



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

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JAN 06 2009

F/SER24:SB

Dr. Thomas Mellwain, Chair  
 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council  
 2203 North Lois Avenue  
 Tampa, Florida 33607

Dear <sup>Tom</sup> Dr. Mellwain:

This letter is to inform the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) of the results of a referendum conducted for the Council's proposed grouper and tilefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) program for the Gulf of Mexico. In accordance with Section 303A(c)(6)(D) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, for the Gulf of Mexico, the Council may not submit, and the Secretary of Commerce may not approve and implement, a fishery management plan amendment that creates an IFQ unless such a system has been approved by a majority of those voting in a referendum among eligible permit holders.

On December 5, 2008, NOAA Fisheries Service mailed eligible permit holders a referendum ballot, along with a description of the Council's proposed IFQ program. Eligible voters were those individuals who possessed, on December 1, 2008, an active or renewable commercial Gulf of Mexico reef fish permit with combined average annual grouper and tilefish landings of at least 8,000 pounds (gutted weight) during 1999-2004 (with the allowance of dropping one year). Referendum ballots had to be returned to NOAA Fisheries Service by 4:30 p.m. Eastern time on January 5, 2009.

All ballots were mailed via the United States Postal Service, using certified mail return receipt requested. Of the 301 ballots distributed, 273 (90 percent) were returned, 23 were not returned, and 5 were not claimed by the addressees. Of the 273 votes cast, 220 "yes" ballots (81 percent) were received supporting the proposed IFQ program, and 50 "no" votes (18 percent) opposed the proposed IFQ program. Three returned ballots were declared invalid.

NOAA Fisheries Service will provide additional information regarding the referendum at the January 2009 Council meeting.

Sincerely,

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.  
 Regional Administrator

