



# Gulf Fishery News

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April–May 2008

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## Grouper data gets another look

The Council will convene its SSC to consider the following issues related to gag and red grouper:

- ◆ Changes in biomass, catches, fishing effort and other indicators of red and gag stock status during 2005-2007
- ◆ Projections from 2004 - 2010, incorporating available data from 2005 -2007 and including a range of management alternatives
- ◆ Alternative methods for estimating natural mortality of red and gag and estimates produced by those methods
- ◆ Sensitivity of the September 2007 red and gag assessment and fishery projections to the uncertainty in natural mortality indicated by estimates produced by various methods.

## The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council *Protecting our marine resources*

### Gag and Red Grouper Amendment 30B Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, at its April meeting, moved to convene its Science and Statistical Committee to address some points raised by Dr. Trevor Kenchington, Gadus Associates, related to the latest gag stock assessment and the resulting Reef Fish Amendment 30B.

Kenchington presented the Council with an alternate scenario of gag grouper, one that he says shows no overfishing.

The SSC will also review updated abundance data and other related material.

Based on the latest stock assessment, the current status of gag requires Council action to end overfishing.

In further refining draft Amendment 29 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan, the Council at its April meeting selected some additional preferred alternatives.

The amendment addresses effort in the commercial grouper and tilefish fisheries and proposes to move these two fisheries into a limited access privilege program, or LAPP.

The Council moved forward with selecting preferred alternatives, but held off on taking final action until the SSC has a chance to comment.

The SSC meets May 27—29 and will have comments ready for the June Council meeting.

The draft amendment so far calls for a possible commercial quota closure, adjusted recreational season, adjusted bag and size limits, setting total allowable catch and allocation, a possible marine reserve within the gag spawning area, and federal regulatory compliance for vessels with federal reef fish permits.

The Council is currently accepting public comment on the proposal. Comments can be e-mailed to [Amendment30B@gulfcouncil.org](mailto:Amendment30B@gulfcouncil.org), or mailed to:

Gulf Council  
2203 N. Lois Avenue  
Suite 1100  
Tampa, FL 33607

Copies of the draft document can be obtained by visiting the Council web site at [www.gulfcouncil.org](http://www.gulfcouncil.org), or by calling 888-833-1844.



Gag grouper

### Draft Grouper and Tilefish IFQ Amendment Moving Forward

The specific program under consideration is an individual fishing quota (IFQ) program—a management tool designed to rationalize effort and reduce overcapacity in the commercial grouper and tilefish fisheries as a means of achieving and maintaining optimum yield (OY).

Current regulatory measures used in the management of the commercial grouper fishery include a

license limitation system, quotas, trip limits, mini-



See IFQ, page 6

## Allocation Committee holds its first meeting

The newly created Allocation Committee in April met for the first time to formally adopt its charge—to study and develop consistent guidelines and principles within the Council Fishery Management Plans for establishing allocations between recreational and commercial sectors, engaging the expertise of the SSC and SEP, and incorporating requirements of the M-SFCMA and other applicable laws and rules.

Members discussed the importance of net economic benefits in allocation decisions and agreed that consideration also must be given to issues such as promotion of conservation and the effects of allocation on communities.

The Committee also began laying the groundwork to achieve its objectives and developed a list of the information and materials to be reviewed in June.

Among the materials identified are a draft set of guiding principles for allocation based on M-SFCMA and other relevant regulations, a description of what constitutes a fishing community, and a list of FMP objectives and existing allocation.

The Allocation Committee is scheduled to meet again June 4, from 2:30 pm—4:30 pm in Houston, Texas, in conjunction with the regularly scheduled Council meeting.

## Plan Amendment for Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Underway

G.P. Schmahl, Superintendent, Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS), recently briefed the Gulf Council on the status of the proposed amendment to the FGBNMS management plan and requested input on the range of alternatives under consideration.

Among those alternatives are additional areas in the sanctuary boundary and authority to regulate SCUBA diving and vessel activity.

Specifically, the FGBNMS Advisory Council is recommending a boundary expansion to incorporate adjacent habitat and to add nine additional banks.

Furthermore, because user conflicts among divers, fishermen and boaters, along with user impacts on sanctuary resources are an increasing concern, new management strategies to protect sanctuary resources and/or prevent user conflicts are under consideration.

Designated as a national marine sanctuary in 1992, FGBNMS protects 56 square miles of federal waters in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico.

Located roughly 110 miles south of the Texas-Louisiana border, FGBNMS includes three separate areas. Those areas are known as East Flower Garden, West Flower Garden, and Stetson Banks.

