



GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Gulf Council to Convene its Regularly Scheduled Meeting in Galveston, Texas

Tampa, Florida – October 20, 2006 - The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) will meet November 13 - 16, 2006 at the San Louis Resort, 5222 Seawall Boulevard, Galveston, Texas.

After the Council postponed deliberations on Joint Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp Amendment 14 in order to gather more data, the National Marine Fisheries Services submitted to the Department of Commerce a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to evaluate alternatives to set Gulf of Mexico red snapper total allowable catch (TAC) and reduce bycatch in the Gulf of Mexico directed and shrimp trawl fisheries.

Additionally, NMFS intends to transmit an interim rule, which proposes the following:

- Set red snapper TAC at 6.5 million pounds, proportionately reducing the commercial and recreational quotas
- Reduce the red snapper recreational bag limit to two fish
- Set the for-hire captain and crew red snapper bag limit to zero
- Set a 13-inch minimum size limit for the commercial fishery to reduce bycatch
- Establish a target reduction of shrimp trawl bycatch mortality on red snapper 50 percent less than the benchmark years of 2001-2003.

The proposed action would not change the 16-inch minimum recreational size limit or alter the April 21 – October 31 recreational fishing season. Dr. Roy Crabtree, Regional Administrator, NMFS, will provide the Council's Joint Reef Fish/Shrimp Management Committee with an update on the DEIS and Interim Rule during its Monday afternoon session.

The Committee will also hear the Scientific Statistical Committee's (SSC) recommendations on the reliability of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS). The SSC was asked by the Council to review the issue after the National Research Council published its report criticizing the MRFSS.

The Reef Fish Management Committee has a full agenda. With the publishing of the final rule for Reef Fish Amendment 18A, which requires Vessel Monitoring Systems on all vessels with a valid reef fish permit, several questions have been raised by permit holders. The Committee will discuss the VMS requirement and some of the issues that have surfaced.

Also on the agenda is the Southeast Fisheries Science Center's recommendation on whether there is an acceptable level of harvest of goliath grouper that may be taken for scientific study, along with a SEDAR recommendation on a Goliath Grouper stock assessment.

Scoping options for a new Amendment for Gag grouper, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish will be reviewed, in addition to management measures and assessment adjustments for vermilion snapper.

Finally, the Committee will hear updates on Reef Fish Amendments 28 (Grouper allocation), 29 (Grouper IFQ), and 26 (Red Snapper IFQ). A summary report on the red snapper IFQ outreach workshops conducted in September will also be presented. The workshops are designed to provide IFQ shareholders and dealers the information necessary to use the new system, which goes into effect in January. Another round of workshops is scheduled for November 27-30, 2006.

The Shrimp Management Committee will hear a report from the Ad Hoc Shrimp Effort Working Group (AHSEWG), which will meet November 3, 2006 in Galveston to continue evaluating shrimp effort in the EEZ of the Gulf of Mexico. The Committee will also decide when the Ad Hoc Shrimp Effort Advisory Panel (AHSEAP) should convene its first meeting.

Other items on the Committee agenda include recommendations to the Mackerel Management Committee on King Mackerel by the Joint SAFMC/GMFMC Committees; SEDAR recommendations for a Red Drum Assessment to the Red Drum Management Committee, and an update on work completed by contractors on an Aquaculture Amendment to the Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum Committees.

Public testimony is scheduled for Wednesday, November 15, 2006, from 9:15 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and will be accepted on Exempted Fishing Permits (if any). The Council will also hold an 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 3:15 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.

Thursday's agenda includes continued 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, please call or E-mail the Council office. 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 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 Tina Trezza 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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