



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: Steven Atran.

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SCOPING MEETINGS SCHEDULED ON REEF FISH AND MACKEREL LIMITED ACCESS AND ON MANAGEMENT OF OFFSHORE MARINE AQUACULTURE

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold scoping meetings to solicit input from interested parties to identify issues and potential impacts regarding alternatives to limit entry in the king mackerel and reef fish fisheries. King mackerel and reef fish in the Gulf of Mexico are managed under their respective FMPs. A moratorium on the issuance of new commercial king mackerel permits was established by Amendment 8 to the Mackerel FMP in March 1998, and extended with the implementation of Amendment 12 to the Mackerel FMP; and is scheduled to expire on October 15, 2005.

A moratorium on the issuance of new commercial reef fish permits was established by Amendment 4 to the Reef Fish FMP in May 1992. The moratorium has been maintained since that time with the implementation of Amendments 9, 11, and 17 to the

NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

March 8-11, 2004
Adam's Mark Hotel
64 South Water Street
Mobile, Alabama 36602



Reef Fish FMP, and is scheduled to expire on December 31, 2005.

Management alternatives that could be considered by the Council include, but are not limited to: a “no action” alternative regarding each fishery, which would allow the moratoria to expire; an extension of the existing moratoria for a designated time frame; or the establishment of some form of license limitation system for each fishery. If a license limitation system is chosen, the Council may also consider alternatives for different classes of licenses, initial qualification, initial allocations by license classes, transferability, and appeals regarding eligibility.

The Scoping document for Generic Amendment for Offshore Marine Aquaculture; (1) summarizes the existing federal statutes, programs, and rules that apply to marine aquaculture of fish and marine organisms in the federal waters of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ); (2) lists the fishery stocks that may be cultured in marine aquaculture programs carried out under the amendment; (3) discusses the environmental and other effects of the various marine aquaculture practices to provide a background for selecting alternatives for the best management practices possible for regulating the marine aquaculture process; and (4) sets forth a broad range of management alternatives for public consideration in selecting the best management practices (BMP) possible.

In accordance with NOAA’s Administrative Order NAO 216-6, Section 5.02(c), the Council has identified this preliminary range of alternatives for both documents as a means to initiate discussion for scoping purposes only. This may not represent the full range of alternatives that eventually will be evaluated by the Council. Depending on the range of alternatives and issues identified during the scoping process, the Council may prepare an Environmental Assessment, with a Finding of No Significant Impact in association with the proposed actions. Should significant issues be identified in regard to the proposed actions, a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) will be developed.

The scoping meetings will be held beginning at 6:00 p.m. beginning with the Limited Access document and following immediately with the Offshore Marine Aquaculture document. The meetings will conclude no later than 10:00 p.m. and will be held at the following locations and dates:

Tuesday, February 17, 2004

Adams Mark Hotel & Resort
64 South Water Street
Mobile, AL 36602
251-438-4000

Wednesday, February 18, 2004

J.L. Scott Marine Education Center and Aquarium
115 Beach Boulevard
Biloxi, MS 39530
228-374-5550

Thursday, February 19, 2004

Larose Regional Park
2001 East 5th Street
Larose, LA 70373
504-693-7355

Monday, February 23, 2004

Holiday Inn Emerald Beach
1102 South Shoreline Boulevard
Corpus Christi, TX 78401
361-883-5731

Tuesday, February 24, 2004

Moody Gardens Hotel
7 Hope Boulevard
Galveston, TX 77554
409-741-8484

Wednesday, February 25, 2004

National Marine Fisheries Service
Panama City Laboratory
3500 Delwood Beach Road
Panama City, FL 32408
850-234-6541 - ext 201

Thursday, February 26, 2004

Madeira Beach City Hall Auditorium
300 Municipal Drive
Madeira Beach, FL 33708
727-391-9951

Monday, March 1, 2004

Holiday Inn Beachside
3841 North Roosevelt Boulevard
Key West, FL 33040
305-294-2571

These meetings are open to the public and are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to the Council office by February 10, 2004.

