



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

Southeast Regional Office
 263 13th Avenue South
 St. Petersburg, Florida 33701
 (727) 824-5305; FAX (727) 824-5308
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Thomas McIlwain, Chairman
 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council)

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

James E. Weaver

SUBJECT: April 2008 Regional Administrator's Report

Dr. James W. Balsiger has been appointed Acting Assistant Administrator.

Permits Status

Active permits as of March 24, 2008:

- 1,789 moratorium Gulf shrimp permits (1,932 moratorium permits were issued)
- 1,346 for-hire coastal pelagic moratorium permits
 (51 historical captain for-hire coastal pelagic moratorium permits)
- 1,502 commercial king mackerel moratorium permits (includes South Atlantic)
- 1,451 commercial Spanish mackerel permits (includes South Atlantic)
- 1,310 for-hire reef fish moratorium permits
 (50 historical captain for-hire reef fish moratorium permits)
- 897 commercial reef fish moratorium permits

Amendment Status

Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) - Currently, there are 928 units installed and 671 actively reporting. Many units have been powered off through the power-down exemptions allowed through a final rule effective January 28, 2008. Reef Fish permit renewals are tied to active VMS unit reporting, and permit holders who have not previously purchased a VMS unit must do so or they will be ineligible to renew their permit when they apply for renewal.

Vermilion Snapper Regulatory Amendment - A final rule implementing the actions in this regulatory amendment published on January 3, 2008, effective February 4, 2008. The actions relieve harvesting restrictions for vermilion snapper after a recent stock assessment indicated the stock was not overfished or undergoing overfishing.

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. The 2008 allocations for all shareholders were based on a 2.55 million pound (mp) commercial quota. Based on input from the fishery participants, NOAA Fisheries Service has taken two separate actions to relieve reporting requirements under the IFQ. Participants can now report a three-hour notification of a landing via telephone, their VMS unit, or by completing an electronic form available on the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) IFQ Web site. In addition, NOAA Fisheries Service made technical changes to the definition of "landing" and "offloading." The regulations have been clarified so IFQ fishermen: 1) Can land their vessels anytime during the day and night, provided that a landing notification has been given between 3 to 12 hours prior to landing; 2) can only offload red snapper from 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.; and 3) do not need to give law enforcement an offloading notification for red snapper. For 2007, 97 percent of the quota was landed. When initiated in 2007, there were 621 IFQ accounts; at the start of the 2008 fishing year, this number had consolidated to 549 accounts.

Shrimp Amendment 14-Reef Fish Amendment 27 - NOAA Fisheries Service published a final rule on January 29, 2008, implementing the approved actions in Amendment 27/14. The 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 actions include harvesting restrictions for the directed fishery, and a bycatch reduction target for the shrimp fishery. The regulations became effective February 28, 2008, except for the requirements to use dehooking devices and venting tools, which become effective June 1, 2008.

Based on actions established from Amendment 27/14, NOAA Fisheries Service has reviewed data through 2007 for compliance with the regulatory requirements. For 2007, NOAA Fisheries Service estimates shrimp effort was more than 75 percent lower than the baseline effort estimates, thus no additional action is needed to constrain shrimp effort in 2008. NOAA Fisheries Service conducted an analysis to project 2008 red snapper recreational landings in accordance with the established federal and state recreational fishing seasons and harvesting restrictions. To prevent overfishing and to keep the recreational fishery from exceeding its quota during the 2008 fishing year, NOAA Fisheries Service is closing the recreational fishery for red snapper in federal waters at 12:01 a.m. local time August 5, 2008, through December 31, 2008, the end of the current fishing year. The recreational fishery in federal waters will reopen on June 1, 2009, the beginning of the 2009 federal recreational fishing season.

Regulatory Amendment to Adjust Bycatch Reduction Criterion - NOAA Fisheries Service published a final rule on February 13, 2008, effective March 14, 2008 implementing actions stemming from this action. This regulatory amendment modified the bycatch reduction certification criterion for the western Gulf to match the criterion of the eastern Gulf: a 30-percent reduction in finfish biomass. With a consistent certification criterion throughout the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic region, NOAA Fisheries Service consolidated and made technical revisions to the testing manuals for the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic region. In addition, NOAA Fisheries Service certified three additional bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) for use in the southeastern shrimp fishery.

Framework Action to Revise the List of Allowable BRDs - In accordance with the framework procedures established in the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan, NOAA Fisheries Service is currently reviewing a proposed rule to revise the list of allowable BRDs for the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery. In summary, the allowable placement of fisheye-type BRDs would be restricted for use in the Gulf of Mexico, and the Expanded Mesh BRD would be decertified.

Reef Fish Amendment 30A - Amendment 30A proposes regulatory actions to end overfishing of greater amberjack and gray triggerfish. For greater amberjack, the amendment has actions to: 1) Modify the rebuilding plan; 2) develop accountability measures for the rebuilding plan; and 3) change the recreational and commercial harvest controls (i.e., size limits, bag limits, trip limits, or seasons). For gray triggerfish, the amendment proposes to: 1) Establish minimum stock size and fishing mortality thresholds and set optimum yield; 2) develop a rebuilding plan; 3) develop accountability measures for the rebuilding plan; and 4) change the recreational and commercial harvest controls. NOAA Fisheries Service has submitted this amendment, and its accompanying proposed rule for review by the Secretary of Commerce.

Reef Fish Amendment 30B - In 2007, NOAA Fisheries Service completed stock assessments for gag and red grouper, the two most abundant grouper species in the Gulf of Mexico. Gag were determined to be undergoing overfishing, but were not overfished. Red grouper were determined to be rebuilt and no longer undergoing overfishing. Amendment 30B proposes a 45-percent reduction in gag grouper landings for both the commercial and recreational sectors via various harvesting restrictions, and an increase in the red grouper total allowable catch from 6.56 to 7.57 million pounds. The amendment also establishes sector specific annual catch limits and accountability measures for these two species.

Generic Aquaculture Amendment - The amendment would establish a regional permitting process for regulating and promoting environmentally-sound and economically-sustainable aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone. The primary goal of the amendment is to increase maximum sustainable yield and optimum yield of federal fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico, consistent with the goals of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, by supplementing the harvest of wild caught species with cultured product. Proposed management actions in the amendment include: 1) Establishing an operating permit for offshore aquaculture facilities; 2) extensive permitting, reporting, recordkeeping, and siting requirements; 3) restrictions on species allowed for aquaculture; and 4) case-by-case review and approval of allowable aquaculture systems, such as cages and net pens. SERO staff continue to work with Council staff to develop this amendment.