

GULF FISHERY NEWS

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COUNCIL SENDS REEF FISH AMENDMENT 18/DSEIS OUT FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Reef Fish Amendment 18 and its accompanying draft supplemental environmental impact statement (DSEIS) are being prepared to establish a rebuilding plan for red grouper (recently declared overfished by the National Marine Fisheries Service [NMFS]), and to address other gear and enforcement issues. The Amendment contains alternatives to address the following issues: longline/buoy gear limited entry system, longline/buoy gear boundary line, longline/buoy gear phase-out, use of powerheads when spearfishing, use of reef fish for bait, vessel monitoring system (VMS) on reef fish vessels, dormant reef fish permits, tilefish and deep-water grouper quotas and closed seasons, additions to the management unit, and modifications to the framework procedure for setting

TAC. In addition, Amendment 18 contains alternatives to implement a red grouper stock rebuilding plan, including options for commercial closed seasons, recreational closed seasons, commercial trip limits, recreational bag limits, and closed areas.

Aspects of the amendment are as follows:

Gear restrictions: Longline vessels account for about 80 percent of the commercial red grouper catch,

NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

July 9-13, 2001
Hawk's Cay Resort
61 Hawk's Cay Boulevard
Duck Key, FL 33050



and average about 3 times as much annual landings of reef fish per vessel as handline and bandit rig vessels. Possible restrictions to longline gear include limited entry, changing the longline/buoy gear boundary line (currently outside of 20 fathoms east of Cape San Blas [85°30' W. Longitude] and outside 50 fathoms west of Cape San Blas), seasonally close the area within 50 fathoms east of Cape San Blas to longline/buoy gear, and phase-out longline/buoy gear. **The Council has specified as preferred alternatives for longline gear restrictions that should a longline gear endorsement be created, that it will be transferable between other vessels regardless of ownership and individuals or corporations can appeal to the Regional Administrator (RA) to resolve issues related to the NMFS permit office records that pertain to initial eligibility.**

Spearfishing with powerheads make it easier to catch large reef fish. This increase in fishing pressure on the larger, more fecund individuals in a population can hinder the rebuilding programs for overfished stocks (e.g., greater amberjack and red grouper). Permitting the use of powerheads would allow managers and assessment biologists to get a better idea of their level of use in the fishery. **As its preferred alternative, the Council selected that a permit be required for the use of powerheads to harvest reef fish (both commercially and recreationally), and eliminate the regulatory exemption that allows the use of powerheads in the stressed area for harvest of sand perch, dwarf sand perch, and hogfish.**

Use of reef fish for bait: Presently it is illegal to cut up reef fish at sea for use as bait. However, it is not illegal to use cut up reef fish that were purchased on shore, nor is it illegal to use a whole reef fish provided it complies with applicable size and bag limits. This creates an enforcement problem because it is difficult for agents to differentiate between purchased carcasses and fish being cut up at sea. These alternatives would apply to commercial fishing, recreational fishing, or both types of fishing. **The Council selected as its preferred alternative to prohibit the use of all species and parts thereof in the reef fish management unit except sand perch and dwarf sand perch with any gear for bait.**

Vessel monitoring system: Fish trap vessels, reef fish longline vessels, and reef fish vessels fishing near no-take zones are subject to area restrictions. However, at-sea enforcement of offshore area restrictions is difficult. A VMS system would improve enforcement of area restrictions. **The Council indicated their preferred alternative was to require VMS on bottom (reef fish) longline commercial vessels, with the cost of the vessel equipment, installation, maintenance, and month-to-month communications to be paid or arranged by owners as appropriate. NMFS will maintain and will publish in the Federal Register a list of type-approved units and communications protocols.**

Dormant reef fish permits: Vessel permits that are not used or rarely used represent a potential for unforeseen increases in reef fish effort and could nullify conservation/rebuilding measures. During 1997-1999, there were between 531 and 591 vessels each year that were assigned a reef fish vessel permit for at least part of the year, but did not have any reef fish catches. Many of these permits are apparently held by owners of charter vessels. Management measures to prevent a sudden or uncontrolled increase in reef fish effort from increased reef fish fishing by these vessels, or transfer of the permit to a vessel that will be more active, will prevent disruption to existing conservation and rebuilding plans. **The Council did not select a preferred alternative for this section.**