SEDAR ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP TO DEVELOP STOCK ASSESSMENTS FOR GULF AND ATLANTIC GROUP KING MACKEREL

The Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, in cooperation with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center of the National Marine Fisheries Service, will hold a Stock Assessment Workshop in Miami, Florida as part of the Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process to assess the status of Gulf and Atlantic group king mackerel. The Stock Assessment Workshop will include a select group of scientists, commercial and recreational fishing representatives, state agency personnel, and other knowledgeable persons to review recently completed stock assessment data and modeling approaches; and in conjunction with biologists at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, develop assessments of the Gulf and Atlantic group king mackerel stocks.

The workshop will evaluate the current condition of these stocks based on established and proposed status criteria (minimum stock size thresholds [MSST] and maximum fishing mortality thresholds [MFMT]) to determine whether either stock is overfished or undergoing overfishing and may recommend levels of acceptable biological catch. A report will be produced by the workshop that will be reviewed at the SEDAR Assessment Review Workshop beginning April 5, 2004. Final recommendations will subsequently be used by the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils to develop any additional management measures, if needed, for these stocks.

The meeting will be held at the National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, 75 Virginia Beach Drive in Miami, Florida. The meeting is to begin at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, February 16, 2004 and conclude by 3:00 p.m. on Thursday, February 19, 2004. An agenda and materials to be reviewed at the workshop are available from NMFS SEDAR Coordinator John Carmichael (843-571-4366, e-mail John.Carmichael@safmc.net).

The meeting is open to the public and is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to the Council office by February 10, 2004.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES SELECTED ON REEF FISH AMENDMENT 22 (RED SNAPPER REBUILDING PLAN)

The Gulf Council selected preferred alternatives for Reef Fish Amendment 22 (Red Snapper Rebuilding Plan) at its meeting in Austin, Texas January 12-15, 2004. Changes from the preferred alternatives presented in public hearings were as follows: Under Rebuilding Strategies, the requirement for "5-year" periodic assessments was deleted. Although periodic assessments will be needed, the Council felt that the time between assessments could be better evaluated following the new red snapper stock assessment that will be completed in 2004. Also, under Bycatch Reporting for Private Recreational Fishery, the Council adopted status quo as a proposed alternative. A final version of Amendment 22 will be reviewed by the Council at its March meeting in Mobile, Alabama for approval to submit to NOAA Fisheries.

The Council's proposed alternatives are as follows:

Section 4.1.2 - Alternative Biological Reference Points and Status Determination Criteria

Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) - Alternative 2: MSY for red snapper equals the yield associated with fishing at F_{MSY}, (where F_{MSY} = 0.092) or 41.13 million pounds, assuming low maximum recruitment and an initial steepness of 0.90 for the stock recruitment relationship.

- Optimum Yield (OY) - Sub-option B: Until recovery, OY is defined to be consistent with the rebuilding strategy selected in this amendment. After achieving the rebuilding target, the OY for red snapper shall correspond to a fishing mortality rate defined as $F_{OY} = 0.75 * F_{MSY} = 0.069$. (The OY yield corresponding to this F_{OY} is not specified, but it typically is 94-96 percent of MSY.)
- Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) - Sub-option E: $(1-M) * B_{MSY} = 2,453$ billion pounds where $B_{MSY} = 2,726$ billion pounds, and M (natural mortality rate) = 0.10.
- Maximum Fishing Mortality Threshold (MFMT) - Sub-option G: Red Snapper MFMT is equal to the fishing mortality rate specified by the rebuilding strategy adopted in this amendment. Under equilibrium conditions, MFMT would equal F_{MSY} .

Section 4.22 - Rebuilding Strategy

Alternative 2: Maintain TAC at 9.12 million pounds and rebuild red snapper by 2032. Review and adjust this policy, as necessary, through periodic assessments. Monitor annual landings to ensure quota is not exceeded.

