwork and fees required of fishermen, NOAA Fisheries will combine two regulatory requirements into a one-step process that allows fishermen to simultaneously apply for federal fishing permits and register fishing vessels that encounter marine mammals. Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, commercial vessels with certain gear types that might incidentally encounter or harm marine mammals while fishing must register with the Marine Mammal Authorization Program (MMAP). The program is designed to monitor and minimize fishing impacts on marine mammal populations. Beginning in 2003, commercial fishers with active federal permits will no longer need to submit an MMAP registration form, renewal form, or processing fee to receive or validate their MMAP certificate. The permit renewal and MMAP registration has been combined. NOAA Fisheries will identify the gear types affected by the MMAP, and the agency will automatically issue MMAP certificates to fishers.

NOAA Fisheries will automatically process registrations for the 2003 MMAP authorizations based on the southeast federal commercial fishery permitting system, and fishers are not required to take any action. To learn more about the MMAP and to view a list of commercial fisheries according to category, visit the following web site:

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR2/Fisheries_Interactions/2002_LOF.pdf For more information, contact Teletha Griffin, 9721 Executive Center Drive North, St. Petersburg, FL 33702; (727) 570-5312.

TENTATIVE AGENDA FOR THE MARCH GULF COUNCIL MEETING

COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

Tuesday, March 11, 2003

AP Selection Committee (Closed Session)

- Appointment of AP Members

SSC Selection Committee (Closed Session)

- Appointment of SSC, SAP, and SEP members

Data Collection Committee

- Proposed FSU Economic Study

Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum Management Committee

- Proposed Scoping Meetings on Aquaculture Generic Amendment

Reef Fish Management Committee

- Amendment 21 Public Hearing Document
- Grouper Violations (McKinney)

Wednesday, March 12, 2003

Mackerel Management Committee

- Final Draft Coastal Migratory Pelagic Regulatory Amendment
- Size and Bag Limit Alternatives for Cobia
- Commercial landings of Blue Runner

Shrimp Management Committee

- Amendment 13 Options Paper

Habitat Protection Committee

- EFH Alternatives for EIS

Thursday, March 13, 2003

Joint ReefFish/Artificial Reef Committee

- Consideration of proceeding with SMZ designation for Alabama Reefs
 - S Presentation of framework procedure
 - S Public Testimony

COUNCIL AGENDA

Thursday, March 13, 2003

- I. Call to Order and Introductions
- II. Adoption of Agenda
- III. Approval of Minutes
- IV. Access to GSMFC FIN System
- V. Worldwide Water Foundation Request

VI. Public Testimony¹

- a. Draft Coastal Migratory Pelagic Regulatory Amendment

VII. Committee Reports

- a. AP Selection (Closed Session)
- b. SSC Selection (Closed Session)

Friday, March 14, 2003

VII. Committee Reports (continued)

- c. Habitat Protection Committee
- d. Shrimp Management
- e. Mackerel Management
- f. Reef Fish Management
- g. AP Selection
- h. SSC Selection
- i. Data Collection
- j. Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum
- k. Logo Selection Committee
- l. Joint ReefFish/Artificial Reef Committee

VIII. NMFS Billfish AP

IX. NMFS HMS AP

X. SAFMC Liaison

XI. Summit for GOM Shrimp Industry

XII. Gulf Safety Committee

XIII. Enforcement Reports

XIV. Regional Administrator's Report

XV. Directors' Reports

XVI. Other Business

Please note: The above agenda is tentative and is not final until it becomes noticed. Updates to the agenda will be posted on the Gulf Council web site as they become available. Although non-emergency issues not contained in the agenda may come before the Gulf Council for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA), those issues may not be the subject of formal Gulf Council action during the meeting. The Gulf Council's actions will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in the noticed agenda and any issues arising after publication of that notice that require emergency action under section 305 (c) of the MSFCMA, provided the public has been notified of the Gulf Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency.

¹ Persons testifying must turn in the registration card prior to the start of the testimony period.