Red grouper rebuilding plan: Red grouper were declared overfished by NMFS in October 2000, and a rebuilding plan must be submitted to NMFS within one year. Because red grouper is part of a multi-species fishery, actions to reduce red grouper harvest will affect other reef fish fisheries as well. The Council felt that the rebuilding plan should be developed in a full plan amendment rather than a regulatory amendment because of the widespread affects that a red grouper rebuilding plan could have. The rebuilding plan will require an initial harvest reduction of 13 to 50 percent, depending on the strategy adopted. **As its preferred alternatives, the Council selected that minimum stock size threshold (MSST) be set at 80 percent of the spawning stock at maximum sustainable yield (SS_{MSY}), maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT) be set at a**

fishing mortality rate that produces MSY (F_{MSY}) consistent with recovery to the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) level in no more than 10 years, optimum yield (OY) be set at 90% of MSY (6.0-6.3 million pounds), adopt a 10-year rebuilding plan based on a constant catch strategy which could switch to a constant fishing mortality (F) strategy at an appropriate future time. The Council selected no preferred alternative regarding commercial closed seasons, recreational closed seasons, commercial trip limits, recreational bag limits, and closed areas.

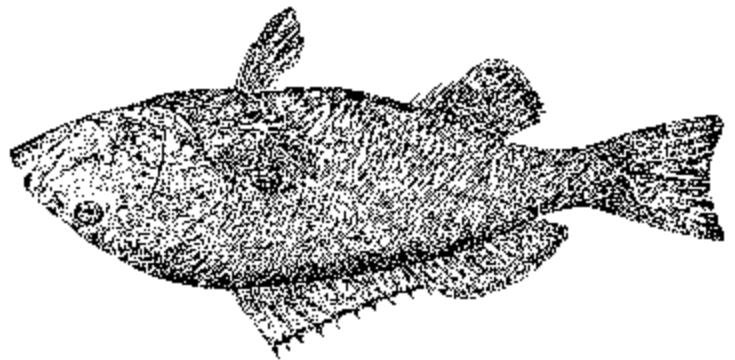
Tilefish: Action to reduce red grouper harvest or to move the longline boundary could shift effort to deep-water groupers and tilefish. Deep-water groupers (speckled hind, misty, yellowedge, snowy, and warsaw groupers) have a precautionary quota of 1.6 million pounds, but no quota exists for tilefish. A precautionary tilefish quota will assure that the tilefish stocks do not become overfished. **As its preferred alternative, the Council selected to combine tilefish and deep-water grouper into a new deep-water reef fish aggregate, and set the new deep-water reef fish quota at: 0.41 + 1.06 million pounds (based on average annual harvests from 1996-1999, respectively).**

Changes to the reef fish management unit: The Reef Fish FMP fails to include some reef fish species for which landings from the Gulf of Mexico have been reported, specifically marbled grouper and sand tilefish. The inclusion of all groupers landed from the Gulf of Mexico is necessary to maintain consistency with the NMFS regulations implementing the shallow-water grouper quota. NMFS defines shallow-water grouper as all groupers other than deep-water groupers, jewfish, and Nassau grouper. The inclusion of all tilefish landed in from the Gulf of Mexico will assure consistency with the NMFS regulations if a tilefish quota or other tilefish management measures are adopted. **As its preferred alternative, the Council voted to add the marbled grouper and sand tilefish to the management unit.**

Modifications to the framework procedure for setting TAC and grouper allocations: The recent stock assessments produced by NMFS are being done in a manner that usually produces stock status based on biomass or biomass proxy estimates other than SPR. In

order to be compatible with this move away from SPR-based management, the language in the framework procedure should be modified to allow assessments to provide current biomass or biomass proxy estimates in place of SPR. **As its preferred alternative, the Council selected to adopt the following modifications shown below to steps 1 and 4 of the framework procedure for setting total allowable catch**

- a. In step 1, add the words, "biomass, biomass proxy, or" between "current" and "SPR levels";
- b. In step 4(b), add after the second sentence the following: "However, if catch data during the base period for an individual species within an aggregate is inadequate to determine its allocation of TAC, the basis for the individual species allocation may be based on alternate criteria, provided that the aggregate allocation remains as specified."