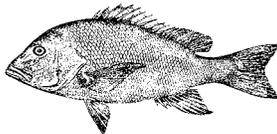
Section 4.3.3.1 - Bycatch Reporting Methodologies for Commercial and Recreational For-Hire Vessels (2 preferred alternatives adopted)

Alternative 4: Develop an observer program managed by NOAA Fisheries for the reef fish fishery. NOAA Fisheries will develop a random selection procedure for determining vessels that will be required to carry observers in order to collect bycatch information. In selecting vessels, the agency will consider the suitability of the vessel for such purpose and ensure that the universe of vessels included are representative of all statistical sub-zones in the Gulf. Vessel permits will not be renewed for vessels that fail or refuse to carry observers in accordance with this process. The requirement for the observer program be implemented contingent on NOAA Fisheries obtaining sufficient funding for the program.

Alternative 6 - Enhance the MRFSS by including headboats using the same sampling methodology as used for charter vessels. This motion is contingent on the ongoing studies demonstrating that this would be an improvement in the current estimates.

Section 4.3.3.2 - Bycatch Reporting Methodologies for Private Recreational Fishery

Alternative 1. No action (status quo). Use the existing MRFSS catch and effort program to continue collecting bycatch information from the private recreational sector.



VERMILION SNAPPER SET AS A TOP STOCK ASSESSMENT PRIORITY FOR 2005

In light of the determination by NOAA Fisheries last October that vermilion snapper in the Gulf of Mexico is overfished, the Gulf Council reviewed its priorities for reef fish stock assessments to be conducted by NOAA Fisheries under the SEDAR process in 2005. A red snapper stock assessment is planned for 2004 and that assessment will proceed as scheduled. For 2005, the Council had previously requested assessments for greater amberjack (declared overfished in 2001, currently under a rebuilding plan) and scamp (status unknown, no prior stock assessments conducted). The last vermilion snapper assessment was conducted in 2001 and was based on data through 1999. Recent analyses presented at the

January 2004 Council meeting in Austin, Texas indicated that vermilion snapper catch rates, which were declining prior to 1999, may have stabilized or begun to increase in recent years. Although the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that the Council must submit a vermilion snapper rebuilding plan to NOAA Fisheries by October 2004, before any 2005 assessments can be conducted, the Council felt that an updated assessment will be needed to make any needed changes to the vermilion snapper rebuilding plan once the plan is submitted. As a result, the Council voted to recommend that NOAA Fisheries give priority to reef fish stock assessments in 2005 as follows:

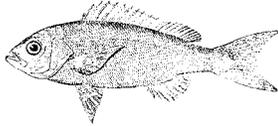
- 1) vermilion snapper;
- 2) greater amberjack;
- 3) scamp.

NOAA Fisheries will likely only be able to complete two of the three stock assessments. Therefore, the Council will investigate the feasibility of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission working with NOAA Fisheries and taking the lead in conducting a scamp stock assessment.

VERMILION SNAPPER REBUILDING PLAN DEVELOPMENT CONTINUES

Development of a vermilion snapper rebuilding plan (Reef Fish Amendment 23) continued at the January 2004 meeting in Austin, Texas with a review of an options paper. The draft report contained options to set a rebuilding plan for 10 years or less using either a constant catch scenario, a constant fishing mortality rate scenario, or a stepped scenario that reevaluates allowable catch at three year intervals. Under the 10-year constant catch strategy, an initial reduction in harvest of 18% would be needed. The other scenarios would require a greater reduction in harvest, but the Council felt that an initial 18% reduction provides a reasonable first step until a new stock assessment can be conducted. The specific management measures to achieve this reduction (minimum size limits, bag limits commercial trip limits) will be selected later in the development of the rebuilding plan, but are dependent upon the level of release mortality. Reef fish assessments have typically assumed release mortalities of 20% and 33% for the recreational and commercial fisheries respectively. However, research

into release mortality of vermilion snapper has produced a range of estimates from 5% to 40%, and research into other snappers (i.e., red snapper) has produced estimates as high as 70%. The analyses of specific management measures takes a range of release mortalities into account when evaluating their effects on reducing fishing mortality. Development of the vermilion snapper rebuilding plan will continue at the March Council meeting in Mobile, Alabama, and public hearings are tentatively scheduled to be held in April 2004 in Port Aransas, Galveston, New Orleans, Biloxi, Orange Beach, and Panama City.