COAST GUARD "CATCHES" REPEAT OFFENDER; MORE THAN 17,000 POUNDS OF ILLEGAL SHRIMP SEIZED FROM VESSEL

The United States Coast Guard (USCG) Cutter Nantucket boarded the commercial fishing vessel Miss Christine V and seized its catch after the vessel was detected fishing inside the Dry Tortugas North Ecological Preserve by USCG air and surface assets.

"This is the second time in less than a week that a Coast Guard helicopter from Air Station Miami and cutters from Key West have played a crucial role in catching suspected illegal fishing in the act," said Lt. Cmdr. David Cinalli, chief of fisheries enforcement for the Seventh USCG District.



The 88-foot commercial fishing vessel was initially detected by the cutter Key Largo by radar as being within the boundaries of the preserve. An Air Station Miami helicopter was called and visually confirmed Miss Christine V was shrimp trawling in the federally protected area. The cutter Nantucket, also confirmed Miss Christine V's position with radar and found it to be inside the protected area.

Crew members from the Nantucket boarded the vessel and found approximately 1,000 pounds of shrimp on board. The evidence package for this seizure has been forwarded to NOAA Fisheries who will determine if a formal Notice of Violation will be issued.

This is the second time the Miss Christine V has had a catch seized in the past week. Law enforcement officers from Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) seized 16,259 pounds of shrimp from Miss Christine V after it was boarded for suspected fishing inside the State Tortugas Shrimp Sanctuary. According to FWCC

officials, Thursday's catch was sold for \$23,682.25 and the owner of the vessel must pay a \$3,500 bond to prevent the vessel's nets and net doors from being seized. Money from the catch goes into an escrow account pending the findings of an investigation.

COAST GUARD CONTINUES AT-SEA ENFORCING IN SHRIMP SANCTUARY

The USCG Cutter Key Largo (a 110 ft patrol boat) boarded and cited a commercial fishing vessel that was allegedly fishing inside the Dry Tortugas Shrimp Sanctuary, a zone closed to trawling.

The 70-foot fishing vessel U.S. Eagle, whose home port is New Orleans, was spotted by a Coast Guard helicopter from Air Station Miami, Fla., fishing inside the federally protected area and did not respond to numerous attempts by radio to the master. Once the master of the vessel spotted the helicopter, he immediately departed the shrimp sanctuary. The Coast Guard helicopter documented the name and numbers on the boats hull and left the scene.

"The at-sea patrols conducted by the USCG are key in catching illegal shrimp fishing in this area." said Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge Dan O'Brien, NOAA Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement - Southeast Division.

The cutter Key Largo later intercepted the suspect vessel Saturday and ordered it to follow them into calmer waters so a safe boarding could be conducted. Once in calm seas, the vessel was boarded and approximately 850 pounds of shrimp were located in the ship's hold by crew members from the Key Largo. The master of the vessel was issued citations for fishing within the Tortugas Shrimp Sanctuary, fishing for shrimp in federal waters of Gulf of Mexico without a valid permit; and failing to monitor VHF-FM channel 16 for communication with law enforcement unit impeding facilitation of enforcement. Three safety violations - expired visual distress signals, expired emergency position indicating radio beacon battery and no record of emergency drills or actions - were also issued to the U.S. Eagle. The case has been referred to NOAA's Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement.

GULF FISHERY NEWS WANTS YOUR NEWS AND VIEWS

GULF FISHERY NEWS is a publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Any material in this newsletter may be reprinted or reproduced. We would like to hear from you regarding fishery questions you would like to see covered in GULF FISHERY NEWS. GULF FISHERY NEWS or the Gulf Council office can be contacted at c/o Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 3018 U.S. Highway 301 North, Suite 1000, Tampa, Florida, 33619-2266. Telephone: 813-228-2815 (toll-free 888-833-1844). Fax: 813-225-7015. E-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org Website: <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils that were established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act in 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. This is a publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and financial assistance for this newsletter was provided by grant funds pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NA03NMF4410028.

May Meeting:

May 12-15, 2003
Edgewater Beach Resort
11212 Front Beach Road
Panama City Beach, FL 32407

July Meeting:

July 14-18, 2003
Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club
851 Gulf Shore Blvd. N.
Naples, FL 34102

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