Public hearings are tentatively scheduled from 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM on the following dates and cities:

June 14, 2001	June 20, 2001	June 26, 2001
Port Aransas, TX	Orange Beach, AL	Ft. Myers, FL
June 18, 2001	June 21, 2001	June 27, 2001
Larose, LA	Panama City, FL	Madeira Beach, FL
June 19, 2001	June 25, 2001	June 28, 2001
Biloxi, MS	Key West, FL	Crystal River, FL

To receive copies of Amendment 18 and for specific information on where the hearings will be held, contact the Gulf Council office (see page 12 for details).

COUNCIL TO ADD ROCK SHRIMP TO MANAGEMENT PLAN

Rock shrimp were originally a part of the management unit of the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan (FMP) that was implemented in May of 1981. However, in 1991 they were removed from management unit when the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) required overfishing definitions and the Council had no data at that time to specify such a definition. The Council reviewed information on rock shrimp landings and has determined that this species should be added to the Shrimp FMP as part of the management unit.

Rock shrimp are so named because of their tough, rigid outer shell. Unlike brown, white, and pink shrimp that spend part of their life cycle in the estuaries, rock shrimp spend their whole life within the open waters of the Gulf. They are found primarily on sand bottoms off the northwest Florida coast. Spawning appears to be continuous with a peak occurring from October to January. Landings occur primarily off northwest Florida (statistical grids 7 and 8) between June and September.

ANNUAL SHRIMP FISHERY CLOSURE OFF TEXAS

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announced that Federal waters from 9 to 200 nautical miles off Texas were closed to shrimping 30 minutes after sunset on May 15, 2001. The Federal closure will correspond to the period that Texas closes its waters to shrimp trawling. The shrimp fishery is closed annually off Texas to allow brown shrimp to reach a larger and more valuable size prior to harvest, and to prevent waste of brown shrimp that would otherwise be discarded due to their small size.

The closure ranges from 45 to 90 days; historically, the area has been reopened to shrimp trawling on or about July 15. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department establishes the re-opening date based on biological monitoring to determine when the average size of shrimp leaving the estuaries is 112 mm (4.4 inches) total length, during a period of maximum duration ebb tides. Federal waters will be re-opened concurrent to the opening of Texas state waters. If there is a need to adjust the July

15 date for the termination of the closure, NMFS will provide notification of the revised opening date.

COUNCIL WILL REVIEW SHRIMP AMENDMENT 10 AT JULY MEETING

At its May meeting, the Gulf council elected to review the draft Amendment 10 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan (FMP) at its July 2001 meeting with the intention of approving it for public hearings in August 2001 and final action at its September 2001 meeting. This amendment addresses the need for reducing bycatch from the shrimp trawl fishery in the EEZ off the west coast of Florida, specifically in the Gulf EEZ south and east of Cape San Blas (85°30' W. Longitude). Amendment 9 to the Shrimp FMP addressed bycatch reduction of red snapper in the Gulf EEZ west of Cape San Blas, Florida; and the method that was approved was the requirement of bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) that would reduce the mortality from shrimp trawls on age 0 and age 1 red snapper by at least 44% from the average level of mortality during the period 1984-89. Because Amendment 9 did not address

bycatch reduction on the west coast of Florida (east of Cape San Blas), this amendment considers the need and practicability of various alternatives for reducing bycatch from shrimp trawling in this area, including the requirement of BRDs.



The amendment also reviews the effectiveness and potential affects of these alternatives.

The rationale behind this amendment is that the MSFCMA requires that all FMPs, amendments, and regulations be consistent with the 10 National Standards. National Standard 9 states that "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." Bycatch reduction is addressed in this amendment through three methods. These are area closures, seasonal closures, and using BRDs.

Specific information on when and where the public hearings will be held will be available after July 13, 2001. Contact the Gulf Council office for details (see page 12 for Council addresses).