GULF COUNCIL COMMENTS ON SECRETARIAL AMENDMENT 1 (RED GROUPE REBUILDING PLAN)

The Gulf Council reviewed the proposed red grouper rebuilding plan in Secretarial Amendment 1 and provided its comments to NOAA Fisheries at the January Council meeting in Austin, Texas. NOAA Fisheries is currently taking public comments on Secretarial Amendment 1 through March 8, 2004.

The proposed actions in Secretarial Amendment 1 are as follows:

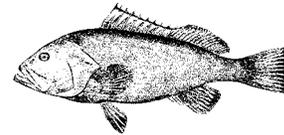
- Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) = 7.560 million pounds gutted weight
- Fishing mortality rate to produce MSY (F_{MSY}) = 0.306
- Spawning stock biomass at MSY (SS_{MSY}) = 840 metric tons mature female gonad weight (proxy for stock biomass).
- Minimum stock size threshold (MSST) or overfished threshold = 80% of MSST or 672 metric tons mature female gonad weight.
- Maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT) or overfishing threshold = F_{MSY} or 0.306 or the F consistent with a recovery to the MSY level in 10 years or less.
- Rebuilding strategy = 10-year rebuilding plan based on three-year intervals. The annual acceptable biological catch (ABC) of red grouper for the first three years will be 6.56 million pounds gutted weight, with subsequent ABCs to be set following future stock assessments.
- Commercial shallow-water grouper aggregate quota = 8.80 million pounds gutted weight
- Commercial red grouper quota = 5.31 million pounds gutted weight.
- Commercial shallow-water grouper fishery will close when either the aggregate or red grouper quota is met, whichever occurs first.

- Commercial closed season February 15 - March 15 on red grouper, gag, and black grouper continues.

- Recreational bag limit = no more than 2 of the 5-grouper bag limit can be red grouper.

In addition, to prevent effort shifting on deep-water groupers and tilefish, the Secretarial Amendment 1 proposes to set a commercial tilefish quota of 0.44 million pounds gutted weight, and to reduce the commercial deep-water grouper quota to 1.02 million pounds gutted weight.

The Gulf Council recommended, in addition to the above proposals, that NMFS adopt a commercial shallow-water grouper aggregate trip limit of 4,000 pounds gutted weight if 75% of the shallow-water grouper quota is reached by September 30 of each year.



NOAA FISHERIES ACCEPTING PUBLIC COMMENTS ON REEF FISH SECRETARIAL AMENDMENT 1 THROUGH MARCH 8, 2004

NOAA Fisheries will consider all public comments (including the Gulf Council's recommendation), on Reef Fish Secretarial Amendment 1 (red grouper rebuilding plan), and will publish a proposed rule after the public comment period on the Secretarial Amendment ends. Public comments should be sent to Phil Steele, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702, or via fax to 727-570-5583. NOAA Fisheries does not accept e-mailed comments. Copies of the Secretarial Amendment can be obtained from the above address. Comments must be received by NOAA Fisheries no later than 4:30 p.m., eastern time, on March 8, 2004.

NOAA FISHERIES ACCEPTING PUBLIC COMMENTS ON PROPOSED RULE TO IMPLEMENT REEF FISH AMENDMENT 21 THROUGH FEBRUARY 19, 2004

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has published a proposed rule in the Federal Register to implement the regulatory actions

proposed in Amendment 21 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico (extension of the Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps marine reserves).

NOAA Fisheries is now requesting comments from the public regarding the proposed rule. The regulatory actions described in the proposed rule would modify the fishing restrictions that apply within the Madison-Swanson sites and Steamboat Lumps marine reserves in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, and would extend the period of effectiveness of those restrictions through June 16, 2010. Written comments on the proposed rule must be received on or before February 19, 2004. See the Addresses section at the end of this bulletin for information on where and how to submit comments.