“I like to think of it as a national park system, only under water,” said Schmahl.

The Flower Garden and Stetson Banks are only three of dozens of reefs and banks scattered along the edge of the continental shelf. All of these are part of a regional ecosystem and together with similar formations throughout the northern Gulf provide the foundation for essential fishes and invertebrates.

All interested parties will have additional opportunities to review and provide comments on the draft management plan later this summer.

For more information contact G.P. Schmahl, Superintendent, FGBNMS, at 409-621-5151 ext. 102.



## The Gulf Council says Farewell to a Legend—Wayne Swingle



Wayne and his granddaughter walk along the beach on Panama City, Florida

Photo Courtesy of Karen Foote

In April, the Council hosted a formal farewell event for him, where friends and colleagues reminisced and shared personal anecdotes about the man they know as a mentor, a leader, and a friend.

“Wayne is a great role model and I’ve tried to pattern my professional work ethic after him,” said Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

As Director of Alabama’s Marine Resource Division, Mr. Swingle originally served as a Council member, filling one of the five state director seats.

In February, 1977, Mr. Swingle was elected Executive Director and has held the post ever since.

“He’s the only Executive Director we’ve ever had and the only one we’ve ever needed,” said Simpson.



**W**ayne Swingle, the only Executive Director the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has ever known, is stepping down. He retires in June.

“For more than 30 years Wayne has guided this Council with his expert opinion and sound advice. He’s leaving behind some very big shoes to fill,” said Tom McIlwain, Council Chair.

“Wayne has been our go-to person for historical information and it will be hard to replace that institutional knowledge,” said Roy Crabtree, Regional Administrator, NOAA Fisheries.

Mr. Swingle has been involved with the Gulf Council since its inception in 1976, and has become a legend among his peers.

“I’m honored to have worked with Wayne, and I wish him the best of times in his retirement,” said Crabtree.

Mr. Swingle plans to spend time with his family, especially his three grandchildren.



## Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Wayne Swingle Executive Director  
Richard Leard Deputy Director

### Appointed Voting Members

William Daughdrill Panama City, FL (850) 814-5468	Michael Ray Austin, TX (512)389-4649
Robert P. Gill Crystal River, FL (352) 795-1916	Robert Shipp Vice Chair Mobile, AL (251) 460-6351
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Julie Morris Sarasota, FL (941) 487-4527	Kay Williams Vanceville, MS (228) 826-2160
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### State/Federal Voting Members

Robin Riechers Austin, TX (512) 389-4864 Designee for Larry McKinney	Corky Perret Biloxi, MS (228) 374-5000 Designee for William Walker
Bill Teehan Tallahassee, FL (850) 487-0554 Designee for Ken Haddad	Karen Foote Baton Rouge, LA (225) 765-2383 Designee for John Roussel
Vernon Minton Gulf Shores, AL (251) 968-7576	Roy Crabtree St. Petersburg, FL (727) 824-5301

### Non-voting Members

Sam Hamilton USF&WS (404) 679-4000	Larry Simpson GSMFC (228) 875-5912
Radm Joel Whitehead Eighth USCG District (504) 589-6223	David Hogan Foreign Affairs Officer (202) 647-2335

## NOAA Fisheries Announces Early Closure for Recreational Red Snapper Fishery

NOAA Fisheries Service announced the recreational fishery for red snapper in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico will **close effective 12:01 a.m. local time August 5, 2008**—an action necessary to prevent overfishing and to keep the recreational fishery from exceeding its quota during the 2008 fishing year. The season will reopen June 1, 2009.

A 2007 Court ruling required NOAA Fisheries and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council to revise the red snapper rebuilding plan with a goal of having a 50 percent or greater probability of ending overfishing for red snapper between 2009 and 2010 and rebuilding the stock by 2032.

As a result, NOAA Fisheries implemented temporary regulations for 2007 that reduced harvest and fishing mortality for red snapper. These regulations included a recreational quota of 3.185 million pounds (MP) and a commercial quota of 3.315 MP.

The recreational bag limit was reduced to two fish, with a zero-fish

bag limit for captains or crew of for-hire vessels.

While these harvesting restrictions were intended to constrain the recreational fishery to the 2007 quota, Texas state waters remained open year-round, and Florida maintained its April 15 through October 31 recreational season. Both states retained the four-fish bag limit for 2007.

