

News Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

BYCATCH REDUCTION APPROVED FOR THE GULF OF MEXICO SHRIMP FISHERY TO PROTECT RED SNAPPER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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On July 30, 1997, Amendment 9 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Shrimp Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico (FMP) was approved, announced Dr. Andrew J. Kemmerer, Regional Administrator, Southeast Region, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared and submitted Amendment 9 for review, approval, and implementation by NMFS. Final regulations for Amendment 9 will be published later this year.

Amendment 9 is designed to reduce the unwanted bycatch of juvenile red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico shrimp trawl fishery and, to the extent practicable, not adversely affect the shrimp fishery. The Council's major goal is to achieve a 44 percent reduction in juvenile red snapper bycatch mortality in shrimp trawls, as compared to the average level of mortality on these fish during the years 1984-1989. The red snapper stock in the Gulf of Mexico is considered overfished and is under a long-term rebuilding program established by the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico. A significant reduction in bycatch mortality of juvenile red snapper in the shrimp fishery is considered necessary to ensure recovery of the red snapper resource consistent with its established stock rebuilding schedule.

When implemented, Amendment 9 will: (1) Require, with limited exceptions, the use of certified bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) in shrimp trawls in the exclusive economic zone (i.e., Federal waters) in the Gulf of Mexico shoreward of the 100-fathom (183-m) depth contour west of 85°30' W. long. (approximately Cape San Blas, FL); (2) set the red snapper bycatch mortality reduction criterion for the certification of BRDs at 44 percent; and (3) establish an FMP framework rulemaking procedure for modifying the bycatch reduction criterion, for establishing and modifying the BRD testing protocol and its specifications, and for certifying and decertifying BRDs.

Amendment 9 will exclude from the requirement for use of BRDs: (1) Vessels trawling for royal red shrimp beyond the 100-fm (183-m) depth contour or trawling for butterfish or groundfish; (2) a single try net with a headrope of 16 ft (4.9 m) or less on each vessel; and (3) vessels trawling for shrimp with no more than two rigid-frame roller trawls limited to 16 ft (4.9 m) or less, such as those used in the Big Bend area of Florida.

A proposed rule to implement Amendment 9 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Shrimp Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico (FMP) was published in the *Federal Register*, on July 2, 1997. Written comments on the proposed rule must be received no later than **August 18, 1997**. All comments should be sent to Michael E. Justen.