



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration


NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Robin Riechers
 Chairman, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

FROM: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D. 
 Regional Administrator

SUBJECT: October 2007 Regional Administrator's Report

Permits Status

As of October 10, 2007:

- 1,848 moratorium Gulf shrimp permits
- 1,388 for-hire coastal pelagic moratorium permits
 (47 historical captain for-hire coastal pelagic moratorium permits)
- 1,514 commercial coastal migratory moratorium permits (includes South Atlantic)
- 1,356 for-hire reef fish moratorium permits
 (46 historical captain for-hire reef fish moratorium permits)
- 945 commercial reef fish moratorium permits

Amendment Status

Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) - In part, Reef Fish Amendment 18A required the use of VMS aboard all vessels with a commercial reef fish permit. Initially scheduled for implementation in December 2006, the effective date was delayed until May 6, 2007. Vessel owners have a choice of three manufacturers to select a unit. To date, 867 units have been purchased, 798 units have been installed, and 529 are actively reporting. Many units have been powered off through the power down exemptions on file due to power drains, drydock, or sales/transfers of vessels/permits. It is estimated that 212 remain to purchase VMS for compliance so it is estimated that VMS implementation compliance is at 80-percent. Based on comments and concerns expressed by the fishing community, NOAA Fisheries Service is developing rulemaking to extend the existing power-down exemption to include vessels "in port," and to reduce VMS transmissions for vessels "in port" to every 4 hours.

Red Snapper Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) - NOAA Fisheries Service continues to monitor, develop, and refine the support infrastructure for the IFQ program. The Web portal used by fishermen and dealers has been updated, reporting requirements have been simplified, and new



information has been provided to all shareholders regarding procedures to be followed to complete a landing and sales transaction.

Red Snapper/Shrimp Interim Rule - This temporary rule enacted interim measures for 2007 to address overfishing of red snapper while the Council evaluates more permanent management measures to end overfishing and reduce red snapper bycatch in Amendment 14/27. Interim measures include reducing total allowable catch (TAC) to 6.5 million pounds (mp), reducing the red snapper recreational bag limit from 4 to 2 fish, maintaining the April 21 to October 31 recreational season and 16-inch total length (TL) minimum size limit, setting the for-hire captain and crew red snapper bag limit to zero, setting a 13-inch TL minimum size limit for the commercial fishery to reduce bycatch, and establishing a target reduction of shrimp trawl bycatch mortality on red snapper 50 percent less than the benchmark years of 2001-2003. The interim rule published on April 2, 2007; the size limit reduction for the commercial fishery was effective immediately; the remaining actions were effective May 2, 2007. The temporary rule was extended 186 days, beginning September 30, 2007, to maintain harvesting restrictions pending approval and implementation of joint Reef Fish Amendment 27 – Shrimp Amendment 14.

Vermilion Snapper Regulatory Amendment - The intended effect of this regulatory amendment is to relieve harvesting restrictions for vermilion snapper after a recent stock assessment indicated the stock was not overfished or undergoing overfishing. The management measures proposed in the regulatory amendment include reducing the recreational and commercial minimum size limit from 11 to 10 inches TL; ending the April 22-May 31 commercial seasonal closure; and eliminating the 10 vermilion snapper bag limit restriction within the current 20-fish aggregate bag limit for those reef fish species without a species-specific bag limit. This amendment was submitted by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) for review by the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) on February 27, 2007. NOAA Fisheries Service published a proposed rule with a comment period ending May 14, 2007. A final rule is under development.

Shrimp Amendment 13 - The final rule for this amendment, effective October 26, 2006, established a moratorium on the issuance of commercial shrimp vessel permits. Moratorium permits were required in the Gulf shrimp fishery beginning March 26, 2007, and fishermen may apply for a moratorium permit until October 26, 2007. A final number of vessels with moratorium permits should be available during the Council meeting.

Shrimp Amendment 14-Reef Fish Amendment 27 - Amendment 27/14 proposes actions to reduce the red snapper catch, bycatch, and discard mortality in the directed commercial and recreational fisheries and the shrimp fishery. The amendment would reduce the TAC in the commercial and recreational red snapper fisheries to 5.0 mp, which would lead to a commercial quota of 2.55 mp and a recreational quota of 2.45 mp. To constrain the recreational harvest to its quota, the amendment would establish a restricted fishing year, reduce the recreational bag limit from 4 to 2 fish, maintain the 16-inch TL recreational minimum size limit, and set the bag limit for captain and crew of for-hire vessels to zero. To reduce discard mortality rates of red snapper for the directed fishery, the commercial minimum size limit would be reduced from 15 to 13 inches TL, and venting tools, dehooking devices, and non-stainless steel circle hooks (when

using natural baits) would be required for all reef fish fishery sectors. To reduce bycatch discard mortality in the shrimp fishery, the amendment proposes to establish, as necessary, a seasonal shrimp fishery closure to coincide with the start date of the Texas Closure to meet a target of a 74-percent reduction in bycatch discard mortality. The proposed actions are intended to revise the Council's red snapper rebuilding plan with a goal of having at least a 50-percent probability of ending overfishing for red snapper between 2009 and 2010 and rebuilding the stock to the biomass associated with maximum sustainable yield by 2032. The amendment and proposed rule were transmitted to begin review by the Secretary on July 20, 2007. A notice of availability of the joint amendment was published in the *Federal Register* on July 26, 2007, with a comment period that ended September 24, 2007. The Secretary must make a decision to approve, partially approve, or disapprove the amendments by October 24, 2007. The proposed rule is under review.

Regulatory Amendment to Adjust Bycatch Reduction Criterion - This regulatory amendment would modify the bycatch reduction certification criterion for the western Gulf to match the criterion of the eastern Gulf: a 30-percent reduction in finfish biomass. This change would result in a consistent certification criterion throughout the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic region. NOAA Fisheries Service is proposing to consolidate and make technical revisions to the testing manuals for the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic region. In addition, the change would allow additional bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) to be certified for use in the southeastern shrimp fishery. The proposed rule published in the *Federal Register* on October 12, 2007, and has a comment period extending through November 12, 2007.

Framework Action to Revise the List of Allowable BRDs - In accordance with the framework procedures established in the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan for the Gulf of Mexico, NOAA Fisheries Service has developed a proposed rule to revise the list of allowable BRDs for the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery. In summary, the allowable configuration of the Fisheye BRD would be modified for the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic regions, and the Expanded Mesh BRD would be decertified. With the proposed revisions to the allowable configurations of the Fisheye BRD in both the Gulf and South Atlantic shrimp fisheries, the Gulf Fisheye BRD would be removed from the allowable list of gears. The rule is currently under development.

Southeast Regional Office staff continue to work with Council staff to complete Reef Fish Amendments 30A and 30B, in addition to the Generic Aquaculture Amendment.