



# GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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NEWS RELEASE

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## **GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL WILL CONVENE AN ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING OF THE SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONE MONITORING TEAM**

**Tampa, Florida – January 18, 2006** - The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) will convene a meeting of the Special Management Zone (SMZ) Monitoring Team to review requests from the states of Alabama and Mississippi.

The Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks, Inc. (MGFB) and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources/Marine Resources Division (ADCNR) have both petitioned the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) for Special Management Zone (SMZ) status for artificial reef areas off their respective coasts. SMZ status allows for the implementation of gear restrictions that are required when fishing within a zone.

The ADCNR is requesting that fishing on artificial reefs designated as SMZs be limited to no more than 3 hooks per line. The MGFB is requesting fishing in SMZs be limited to no more than 3 hooks per line or to spearfishing gear. The reefs proposed for designation as SMZs are all located in the federal waters of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The monitoring team, established by the Council to provide technical advice regarding requests from petitioners, will review and discuss the adequacy of the reports, determine additional data needs, and review the SMZ process in general before proceeding with public workshops/hearings. The Monitoring Team will recommend to the Council the dates and locations of public workshops/hearings in each state to take public testimony regarding the petitions before preparing a report to the Council.

The SMZ Monitoring Team will convene February 1 - 2, 2006 at the NMFS Panama City Lab, 3500 Delwood Beach Road, Panama City, Florida. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. Wednesday, February 1, 2006, and conclude no later than 12 p.m. on Thursday, February 2, 2006. Copies of the agenda can be obtained by calling 813-348-1630.

Although other non-emergency issues not on the agenda may come before the SMZ Monitoring Team for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (M-SFCMA), those issues may not be the subject of formal action during these meetings. Actions of the SMZ Monitoring Team will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in the agenda and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under Section 305(c) of the M-SFCMA, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take action to address the emergency.

This meeting is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Dawn Aring at the Council at least five working days prior to the meeting.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council prepares fishery management plans designed to manage fishery resources in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico.