



GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT SESSIONS INSTITUTED ON GENERAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT ISSUES – BEGINNING WITH JANUARY SCOPING MEETINGS

Tampa, Florida – January 17, 2006 - In an effort to give the public an opportunity to present issues and ideas that may not necessarily be under consideration by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the Council has implemented general public comment sessions to be held at the end of public hearings, scoping meetings, and regular Council meetings.

"We'd like to give our constituency an opportunity to address the Council on not only the amendments we're working on, but on general fishery issues of public concern," said Robin Riechers, Council Chair. Riechers raised the issue during the Council's January meeting and the Council, in a unanimous vote, adopted the measure.

The first meetings during which these new sessions will occur are the Joint Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp 14 and Shrimp Amendment 15 scoping meetings scheduled later this month. The new open comment sessions will allow the public to make remarks or ask questions about other fishery issues. For example, next week's scoping meetings are being held to hear comments about specific proposed amendments; however, during open comment, individuals can bring up any issues of concern, such as the difference between state and federal regulations.

Bill Daughdrill, the newest member of the Council, will chair the Panama City scoping meeting and says he believes the public testimony is one of the most important elements of the process.

"Sometimes there are issues floating around out there that we're unaware of. This gives the public and the Council a better means of communication - an opportunity to air concerns and frustrations face-to-face," said Daughdrill.

While general public comment will be solicited during the scoping meetings, the main purpose is to take public testimony regarding the scope of the issues being addressed. Under consideration are scoping documents for Joint Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp 14, and Shrimp Amendment 15. Daughdrill is hopeful that people will turn out for the meetings and stressed the importance of being part of the process.

"We have council members who have firsthand experience in both of these fisheries, and their advice and experience will be instrumental in the development of these amendments, but the people, that's who we need to hear from, that's who's going to be affected, and that's who's going to help shape these amendments," said Daughdrill.

The two scoping documents contain possible actions that deal with adjustments to the total allowable catch (TAC) for red snapper, size limits, bag limits, recreational season dates and the certification of new shrimp bycatch reduction devices (BRDs). The amendments will also look at directed fishery gear restrictions and depth restrictions on the commercial fishery, effort management (if needed) in the shrimp fishery, shrimp trawl gear limits, limitations on shrimp vessel permit transferability, further reducing bycatch, as well as other management issues.

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 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council prepares fishery management plans designed to manage fishery resources in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico.

For more information on how to provide public testimony or for a copy of the scoping documents, call the Council at 813-348-1630, or send an e-mail request to gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org. Scoping meetings begin at 7:00 p.m. and will conclude no later than 10:00 p.m. Meeting dates and locations are as follows:

Monday, January 23, 2006

Four Points by Sheraton
3777 North Expressway
Brownsville, Texas 78520
956-547-1500

Holiday Inn Mobile I-10 Bellingrath Garden
5465 Highway 90 West
Mobile, Alabama 36619
251-666-5600

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

University of Texas Marine Science Institute
750 Channel View Drive
Port Aransas, Texas 78373
361-749-6711

LaFont Inn
2703 Denny Avenue
Pascagoula, Mississippi 39567
228-762-7111

Wednesday, January 25, 2006

Holiday Inn on the Beach
5002 Seawall Boulevard
Galveston, Texas 77551
409-740-3581

Hilton Garden Inn Orange Beach
23092 Perdido Beach Boulevard
Orange Beach, Alabama 36561
251-974-1600

Thursday, January 26, 2006

Larose Regional Park Gym
307 East 5th Street
Larose, Louisiana 70373
985-693-7355

National Marine Fisheries Service
3500 Delwood Beach Road
Panama City, Florida 32408
850-234-6541

Monday, January 30, 2006

Tampa Marriott Westshore
1001 North Westshore Boulevard
Tampa, Florida 33607
813-287-2555

Tuesday, January 31, 2006

DoubleTree Grand Key Resort
3990 South Roosevelt Boulevard
Key West, Florida 33040
305-293-1818

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