Summary of Proposed Rule

The intended effect of these proposed regulations is to protect the spawning aggregations of species within these areas, prevent overfishing, and aid in the evaluation of the effectiveness of marine reserves as a management tool.

Specifically, within these marine reserves, this proposed rule would:

- (1) Prohibit the possession of Gulf reef fish year round, except for possession aboard a vessel in transit with fishing gear appropriately stowed;
- (2) During November through April, prohibit all fishing and possession of any fish species, with exception of Highly Migratory Species (Tuna/Swordfish/Shark and Billfish), and for fish possessed aboard a vessel in transit with gear appropriately stowed; and
- (3) During May through October, restrict fishing activity to surface trolling only.

Amendment 21, which includes a Regulatory Impact Review (RIR), Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, Environmental Assessment, Social Impact Assessment, and a Fishery Impact Statement, is available from:

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
The Commons at Rivergate
3018 North U.S. Highway 301, Suite 1000
Tampa, Florida, 33619-2272

Phone: 813-228-2815; fax: 813-225-7015

e-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

Amendment 21 can also be downloaded from the Downloadable Files page of the Council's website, <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>.

NOAA Fisheries prepared a Supplementary Regulatory Impact Review and Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis that augments the findings of the FMP's RIR. This supplemental analysis is available from the Fisheries Economics Office, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702.

Written copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702. Electronic copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from the Federal Register website at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>. Comments regarding the proposed rule should be sent to Mr. Phil Steele at NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702. Comments may be submitted via fax to 727-570-5583. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet. All comments on the proposed rule must be received before 4:30 p.m., eastern time, on February 19, 2004. Comments on non-regulatory actions in the FMP are being accepted through February 9, 2004. All comments received by NOAA Fisheries on the FMP or the proposed rule will be addressed in any final rule that is published to implement the actions proposed in the FMP.

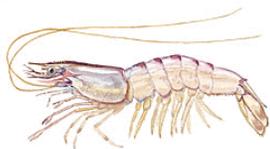
SHRIMP AMENDMENT 13 BEING DEVELOPED

Development of Shrimp Amendment 13 continued at the January Gulf Council meeting in Austin, Texas. Amendment 13 addresses the need to collect additional data on the deep-water royal red shrimp fishery, completion of status determination criteria (MSY, OY, overfishing threshold and overfished condition) for shrimp stocks in the Gulf of Mexico, and standardization of bycatch reporting methodologies in the shrimp fishery.

This amendment includes alternatives for a separate royal red shrimp vessel permit or an endorsement to the existing commercial shrimp vessel permit in order

to provide a readily accessible database from which to identify participants in this fishery as well as collect information on areas fished, effort, CPUE, markets, value, etc. Appropriate definitions for MSY, OY, the overfishing threshold, and the overfished condition for the shrimp stocks, as required by the M-SFCMA, will be developed in the amendment. Finally, there is a need to develop a more accurate means of determining the overall amount and type of bycatch that is being taken by the shrimp fishery. The currently proposed methodology in Amendment 10 to the Shrimp FMP, using SEAMAP data as extrapolated by effort data, has been criticized as not accurately reflecting actual bycatch. This information is needed in order for the Council to determine whether it is complying with National Standard 9 of the M-SFCMA that states: “conservation and management measures shall to the extent practicable, (A) minimize bycatch and (B) to the extent bycatch cannot be avoided, minimize the mortality of such bycatch.”

The draft amendment is expected to be ready for public hearings in June. Hearings are planned for Tampa, FL; Mobile, AL; Biloxi, MS; New Orleans, LA; Abbeville, LA; Houma, LA; Galveston, TX; Palacios, TX; Aransas Pass, TX; and Brownsville, TX.



**BYCATCH REDUCTION DEVICES (BRDS)
REQUIRED IN THE SHRIMP FISHERY OF
THE EASTERN GULF OF MEXICO (SMALL
ENTITY COMPLIANCE GUIDE)**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has published a final rule requiring the use of bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) in the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery east of 85°30' W. longitude (east of Cape San Blas, Florida). This requirement applies to the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which includes all waters between 9 and 200 miles off the west coast of Florida.

