



GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council approves Reef Fish Amendment 26 establishing an Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) for the red snapper fishery

Tampa, Florida – May 3, 2006 - After spending nearly six years in development, Reef Fish Amendment 26, which establishes an IFQ system for commercial red snapper, received resounding approval from eligible voters. While the Department of Commerce will have the final say in whether or not the measure is approved, 87% (weighted) of those who returned a ballot voted in favor of the IFQ amendment.

"We're tired of wasting fish," said David Krebs of Destin, Florida, adding that "VMS and a quota system is the only way we're going to save the fishery."

At its March meeting, the Gulf Council voted to forward Reef Fish Amendment 26 to the Secretary of Commerce for review and consideration. Under the red snapper IFQ program, also known as Amendment 26 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan, individual fishing quotas will be assigned to current permit holders based on historical landings. Class 1 reef fish permit holders will choose ten consecutive years between 1990 and 2004, and **Class 2 reef fish permit holders will choose five years between 1998 and 2004**. For those fishermen who hold a Class 1 historical captain's license, individual quotas will be assigned based on a seven-year average of historical landings.

For years, the red snapper fishery has been marked by overcapitalization. The current limited entry and closed season management system has encouraged fishermen to engage in derby-type fishing where participants race to harvest as many fish as possible before the quota is taken and the fishery closed.

"We stepped up, identified problems, and went forward with ways to address those problems," said Donald Waters, a commercial fisherman from Pensacola, Florida who also serves on the Red Snapper IFQ Advisory Panel.

It is hoped that working under an IFQ system, product quality will increase by improving fishing and handling methods. A reduction in bycatch is also anticipated because fishermen will be allowed greater flexibility in operations.

"IFQs often create an incentive for fishermen to conserve the resource by giving them a long-term interest in the health and productivity of the fishery," said Wayne Swingle, Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

"We won't be racing out there for ten days trying to wipe out everything that's out there," said Krebs.

If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the IFQ program will become effective in 2007.

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.

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