These incompatible regulations contributed to a recreational harvest that exceeded the 2007 recreational quota by approximately 1 MP. The commercial fishery landed 3.22 MP, or 97 percent of its 2007 quota.

Meanwhile, new regulations outlined in Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp Amendment 14 were approved by the Council and implemented by NOAA Fisheries.

Those regulations, which become effective June 1, further reduce the 2008 recreational red snapper quota to 2.45 MP, and the commercial quota

*See Snapper Closure, page 8*

## Operator Permit Committee Report

The Gulf Council is considering a proposal to require commercial, charter boat, and head boat captains to obtain a federal permit.

Currently there is no accurate means to identify operators of commercial/charter/head vessels. And while many operators are the actual vessel owners, others are hired by the corporation that owns the vessel.

Many captains move about the Gulf and Atlantic to operate various vessels—some to increase experience and improve earning power. But other moves are the result of firings due to violations or other inappropriate behavior.

Requiring operator permits could provide a deterrent for future violations since permits can be sanctioned or rendered invalid and add a level of professionalism to the industry.

Fleet owners could also easily determine whether a captain seeking employment is qualified, and could more readily conduct a background check.

Additionally, operator permits would ensure that operators are equally subject to permit sanctions as are vessel owners, and proportionately held accountable for their actions should such permits be required.

For more information, call the Council office at 888-833-1844.

## True or False?

### Reef fish caught on artificial reefs are not counted in stock assessments?

FALSE. All fish reported are included in the recreational catch statistics.

There are three primary sources that are used to collect information on recreational catches. They include the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey or MRFSS (which is currently undergoing revisions per NRC recommendations), the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department coastal sport fishing survey, and the NMFS headboat survey.

Interviewers for these surveys record information regarding the type of fish and how many were caught on a trip. While other information may be collected, surveyors do not record from what type of habitat fish are caught, making it impossible to separate those fish caught on artificial reefs from those caught elsewhere.



## NOAA seeks public comment on proposed regulations for greater amberjack and gray triggerfish

NOAA Fisheries is seeking public comment on a proposed rule that would implement measures to end overfishing and rebuild greater amberjack and gray triggerfish in the Gulf of Mexico. The most recent assessments for these species indicate reductions in harvest are needed to end overfishing and allow the stocks to recover within each species' respective rebuilding schedule. For 2008, the overall harvest of greater amberjack must be reduced by 32 percent. A 49 percent reduction for gray triggerfish is needed.

To ensure these targets are met, the rule proposes annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) for these species. Proposed AMs for both species give the NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator authority to shorten the fishing season for a sector should landings go over the ACLs.

For greater amberjack, the proposed rule would:

- Establish ACLs and AMs that require in-season adjustments for the recreational and commercial sectors. The AA would have the authority to shorten the season within the fishing year and in the following year if ACLs are exceeded or are projected to be exceeded, while the commercial AM would give the AA the authority to shorten the fishing season within the fishing year and in the following year if the commercial ACL is exceeded.
- Increase recreational minimum size limit to 30 inches fork length.

- Set the bag limit for captain and crew of for-hire vessels at zero.
- Establish a greater amberjack commercial fishery quota of 0.503 million pounds and a recreational fishery quota of 1.368 MP.

For gray triggerfish, the proposed rule would:

- Establish gray triggerfish ACLs and AMs. ACLs would be defined as multi-year running average landings, with exception of the first year which would use only 2008 landings
- Increase the gray triggerfish recreational and commercial minimum size limit to 14 inches FL.
- Establish a gray triggerfish commercial hard quota of 80,000 pounds for 2008, 93,000 pounds for 2009, and 106,000 pounds for 2010.

Written comments must be received no later than 5 p.m., Eastern time, May 23, 2008. Comments may be submitted via the following methods:

- Electronic Submissions: Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>.
- Mail: Peter Hood, Southeast Regional Office, NOAA Fisheries Service, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701.
- Fax: 727-824-5308, Attention: Peter Hood.

The proposed rule is also available via the Internet at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html> (do an advanced search under proposed rules for "page 19040").

## IFQ *continued from page 1*

imum size limits, area gear restrictions, and season closures.

The incentive structure resulting from this regulatory framework has fostered overcapitalization, causing commercial grouper regulations to become increasingly restrictive over time, and intensifying derby conditions under which fishermen race to harvest as many fish as possible before the quota runs out.

The proposed amendment should ease some of the problems resulting from derby fishing and prevent the problem from worsening.

Reducing overcapitalization is also expected to improve profitability of commercial grouper and tilefish fishermen.

In addition, working conditions including safety at sea should improve, bycatch should be reduced, and a

flexible and effective integrated management approach should follow.

Public hearings are planned for late July and will be held throughout the Gulf coast. Preferred alternatives selected to date are listed in the table below.

To obtain a copy of the draft document please call the Council office at 888-833-1844.

## Preferred Alternatives for Commercial Grouper & Tilefish Effort Management Reef Fish Amendment 29

- Implement an Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program
- Allow a single owner of multiple commercial reef fish permits to consolidate permits into one. The consolidated permit would have a catch history equal to the sum of the catch histories associated with the individual permits
- Maintain the current composition of the multi-species deep water grouper unit and revise the shallow water grouper unit to include speckled hind and Warsaw
- Do not specify minimum harvest thresholds for grouper and tilefish endorsements
- Do not specify qualifying years for endorsement eligibility
- Do not establish incidental bycatch provisions for grouper or tilefish landings for commercial reef fish permits that did not qualify for endorsement
- Do not define substantial participants
- Restrict initial eligibility to valid commercial reef fish permit holders
- Distribute initial IFQ shares proportionately among eligible participants based on average annual landings associated with current permit(s) during 1999-2004 with allowance for dropping one year
- Establish IFQ share types as follows: red grouper, gag, other shallow water grouper, deep water grouper; and tilefish
- IFQ shares or allocation can only be transferred to commercial reef fish permit holders during the first five years of the IFQ program and to all U.S. citizens and permanent resident aliens thereafter
- No person shall own more IFQ shares than the maximum percentage issued to the recipient of the largest shares at the time of initial apportionment
- Set allocation cap equal to the total share cap as defined in Action C7. For any single fishing year, no person shall possess allocation in the amount that exceeds the allocation cap. However, persons grandfathered in for more than the total share cap during initial apportionment will also be grandfathered in for more than the allocation cap
- Allocate adjustments in the commercial quota proportionately among eligible IFQ shareholders based on the percentage of the commercial quota each holds at the time of the adjustment
- Do not specify a minimum landings requirement for retaining IFQ shares
- Implement an IFQ cost recovery plan. All IFQ cost recovery fees shall be the responsibility of the recognized IFQ shareholder.
- Do not establish an IFQ loan program
- Establish certified landing sites for all IFQ programs in the commercial reef fish fisheries. All IFQ participants must land at one of these sites to participate in the IFQ program. Certified landing sites will be selected by fishermen but must be certified by NMFS Office of Law Enforcement
- Restrict participation in the referendum to persons that have substantially fished in the grouper and tilefish fisheries. Only commercial reef fish permit holders who have combined average annual grouper and tilefish landings from logbooks during the qualifying years of at least 4,000 pounds are considered as having substantially fished. Each eligible individual voter will have one vote regardless of the relative size of catch history.

## Committee Agenda<sup>1</sup> Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Hilton Hobby  
Houston, Texas  
June 2—4, 2008

### Monday, June 2, 2008

- 1:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.  
Budget/Personnel Committee & Full Council (CLOSED SESSION)
- Interviews and Selection of Executive Director
- recess

### Tuesday, June 3, 2008

- 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon & 1:30p.m. — 5:30 p.m.  
Reef Fish Management Committee
- Draft Reef Fish Amendment 30B (Gag/Red Grouper)
    - SSC Comments on Kenchington Proposal and New SEFSC Analysis
    - Alternatives for Interim Rules for Amendment 30B
    - Committee Recommendations
  - Approval of Public Hearing Draft Reef Fish Amendment 29 (Grouper and Tilefish IFQ)
    - Presentation
    - Ad Hoc Grouper IFQ AP Recommendations
    - IFQ Referendum Language
    - Committee Recommendations
  - Ad Hoc Recreational Red Snapper AP Management and Bycatch Reduction Ideas
  - SEDAR TOR for Hogfish

- 5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.  
Informal Question and Answer Session
- recess

### Wednesday, June 4, 2008

- 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.  
Administrative Policy Committee
- Report on Lenfest Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) (Powers)
  - Review of NMFS Guidelines for ACL/AMs (if available)
  - Improving Bycatch Data
  - Plans Amended to Comply with all Guidelines

- 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon  
Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum Management Committee
- Generic Aquaculture Amendment
    - Presentation on IPT Revisions
    - Public Comment Material
    - Committee Action

- 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
Outreach and Education Committee
- Review/Adopt Mission Statement
  - Creation of an O&E AP0
  - Current Outreach Methods
    - Gulf Council
    - Other Councils