TEXAS SHRIMP ASSOCIATION SUBMITS PETITION FOR EMERGENCY RULE MAKING TO REDUCE 2001 TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH (TAC) OF RED SNAPPER IN GULF OF MEXICO FEDERAL WATERS TO 3 MILLION POUNDS

The NMFS announced the receipt of a petition for emergency rulemaking or fishery management action under the MSFCMA and the Administrative Procedures Act. The Texas Shrimp Association (TSA) has petitioned the U.S. Department of Commerce to promulgate an emergency rule to reduce the 2001 total allowable catch (TAC) in the directed commercial and recreational fisheries for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico from 9.12 million pounds to no more than 3 million pounds. Also, the TSA petition requests that the emergency action shorten the recreational fishing season as part of the TAC reduction. The petition filed by TSA maintains that overfishing has been occurring in the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery and will occur again in 2001, thereby necessitating emergency rulemaking to reduce the 2001 TAC for the directed fishery. Included in the requested emergency action for TAC reduction is a request to shorten the recreational fishing season (currently April 21-October 31, 2001).

The TSA petition states that the following are causes of previous and continuing overfishing: (1) TSA asserts that the current definition of "optimum yield" (OY) in the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico does not conform to the more rigorous definition of OY required by the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996, which amended the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act; (2) TSA asserts that NMFS' scientific studies indicate that bycatch reduction devices required in shrimp trawls in the exclusive economic zone of the Gulf of Mexico west of Cape San Blas, Florida, have reduced juvenile red snapper mortality by 40 percent or less instead of the 50 to 60 percent reduction necessary as a basis for the present 9.12-million-lb TAC. Further, TSA asserts that NMFS and the Gulf Council have greatly exaggerated the importance (positive impact) of bycatch reduction for rebuilding the red snapper stock; (3) TSA asserts that recent scientific information presented to the Gulf Council's scientific advisory committees indicates that the overfished condition of the red snapper fishery is a result

of excessive fishing pressure by the directed fisheries, in particular the recreational sector of the fishery, and not because of bycatch mortality associated with shrimp harvest; (4) TSA states that the recreational sector of the directed fishery continues to exceed its annual quota under the present season opening and closing dates; (5) TSA states that NMFS is significantly underestimating fishing effort in the recreational sector, which allows that sector to harvest red snapper in excess of its share of the TAC; and (6) TSA asserts that NMFS has failed to make a reduction in the recreational sector's share of the TAC to account for these excessive harvests.

The Gulf Council, at its January 2001 meeting, took final action on recommendations for rebuilding the red snapper stock, including recommendations for TAC. The Council has formally submitted these recommendations to NMFS for Secretarial review.

NMFS ISSUES RULE TO HELP FISHERMEN COMPLY WITH TED REQUIREMENTS

The NMFS issued an interim final rule to add the double cover flap turtle excluder device (TED) to the list of hard TEDs approved for use by shrimp trawlers operating in the Atlantic Ocean off the southeastern United States and in the Gulf of Mexico. This TED is designed to exclude large debris and turtles better than existing standard TEDs, while maintaining the shrimpers' catch. The double cover flap TED also is approved for use without modification when the leatherback contingency plan has been implemented due to high concentrations of leatherback turtles in a specific area. Fishermen who use the TED will not have to worry about changing TEDs if they fish in areas where the leatherback contingency plan could be implemented.

Most existing hard TEDs can be easily and inexpensively modified to use the double cover flap. NMFS will provide technical materials and training to fishermen interested in using the double cover flap TED. For more information, contact: Robert Hoffman, (727) 570-5312 (Robert.Hoffman@noaa.gov); or John Mitchell, (228) 762-4591 (John.Mitchell@noaa.gov).

COUNCIL SUPPORTS SENATE BILL 637

At its May meeting, the Gulf Council reviewed U.S. Senate Bill 637 submitted by Senators Snowe (Maine) and McCain (Arizona) that amends the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) to authorize the establishment of individual fishery quota (IFQ) systems. In general, the Gulf Council confirmed its support of Senate Bill 637; however, the Gulf Council did have some recommendations for the bill. These were:

- Recommends that Congress limit the individual quota systems authorized under Senate Bill 637 to the commercial fisheries only.
- Supports the language under the Section (1) on conditions for individual quota systems, paragraph (B) on page two, which provides the system “shall not create, or be construed to create, any right, title or interest in or to any fish before the fish is harvested.”
- Supports the provision under Section (1) (E), lines 12, 13, 14 on page 3, which reads as follows “(E) include provision that prevent any person or entity from acquiring and excessive share of individual quotas issued for a fishery”.
- Recommends that under Section (3), Eligible Holders subsection (B), lines 4 through 7 on page 5 which reads as follows “(B) NON-CITIZENS NOT ELIGIBLE - An individual who is not a citizen of the United States may not hold an individual quota issued under a fishery management plan”, “an individual” be replaced by “persons” so that foreign corporations would be excluded.
- Recommends the provision under Section (6), Required Provisions; Reallocations paragraph (A), lines 15, 16, and 17 on page 6, which reads as follows “an individual quota system (A) shall not allow individual quota shares under the system to be sold, transferred, or leased” be modified to allow transferability.
- The Council noted that under Section (C) on Referendum Procedure (page 8) that the language in paragraph (2), lines 21 through 25,

which requires approval of the referendum by two-thirds of the eligible permit holders conflicts with the language under Section (3) Eligible Holders (on pages 4 and 5), which indicates eligible persons are vessel owners, fishermen, and crew members and that this be brought before Congress for clarification.

COUNCIL SEEKS MEMBERS TO AD HOC RED SNAPPER ADVISORY PANEL

At its May meeting, the Gulf Council moved to create an ad hoc red snapper panel to create a red snapper individual fishing quota (IFQ) profile. IFQs are a form of limited entry to a fishery where fishermen are assigned a fixed share of the catch. The Council is soliciting people who are interested in serving on the panel. The panel will consist of 8 holders of Class I red snapper licenses, 2 holders of Class II red snapper licenses, and 2 red snapper dealers. In addition, the panel will have 4 non-voting members consisting of 1 law enforcement representative, 1 reef fish biologist, 1 economist, and 1 environmentalist. Persons interested in serving on the AP should submit a letter of interest, along with a vitae or resume containing relevant background information. This documentation should be sent to the Gulf Council no later than June 29, 2001 (see page 12 for Council addresses).



NMFS OFFICE OF HABITAT CONSERVATION LAUNCHES NEW WEB PAGE FEATURING ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT

The NMFS's Office of Habitat Conservation recently launched a new web page featuring extensive background information on the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) provisions of the MSFCMA, and implementation of the EFH requirements by NMFS and regional Fishery Management Councils. The EFH site may be accessed through the EFH link on the Office of Habitat Conservation's web site: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/index.html>.

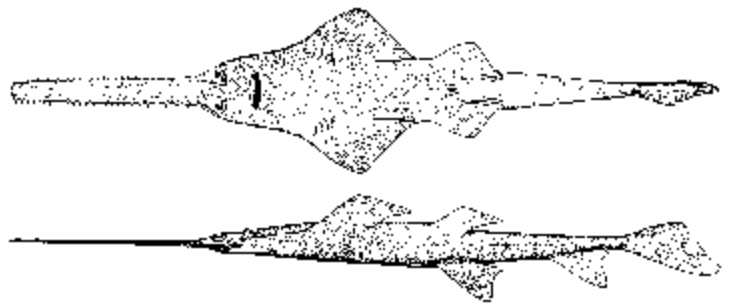
COUNCIL HEARS REVIEW OF COASTAL PELAGIC STOCK ASSESSMENTS

Dr. William Patterson, chairman of the Mackerel Stock Assessment Panel (MSAP) presented the MSAPs report on the updated stock assessments for all groups of Atlantic and Gulf groups of king and Spanish mackerel, the genetic structure of king mackerel (Gulf and Atlantic) and the mixing rates in the south Florida area, and stock status bench marks for other species in the coastal pelagic management unit. Dr. Patterson noted that landings of the Gulf group king mackerel stock were down, therefore, fishing mortality (F) was down and biomass (B) was up. However, the trend in recruitment has been low in the last few years. He presented the default control rule for Gulf group king mackerel that shows that there was only a 10% chance that estimates of current F were above the maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT), so overfishing was not occurring. Additionally, there was only a 20% chance that the estimates of current B were below the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) so that the stock would not be considered as overfished. However, it was noted that the stock was not fully recovered to the stock biomass capable of producing maximum sustainable yield (B_{msy}), and recent years of low recruitment could cause future reductions in spawning stock biomass. Based on the results of the stock assessment, the MSAP recommended that total allowable catch (TAC) not exceed 11.2 million pounds.

Dr. Patterson presented the default control rule projection for Gulf group Spanish mackerel as well as the landings, historical F values and biomass estimates. He noted that Gulf group Spanish mackerel were not considered to be undergoing overfishing because almost all of the estimates of current F values were below MFMT. Also, they are not considered to be overfished because less than 1% of the estimates of current B were below MSST. Based on the results of the stock assessment, the MSAP recommended that no changes be made in TAC for Spanish mackerel, however, they did note that current TAC does exceed the TAC associated with the B_{msy} .

