



GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Airport Executive Center

2203 North Lois Avenue, Suite 1100 \$ Tampa, Florida 33607

(813) 348-1630 \$ FAX (813) 348-1711

e-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org Web: <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>



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Contact: Charlene Ponce
813-348-1630

Gulf Council to Convene its Regularly Scheduled Meeting in Mobile, Alabama

Tampa, Florida – February 27, 2006 - The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) will meet March 20 - 23, 2006 at the Radisson Admiral Semmes, 251 Government Street, Mobile Alabama 36602.

On the agenda are several issues of interest, including the final outcome of the Red Snapper IFQ Referendum, the results of which will determine whether that fishery moves from a limited access system to an Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) system.

Also related to the red snapper fishery is the options paper for Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp 14. Scoping meetings for the proposed amendment were held in January. More than 500 citizens and industry representatives attended the meetings held throughout the Gulf coast. The options paper will include alternatives for Council consideration, such as a possible reduction in total allowable catch (TAC), along with other regulatory changes designed to keep the stock on track with its rebuilding plan. The scoping document for Draft Amendment 15 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan (FMP) will also be reviewed. That amendment considers shrimp limits on trawling gear, shrimp restrictions on the transfer of vessel permits, and possible area closures for shrimp. Public comments from the scoping meetings will be reviewed for both proposed amendments.

In addition, two items concerning the grouper fishery will be discussed - the first, a report by the Socioeconomic Panel (SEP) regarding TAC issues for grouper. Grouper allocation became an issue last year when the Council began developing a regulatory amendment to aid in the recovery of that fishery. During its January meeting, the Council took the first step toward establishing a grouper allocation among the recreational and commercial fishing sectors and agreed to convene its SEP to recommend the socioeconomic models and other information the Council should use in setting those allocations.

The second item is the grouper IFQ issue. The Ad Hoc Grouper IFQ Advisory Panel (AHGIFQAP) held its first meeting and has begun assembling a broad list of recommendations regarding the scope and general configuration of a Dedicated Access Privilege (DAP) system for the commercial grouper fishery. The panel will present its first report to the Reef Fish Management Committee Wednesday, March 22, 2006. Additionally, Council staff has developed a discussion paper for the Committee's consideration.

Public testimony is scheduled for Wednesday, March 22, 2006, from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. and will be accepted on the following issues:

Reef Fish Amendment 26 - Red Snapper Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ)
Exempted Fishing Permits (if any)

Immediately following public testimony, the Council will hold its first open public comment session for citizens to address the Council on fishery issues that may not be on the agenda. Comments will be heard from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Also on Wednesday, NOAA Fisheries Service will hold a public workshop to provide a general demonstration of the on-line capabilities to implement the Red Snapper Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) System. This presentation, which begins at 6:30 p.m., is solely for the purpose of soliciting input from the Council and potential users of the system in an effort to make the tool user friendly, concise and responsive to Reef Fish Amendment 26.

Thursday's agenda includes Council deliberation and action on committee recommendations established earlier in the week.

For a complete agenda or for copies of documents pertaining to any of these issues call or E-mail the Council offices. Anyone wishing to testify before the Council should register prior to the start of the scheduled public comment period.

Although other non-emergency issues not on the agenda may come before the Council and Committees 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 Council and Committees will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in the agendas 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.

The established times for addressing items on the agenda may be adjusted as necessary to accommodate the timely completion of discussion relevant to the agenda items. In order to further allow for such adjustments and completion of all items on the agenda, the meeting may be extended from, or completed prior to the date established in this notice. Meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Dawn Aring at the Council five 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 Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico.

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2203 N. Lois Avenue
Suite 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

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