Beginning February 9, 2004, a NOAA Fisheries certified BRD must be installed in each net rigged for fishing aboard vessels trawling for shrimp in the

eastern Gulf of Mexico EEZ. Try nets with a headrope length of 16 feet or less are exempt from this requirement.

A shrimp trawler fishing for royal red shrimp is exempt from the BRD requirement, as are vessels using rigid-frame roller trawls that are 16 feet or less in length.

This requirement would complement existing federal regulations requiring the use of BRDs in the western Gulf of Mexico EEZ (west of Cape San Blas, Florida), as well as Florida regulations that require the use of BRDs in their territorial waters. This compatibility of regulations throughout the Gulf of Mexico will ease enforcement issues.

BRDs approved for use in the eastern Gulf of Mexico EEZ include the “Fisheye,” “Gulf Fisheye,” “Jones-Davis,” “Expanded Mesh” and “Extended Funnel.” The “Extended Funnel” BRD is certified for use in Florida territorial waters, along with the “Florida Finfish Excluder” (equivalent to the NOAA Fisheries certified “Gulf Fisheye”).

**COMMERCIAL RED SNAPPER FISHERY
FINISHES UNDER ITS 2003 QUOTA, 2004
SPRING SEASON TO OPEN FEBRUARY 1**

Preliminary landings estimates for the 2003 commercial red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico indicates that there were a total of 4,581,212 pounds whole weight of red snapper harvested (3,021,135 pounds in the Spring season, and 1,560,077 pounds in the Fall season). This is under the 4,650,000 pound quota by 68,788 pounds (1.5%).

The 2004 Spring commercial red snapper season will open at noon, local time, on February 1, 2004, with a Spring season sub-quota of 3.10 million pounds. During the Spring season, fishing will be allowed from noon on the first until noon on the tenth until the Spring sub-quota is reached. The season will then close until October 1, 2004, when the Fall season will open under the same rules for the remainder of the 4.65 commercial quota.

NOAA FISHERIES ENFORCEMENT REPORTS

At the January Council meeting in Austin, NOAA Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement reported on a number of significant enforcement actions during the period July 1, 2003 - September 30, 2003. Among the actions reported from the Gulf of Mexico were:

- The NOAA Office of Law Enforcement at Stennis Space Center, Louisiana, concluded an investigation of the F/V Red Fin, which resulted in charges of fishing with longline gear in a closed area, and falsifying official reports. A \$40,000 Notice of Violation Assessment (NOVA) and a 60-day permit sanction were issued for the alleged violations. The vessel is also the subject of an investigation for taking in excess of the shark limit.

- A shrimper, Mr. Tommy Dar'Dar, was sentenced in the Western District of Louisiana for providing law enforcement officers false information during a TED investigation. Mr. Dar'Dar was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment and 2 years supervised release. A \$14,000 NOVA was issued by NOAA General Counsel for Enforcement and Litigation for the TED violation.

- NOAA General Counsel for Enforcement and Litigation issued two NOVAs (\$15,000 penalty each) and 30-day permit sanctions to two vessels that fished in the Tortugas Northern Ecological Reserve in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

TENTATIVE AGENDA FOR THE MARCH GULF COUNCIL MEETING

COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

Monday, March 8, 2004

8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Shrimp Management Committee (Tab D)

- NMFS Business Plan for Shrimp Industry
- Draft Shrimp Amendment 13/EA
 - Review of Revisions to Document
 - Selection of Preferred Alternatives

11:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Budget Committee (Tab G)

- Cost of New Microphones and Recording Equipment

- recess -

1:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Reef Fish Management Committee (Tab B)

- Public Hearing Draft of Reef Fish Amendment 23 (Vermilion Snapper Rebuilding Plan)
- Final Reef Fish Amendment 22 (Red Snapper Rebuilding Program)
- Options Paper for Reef Fish Amendment 18
- SEDAR Recommendations on Hogfish and Goliath Grouper
- SEFSC Recommendations on Grouping Amberjacks, Tilefish, and Deepwater Groupers
- U.S.C.G. Rule for Crew Size of Inspected Recreational For-Hire Vessels
- SAFMC Actions on Yellowtail Snapper
- Ratify SEDAR Panel Membership

- recess -

Tuesday, March 9, 2004

8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Reef Fish Management Committee (Continued)

- recess -

1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Habitat Protection Committee (Tab J)

- Approval of Final EIS for EFH
- Participation in SARP

2:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel Committees (Tab F)

- Hearing Comments on Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel Limited Access Scoping Document
- Scoping Document for Extension of Charter Vessel Permit Moratorium
 - Review of Document
 - Selection of Scoping Hearing Sites

- recess -

Wednesday, March 10, 2004

8:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Joint Personnel/Administrative Policy Committee (Tab I) (Closed Session)

- Report of NOAA DOC Office of Personnel Management on Job Description Evaluation
- Draft Policy for Travel Advances
- Close-Out Procedure for Staff Terminating Employment
- Review of Revised Administrative Handbook
- Review of Current SOPPs

- recess -

1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum Committee (**Tab E**)

- Cage Culture Study (Benetti)
- Hearing Comments on Offshore Aquaculture Amendment Scoping Document
- NMFS Regional Bycatch Plan (Fay)

COUNCIL SCHEDULE

Thursday, March 11, 2004

- I. Call to Order and Introductions - B. Walker
(8:30 a.m. - 8:35 a.m.)
- II. Adoption of Agenda - B. Walker
(8:35 a.m. - 8:40 a.m.)
- III. Approval of Minutes (**Tab A**) - B. Walker
(8:40 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.)
- IV. Public Testimony - B. Walker
 - a. Reef Fish Amendment 22 (Red Snapper Rebuilding Plan)
 - b. Final EIS for EFH
(8:45 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.)

-recess-

- V. Committee Reports
 - a. Reef Fish Report (**Tab B**) - Minton
(1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.)
 - b. Personnel/Administrative Policy (**Tab I**) (**Closed Session**) - K. Williams/Fensom
(4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.)

-recess-

Friday, March 12, 2004

- V. Committee Reports (Continued)
 - c. Habitat Protection (**Tab J**) - Morris
(8:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.)
 - d. Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum (**Tab E**) - Minton/Fischer/Foote
(9:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.)
 - e. Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel (**Tab F**) - Minton/Fischer
(9:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.)
 - f. Shrimp Management (**Tab D**) - Perret
(10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.)

- g. Budget Committee (**Tab H**) - Budget
(11:00 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.)
- h. Personnel/Administrative Policy (**Tab I**) - K. Williams/Fensom
(11:15 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.)

-recess-

- VI. MRFSS Review - Walker
(1:00 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.)
- VII. SEDAR Steering Committee - B. Walker/Swingle
(1:15 p.m. - 1:45 p.m.)
- VIII. SAFMC Liaison Report - Fischer
(1:45 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.)
- IX. Gulf Safety Committee - Fischer
(2:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.)
- X. Joint Council Meeting (**Tab G**) - B. Walker/Swingle
(2:15 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.)
- XI. NMFS Billfish/HMS APs - B. Walker
(2:30 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.)
- XII. Enforcement Reports - Sherlock/Rogers/Livingston
(2:45 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.)
- XIII. Regional Director's Report - Crabtree
(3:00 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.)
- XIV. Directors' Reports
R. Williams/Minton/Perret/Foote/Riechers/
Simpson/Brown
(3:15 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.)
- XV. Other Business (**Tab K**) - B. Walker
(3:30 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.)

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.

GULF FISHERY NEWS WANTS YOUR NEWS AND VIEWS

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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.

March Meeting:

March 8-12, 2004
Adam's Mark Hotel
64 South Water Street
Mobile, Alabama 36602

May Meeting:

May 10-13, 2004
Westin Beach Resort
97000 Overseas Highway
Key Largo, Florida 70112

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