The MSAP also reviewed the stock structure of king mackerel and benchmark criteria for other species in the management unit. Genetic work by Dr. John Gold of

Texas A&M University revealed that there were weak, but distinguishable differences between the Atlantic group and the Gulf group fish; however, percentages of mixing fish were about 50/50. Other preliminary work using otolith shape analysis conducted by NMFS scientists indicated a larger percentage of Atlantic group king mackerel in the mixing zone. Benchmark criteria for bluefish, cero mackerel, and little tunny (other species in the management unit) were reviewed by the MSAP. The MSAP concluded that these species fall under the SFA category of "data poor", but deferred recommending SFA benchmarks to the Gulf Council until further analyses are conducted (e.g., surplus production models).



NMFS SEEKS PUBLIC COMMENT ON PROPOSAL TO LIST SMALLTOOTH SAWFISH AS ENDANGERED

The NMFS is seeking public comment on its proposal to list as endangered the U.S. population of smalltooth sawfish that once ranged in shallow waters off the Gulf of Mexico and Eastern Seaboard. An extensive status review has concluded that the U.S. population of smalltooth sawfish, currently found only off South Florida, is in danger of extinction. The public will have until July 15, 2001, (90 days) to comment on the proposal. Comments should be addressed to: Chief, Protected Resources Division, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive North, St. Petersburg FL 33702. A copy of the proposal is available by calling (727) 570-5312. An electronic version of the proposal that includes links to the status review for smalltooth sawfish and to the federal register notice are available at:

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/species/fish/Smalltooth_sawfish.html.

ATTENTION CREATIVE MINDS

The Gulf Council is looking for help in finding a logo for itself and seeks the help of interested persons. This logo should capture the mission of the Council which is developing and monitoring fishery management plans (FMP) to provide for the best use of the fishery resources in the Gulf of Mexico (Florida to Texas). Fisheries that the Council manages include shrimp; coastal migratory pelagics (king and Spanish mackerels, cero, dolphin, cobia, and little tunny); reef fish (snapper, groupers, tilefishes, amberjacks, and triggerfishes.); corals and coral reefs; stone crab; red drum; and spiny lobster.

The following should be considered in designing a logo: A logo is an early introduction or an important distinctive identity for an organization. A well designed logo should signal the existence of the organization, its strength, services and products offered. Finally, it needs to have a color scheme that holds up well in black and white because it will be copied and faxed.

COUNCIL SEEKS MEMBERS FOR DEEP-WATER CRAB AP

The Gulf Council is looking for persons interested in assisting in the development of a deep-water crab fishery management plan (FMP) for the Gulf of Mexico. Crabs in this complex include the golden and red crab. Some issues that the advisory panel (AP) will assist in addressing will include defining the management unit, stock targets and thresholds, allowable gear, and permit requirements.

Persons interested in serving on the AP should submit a letter of interest, along with a vitae or resume containing relevant background information. This documentation should be sent to the Gulf Council no later than June 29, 2001 (see page 12 for Council addresses).



PROPOSED CHARTERBOAT MORATORIUM APPROVED FOR SUBMISSION TO NMFS

At its March 2001 meeting, the Gulf Council approved the provisions of a proposed 3-year moratorium on the issuance of new charter and headboat vessel permits in the recreational for-hire fisheries for reef fish, coastal migratory pelagics (mackerels, cobia, and dolphin), and dolphin/wahoo when the Dolphin/Wahoo FMP is approved. The control date and latest qualifying date were changed to March 29, 2001, so that all properly permitted vessels as of the time of the Council's decision would qualify for an initial issuance. The entire amendment was approved for submission to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), but must first be approved by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. The NMFS must still approve the amendment before any regulations are implemented. The public will have an opportunity to comment to NMFS on the proposed regulations once they are published, and before any final regulations are approved and implemented. The provisions of the moratorium approved by the Gulf Council can be found at the Council's web site, as well as a downloadable version of the amendment. A printed copy can be obtained from the Council's office. For Council addresses, see page 12.

