



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
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MAR 13 2015

F/SER24: SG

Mr. Kevin Anson, Chair
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 North Lois Avenue, Suite 1100
Tampa, Florida 33607

Dear *Kevin* Mr. Anson:

This letter is to inform the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (Councils) that the spiny lobster stock in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic exceeded the overfishing limit (OFL) of 7.9 million pounds in the 2013/2014 fishing season.

The accountability measure for spiny lobster requires the Councils to convene a review panel if the annual catch target (ACT) of 6.59 million pounds is exceeded. Because preliminary landings received in July 2014 indicated the ACT was exceeded during the 2013/2014 fishing season, I requested the Councils convene a review panel in a letter dated July 31, 2014. At the review panel meeting on February 9, 2015, it was reported that the final landings were 7,923,969 pounds, slightly higher than the OFL.

The OFL equals the mean of the landings from the 2000/2001-2009/2010 fishing seasons plus two standard deviations from the mean. The review panel was not able to determine if increased landings were the result of actual overfishing, or an improvement in the stock as compared to landings in the years used to set the OFL. The effects of recent changes in the fishery, such as increased harvest later in the season, are difficult to separate from biological changes to the stock. Further, the exceptionally long larval period for spiny lobsters results in a wide distribution of this species throughout the Caribbean, and more than 50 percent of recruits are believed to originate outside the jurisdiction of the United States. Thus, the effects of local fishing on the sustainability of the managed stock are poorly understood. The panel made some recommendations for changes to management, but in general suggested more time was needed to determine if the stock is healthy enough to support higher landings. More details can be found in the report from the review panel meeting.

Projections for the 2014/2015 fishing season indicate landings will be below the ACT. Therefore, it is unlikely overfishing is occurring for the spiny lobster stock in the current year. The Councils should closely monitor this fishery and if the annual catch limit (ACL) of 7.32 million pounds is exceeded more than once in a four-year period or the OFL is exceeded again, consider changes to management measures to constrain catch below the ACL or prevent overfishing, as applicable.

Sincerely,

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator

