

## **Status of amendment 9 Implementation**

BRD compliance rate is extremely high. NMFS agents and Coast Guard boarding officers report very few infractions of the rules, all of which were minor and able to be corrected on the spot or with a “fix it” notification.

Three interim rules were promulgated in April and May 1998 to (1) allow the 9.12 million pound TAC, but with a 3.12 million pound reserve with its release contingent upon results from the 1998 research effort, and a reduction in the recreational bag limit from five to four fish, (2) to certify two additional BRDs whose performance levels may help to achieve the optimistically high reduction rate assumed by the Gulf Council, and (3) to enhance randomized sampling of the Gulf shrimp fleet as recommended by the peer reviews through mandatory observers, logbooks, and vessel monitoring systems. Copies of all rules, press releases, and the rule implementing the BRD requirement were mailed to all state licensed shrimp trawler owners in the Gulf of Mexico.

A significant effort has gone into BRD technology transfer and information dissemination, beginning in 1995. This effort was a planned part of the Cooperative Bycatch Research Program which directly involved the shrimp industry, the directed red snapper fisheries, state fishery management agencies, environmental organizations, the Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the Gulf and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commissions, and NMFS. More than 80 shrimp industry workshops were held in 1995 and 1996 to explain the status of the bycatch research in the Gulf and South Atlantic, and approximately 30 industry workshops are currently being conducted in the Gulf of Mexico to transfer BRD technology. The majority of these workshops are being conducted through the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Development Foundation. Additionally, a major effort has gone into the preparation and distribution of thousands of brochures on the installation and use of BRDs, and in the development and distribution of hundreds of videos also on the installation and use of these devices. The brochures and videos are primarily a product of NMFS.

Additionally, considerable effort by NMFS has gone into training workshops for Coast Guard and state enforcement agents concerning the BRD requirements. The first two weeks of the Gulf of Mexico BRD rule also were set aside as a widely publicized educational period where Federal and state enforcement agents would board vessels and meet with fishermen to evaluate the installation of use of BRDs without the threat of a violation.

Several port agents have reported that the majority of shrimpers they encounter are not disgruntled about BRDs, as many media reports indicate. It appears that all the benefits we promoted as part of the BRD rollout are being realized by many shrimpers: considerably less bycatch cluttering up their nets, on deck sorting time has been reduced, and shrimp loss is far less than they expected.

We currently have 22 observers deployed on shrimp vessels gathering data on bycatch and shrimp retention. Communications with observers is excellent. Their reports indicate that bycatch of juvenile red snapper and other species is being reduced by approximately 61 percent with about a 10 percent shrimp loss. The shrimp loss rate is expected to decline as shrimpers become more adept at handling BRD-equipped trawls.

Logbooks from upwards of 24 trips have been submitted. Staff has been hired to review the log books and process the data.

Initially our goal was to deploy 50 Vessel Monitoring Systems. Thus far, only 14 units have been installed on shrimp vessels.