GULF COUNCIL HOSTS ANNUAL COUNCIL CHAIRMEN'S MEETING

The Gulf Council hosted the annual Council Chairmen's Meeting in Key West, Florida from May 21 to May 25, 2001. Council Chairmen and executive directors of the eight regional councils discussed the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) reauthorization, law enforcement, budgets, marine protected areas, and essential fish habitat. In addition, they met with senior NMFS and NOAA personnel to discuss a variety of issues.

The Gulf Council would like to express its appreciation to the Seventh Coast Guard District, the Southern Offshore Fishing Association(SOFA), the Southeast Fisheries Association (SFA), the Monroe County Commercial Fishermen, Inc (MCCF), Captain Jerry Hill, and Doug Gregory for their hospitality and helping to make this event a success.

COUNCIL UPDATED ON FIN

Mr. Dave Donaldson of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) updated the Gulf Council on the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). This network is a state-federal cooperative program to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the marine commercial and recreational fisheries of the Southeast Region. It consists of two components: the Commercial Fisheries Information Network (ComFIN) and the Recreational Fisheries Information Network (RecFIN).

The need for a comprehensive and cooperative data collection program has never been greater because of the magnitude of the commercial and recreational fisheries and the differing roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved. Many southeastern stocks targeted by anglers are now depleted, due primarily to excessive harvest, habitat loss, and degradation. The information needs of today's management regimes require data that are statistically sound, long-term in scope, timely, and comprehensive. A cooperative partnership between state and federal agencies is the most appropriate mechanism to accomplish these goals.

The scope of the FIN includes the Region's commercial and recreational fisheries for marine, estuarine, and anadromous species, including shellfish. Constituencies served by the program are state and federal agencies responsible for management of fisheries in the Region. Direct benefits will also be derived by federal fishery management councils, the interstate marine fisheries commissions, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries Program.

The mission of the FIN is to cooperatively collect, manage, and disseminate marine commercial, anadromous and recreational fishery data and information for the conservation and management of fishery resources in the Region and to support the development of a national program. The four goals of the FIN include to plan, manage, and evaluate commercial and recreational fishery data collection activities; to implement a marine commercial and recreational fishery data collection program; to establish and maintain a fishery data management system; and to

support the establishment of a national program.

The following is a list of activities to be completed for the current fiscal year.

- Coordination and Administration of RecFIN(SE) and ComFIN Activities - This task provides for the coordination, planning and administration of RecFIN (SE) and ComFIN activities throughout the year as well as provide recreational and commercial information to the RecFIN (SE) and ComFIN participants and other interested personnel.
- Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data - This task provides for the conduct of the MRFSS survey in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for shore, for-hire, and private modes. In addition, this task will provide for coordination of the survey, a field intercept survey of shore, for hire, and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using the existing MRFSS methodology, and entry of the data. The states will conduct supplemental sampling of the PIC mode and will conduct weekly telephone calls to a 10% random sample of the Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida charter boat captains to obtain estimates of charter boat fishing effort.
- Head Boat Port Sampling in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida - This task provides for the sampling of catches, collection of catch reports from head boat personnel, and gathering effort data on head boats that operate primarily in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for along the coasts of Texas, Louisiana, and Florida.
- Commercial Data Collection Activities - This task provides for the continued collection of landings, as well as biological and effort data in the Gulf of Mexico. The collection of general landings information, length and weight data, hard parts and tissue samples from various species under Federal or state fisheries management will be accomplished. A principal sub-objective is to increase the amount of size frequency and aging data for red snapper. Also,

samplers will intercept shrimp fishermen and collect information on the amount of time the vessel was fishing and the area(s) where fishing occurred. It also provides for sampling of gulf menhaden catches from menhaden purse-seine vessels operated in Louisiana. Samples will be processed for size and age composition for use in coast-wide stock assessments. In turn, gulf menhaden stock assessments are incorporated into the Fisheries Management Plan for the species, and are also utilized by the Gulf Coast states, the GSMFC, the menhaden industry, and the NMFS.

- Implementation of FIN Data Management System - This task provides for further implementation of the data management system for the Fisheries Information Network. Additionally this task provides funding for the purchase of full users access to the FIN Data Management System (DMS) and allows all users (who have permission) to access the data in the FIN DMS. This is the next step for implementing a regional data management system for FIN .
- Trip Ticket Program Development - This task provides for the further development and implementation of a commercial trip ticket system for Mississippi and Alabama and will provide for development and implementation of components for a commercial trip ticket system to census the commercial fisheries landings in Mississippi and Alabama, using the data elements and standards developed by the ComFIN. Ultimately, this information will be combined with other commercial fisheries data collected from around the Gulf of Mexico.
- Night Fishing Pilot Study - This task provides for the initiation of a pilot study to examine the feasibility of collecting data on night fishing in the Southeast Region. Mississippi collected the data and GSMFC will provide coordination of the activity.

NMFS BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH CRUISE GOES DIGITAL: DATA NOW AVAILABLE IN DAYS, NOT MONTHS

The NMFS research fleet is being fitted with a new, user-friendly, on-board fisheries data collection system that will give researchers immediate access to fisheries survey data. The first of its kind in the United States, the system will profoundly speed the delivery of data from ship to shore and into the data banks of the scientists and managers who use it.

The Fisheries Scientific Computer System, or FSCS, was tested extensively aboard the NOAA ship Albatross IV, based in Woods Hole, Mass. The FSCS trial period ended April 30 at the completion of a six-week survey, and the system was declared operational. During the trial, survey data were recorded electronically and then successfully transmitted in near real-time to scientists at NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole for analysis.

"The Fisheries Scientific Computer System will cut two to three months from the time data is collected to the time it is ready for analysis," said Dennis Shields, a software engineer with NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations. "The system is an extension of the Scientific Computer System we developed several years ago to give NOAA oceanographic ships real-time access to integrated oceanic and atmospheric sensor data. For FSCS, we worked extensively with NMFS scientists to adapt the system to the very different types of data that are collected aboard fisheries research ships. It's been a very successful effort."

"This represents the single greatest improvement in data collection over the 38-year history of the survey," said Tom Azarovitz, chief of NMFS Ecosystem Surveys Branch, which conducts the work. "Until now, we have used paper logs to record a variety of information about each fish brought up during a survey trawl. Analysts waited up to three months after a survey cruise to work with the data while it was transferred to a database and audited. With FSCS we will be able to begin analysis almost immediately to update stock assessments important to fishery managers," Azarovitz said.

The Office of Marine and Aviation Operations will install the new system on the seven remaining vessels in the fisheries research fleet.

TENTATIVE AGENDA FOR THE JULY GULF COUNCIL MEETING

COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

Monday, July 9, 2001

AP Selection Committee (Closed Session)

- Appoint Ad Hoc Red Snapper AP
- Appoint Deep-Water Crab AP

Reef Fish Management Committee

- Amendment 18/SEIS
 - public hearing summaries
 - S public letters
 - S AP recommendations
 - S SSC recommendations
 - S federal comments
 - S committee recommendations
- Ratio of Guttled to Whole Weight for Red Snapper

Tuesday, July 10, 2001

Reef Fish Management Committee - Continued

Mackerel Management Committee

- Approval of Dolphin/Wahoo DSEIS

Shrimp Management Committee

- Compliance within the Tortugas Shrimp Sanctuary
- Draft Amendment 10
 - (1) approval for public hearings
- Status of Shrimp Stocks

Habitat Protection Committee

- Freshwater Inflow to the Gulf of Mexico

COUNCIL SCHEDULE

Wednesday, July 11, 2001

- I. Call to Order and Introductions
- II. Adoption of Agenda
- III. Approval of Minutes
- IV. Public Testimony
 - a. Reef Fish Amendment 18
- V. AP Selection Committee Report (Closed

Session)

Thursday, July 12, 2001

- VI. Reef Fish Committee Report
- VII. Shrimp Management Committee Report

Friday, July 13, 2001

- VIII. Committee Reports
 - a. Mackerel Management
 - b. Habitat Protection
- IX. Council Chairmen Meeting
- X. NMFS SFA Workshop
- XI. NMFS Observer Workshop
- XII. SAFMC Liaison Report
- XIII. Audit Exit Report
- XIV. Regional Administrators Report
- XV. Enforcement Reports
- XVI. Director's Reports
- XVII. Other Business

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.

September Meeting:

September 10-13, 2001

W New Orleans Hotel

333 Poydras Street

New Orleans, Louisiana 70130

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. NA07FC0015 and NA17FC1052.