- 2:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
Ad Hoc Allocation Committee
- Development of Guidelines and Principles for Allocations
  - Review of Current Allocations & Landings
  - Development of Draft Allocation Principles
  - Recommendations to the Council

- 4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.  
Stone Crab/Spiny Lobster Committee
- Spiny Lobster Amendment

- recess

## Council Schedule<sup>1</sup> Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Hilton Hobby  
Houston, Texas  
June 5, 2008

### Thursday, June 5, 2008

- I. Call to Order and Introductions - Mcllwain  
(8:30 a.m.—8:35 a.m.)
- II. Adoption of Agenda<sup>1</sup> - Mcllwain  
(8:35 a.m. – 8:40 a.m.)
- III. Approval of Minutes - Mcllwain  
(8:40 a.m.—8:45 a.m.)
- IV. Proposed Rule Integrating MSA and NEPA (McPherson)  
(8:45 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.)
- V. Public Testimony<sup>2</sup> - Mcllwain  
Exempted Fishing Permits (EFP) (if any)  
(9:45 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.)
- VI. Open Public Comment Period<sup>2</sup> - Mcllwain  
(10:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.)
- VII. Committee Reports
  - a. Reef Fish Management—Minton
  - b. Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum—Foote/Minton/Teehan
  - c. Administrative Policy—Morris
  - d. Outreach & Education Committee—Walker
  - e. Ad Hoc Allocation—Morris
  - f. Stone Crab/Spiny Lobster—Daughdrill  
1:00 p.m.—4:45 p.m.
- VIII. Other Business—Mcllwain
  - a. Written Reports
  - b. LEAP Request for Workshop to Develop Strategic Plan
  - c. Other Business  
(4:45 p.m.—5:45 p.m.)

Next Meeting:  
August 11—15, 2008  
The Hilton  
Key Largo, Florida

<sup>1</sup>Established times for addressing items on the Council and committee agendas, except for those set for public testimony or open public comment may be adjusted as necessary to accommodate the timely completion of discussion relevant to agenda items. Such adjustments may result in the meeting being extended from or completed prior to the date established by the agendas.

<sup>2</sup>Persons wishing to testify for either public testimony or open public comment **must** turn in a registration card **before** the beginning of the public testimony period; otherwise persons wishing to testify may be denied. One card for **each issue** must be completed.

<sup>3</sup>Persons who wish for Council members to have copies of written testimony or information should provide 30 copies to staff for distribution to members. All written information shall include a statement of the source and date of such information. Any oral or written statement shall include a brief description of the background and interests of the person testifying.

<sup>4</sup>The Council has set aside time for open public comment regarding any fishery issue or concern. People wishing to speak before the Council should complete a public comment card, making sure to check the box marked *Open Public Comment*. A note about open public comment: In the interest of giving everyone an opportunity to speak, speakers are asked to limit comments to three minutes. If your sentiments are reflected in comments made by others, please state so and allow the next speaker to address the Council. Individuals may be asked to reduce speaking time even further in order to accommodate all those who wish to speak. **The open public comment period will end no later than the times scheduled on the agenda regardless of the number of persons wishing to comment.**

## Snapper Closure *from page 4*

to 2.55 MP. The recreational bag limit remains at 2-fish per angler, with a 16" size limit.

In order to keep the recreational harvest within the quota, the season was reduced to June 1 through September 30.

But the 122-day season was based on the assumption that the states would adopt compatible regulations. And while the Council sent each state a formal request to comply, only Louisiana and Mississippi have done so.

Florida subsequently adopted the two-fish bag limit but maintained its

April 15 through October 31 recreational season.

Texas chose to maintain its existing year-round fishing season and a four-fish bag limit. Alabama remains undecided.

NOAA Fisheries Service is required to close a fishery or fishery sector in federal waters when the quota is met or projected to be met.

Analyses done by NOAA Fisheries show that noncompliance by these states will cause an estimated 13.5 percent recreational quota overage for the 2008 fishing year—making the August 5 federal closure necessary.



## A Word on Recreational Fisheries Data Collection

NOAA Fisheries has been collecting recreational catch and effort data since the late 1970s. Catch, effort, and participation statistics are fundamental for assessing the influence of fishing on any stock of fish.

The quantities taken, the fishing effort, and the seasonal and geographical distribution of the catch and effort are required for the development of rational management policies and plans. Continuous monitoring is necessary to monitor trends, evaluate the impacts of management regulations, and project what impacts various management scenarios will have on a fishery.

The basic design for collecting recreational fishing consists of a complementary surveys approach that includes telephone surveys of fishing effort and an access-site intercept survey of angler catch. Effort data are collected via the Coastal Household Telephone Survey for shore and private boat anglers. Similarly, the For-Hire

Telephone Survey collects the same data from the for-hire fisheries.

The access-point angler intercept survey is conducted at public marine fishing access points such as boat ramps, piers, beaches, jetties, bridges, and marinas in order to collect individual catch data. That includes species identification, total number of each species, and length and weight measurements of individual fishes, as well as some angler-specific information about the fishing trip and the angler's fishing behavior.

Survey participation is key. While recreational surveys are voluntary, it is important that anglers provide the best possible data. Angler cooperation ensures that fishery managers obtain accurate and precise information to help avoid unnecessary regulations and to sustain the marine resources.

A good example is the high level of cooperation by charter boat captains in the for-hire survey, which has

helped make that survey a success. Angler participation ensures that the Gulf Council and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission have adequate information to understand the fisheries resources and assists in designing policies that properly manage the fish stocks.

The GSMFC has been involved in the collection of recreational data since 1998 and is responsible for the coordination and administration of the data collection efforts.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources and Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries personnel actually collect the catch and effort data via dockside and telephone interviews.

Through these efforts, the quantity and quality of recreational data has improved in the Gulf region, and has led to more rational management of the resources.

## Improving Recreational Fishery Data

New regulatory mandates in the 2006 reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act have led to ever-greater demands for more timely and accurate data on saltwater recreational fishing.

The National Marine Fisheries Service is partnering with regional fishery management councils, state fishery commissions, state governments, private organizations and interested individuals on a new initiative to address these recreational data needs.

The initiative—The Marine Recreational Information Program—is a nationwide initiative and will improve the collection, analysis, and use of recreational saltwater fishing information. The program blueprint should be released to the public later this summer, with a comprehensive report delivered to Congress in January 2009. This blueprint will detail the progress to date and outline implementation of survey methods.

### Bringing the Best Minds Together

An important part of the initiative is the development of a national saltwater recreational angler registry, a comprehensive database of the nation's recreational fishers who use hook-and-line or spearfishing gear. This registry will help improve the data by allowing scientists to survey fishermen directly in order to capture fishing effort data.

Because so much has changed since NOAA Fisheries launched its original recreational fishing data program, the agency is bringing the best minds together, inside and outside the agency, to develop a new survey program to meet the needs of today's fisheries managers. The idea is to address ever-greater demands for more timely and accurate data on saltwater recreational fishing.

A proposed rule is set to be published within the next couple of months. Proposed rules are public documents announcing significant government plans and offering opportunity for public input.



### Answering the Important Questions

NOAA Fisheries' original recreational fishing data program, the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey, will be phased out over the next several years. The new program is called the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Quite simply, the new survey will better answer these fundamental questions: Who fishes? What's being caught? How many fish are caught? Where and when are they caught? In addition, a new saltwater angler registry will give the agency a more definitive pool of survey participants to call upon, at the same time giving saltwater anglers better representation in the decision-making process.

### Looking Out on the Horizon

The new Marine Recreational Information Program is designed to improve the methodology of collection and analysis of saltwater recreational fishing data. Implementation of survey improvements that lead to better information will begin in early 2009. Ultimately, these improvements will help decision-makers gain a far better understanding of saltwater recreational fishing's relationship to fisheries conservation.

Beyond the numbers, the Marine Recreational Information Program also will help all of us who care about the health of ocean fisheries and the sport of fishing to pass on these strong conservation values to future generations.

### For more information

Please visit the Marine Recreational Information Program web site at [www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/mrii](http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/mrii)



## GMFMC wants your news and views

The Gulf Council would like to hear from you! Please contact us regarding fishery questions, comments, or concerns you would like to see covered in the ***Gulf Fishery News***. Anyone interested in submitting information, such as articles, editorials, or photographs pertaining to fishing or fisheries management are encouraged to do so. Submissions may be mailed to Charlene Ponce, Public Information Officer, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 2203 Lois Avenue, Suite 1100, Tampa, FL 33607. Materials can also be sent via fax to 813-348-1711, or e-mail; [charlene.ponce@gulfcouncil.org](mailto:charlene.ponce@gulfcouncil.org).

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 is responsible for the development and modification of fishery management plans (FMPs) that are designed to manage fishery resources in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Gulf of Mexico from state boundaries to the 200-mile limit.

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