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## **FISHERIES SERVICE CERTIFIES TWO ADDITIONAL BYCATCH REDUCTION DEVICES**

The National Marine Fisheries Service has certified two additional bycatch reduction devices for use in the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery, the Commerce Department announced today.

The Jones-Davis and Gulf fisheye bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) are intended to help Gulf shrimp fishermen more easily comply with the requirement to use BRDs while retaining more than 96 percent of the shrimp they catch.

"Shrimpers can now select a BRD based on how it matches the operating conditions their vessel encounters," said Andrew Kemmerer, administrator of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Southeast Region. "These BRDs should enhance compliance, help minimize shrimp loss and further reduce bycatch."

Shrimp trawling results in a significant, inadvertent bycatch of non-target finfish and invertebrates, most of which are discarded dead. Recent concerns about bycatch in the Gulf have focused on the high mortality of juvenile (ages 0 and 1) red snapper, a valuable reef fish species for commercial and recreational fisheries.

"Amendment 9 to the Gulf Shrimp Fishery Management Plan developed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council in 1996 is being implemented this week," Kemmerer said. "This regulation is intended to reduce shrimp trawler bycatch of juvenile red snapper while, to the extent practicable, minimizing adverse effects on the shrimp fishery."

Several recent stock assessments indicate that the red snapper stock of the Gulf of Mexico is severely overfished. These assessments were subjected to scrupulous, independent peer reviews, two of which were conducted by Council-appointed panels and one mandated by Congress when the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act was renewed in 1996. Each review concluded that red snapper mortality must be reduced by cutting back on the red snapper taken by the directed commercial and recreational fisheries as well as those taken in shrimp trawls. The best scientific information available indicates that, even if the directed fisheries for adult red snapper were eliminated, the bycatch of juvenile red snapper in shrimp trawls would still need to be reduced for the adult-spawning stock to recover under the rebuilding schedule the Council developed.

The critical management measure in Amendment 9 is the required use of NMFS-certified BRDs in shrimp trawls towed in the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone (EEZ), shoreward of the 100 fathom (183-meter) depth contour west of 85 degrees west longitude, the approximate longitude of Cape San Blas, Fla.

The final rule implementing Amendment 9 (63 FR 1813, April 14, 1998) certified the fisheye BRD for use in the Gulf shrimp fishery effective May 14, 1998. The fisheye BRD is a cone-shaped

rigid frame constructed from aluminum or steel rods of at least 1/4 inch (6.35 mm) in diameter, that is inserted into the codend of the trawl to form an escape opening. The specifications of the fisheye BRD have been published in the Federal Register and disseminated to fish houses, net shops, Coast Guard stations, and through the news media.

Recent research indicates that the Gulf fisheye BRD and the Jones-Davis BRD also meet the Gulf red snapper bycatch reduction criterion. The rule published in the Federal Register today certifies these two BRDs for use in the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery on an interim basis. NMFS expects to certify these two BRDs permanently after implementation of a BRD testing protocol later this year.

The Gulf fisheye BRD is constructed the same as the fisheye BRD but its installation requirements allow shrimpers more flexibility in where to position it in their nets. The Jones-Davis BRD is a funnel-type BRD that incorporates a cone-shaped fish deflector made from webbing behind the funnel which acts as a fish stimulator, discouraging them from passing into the aft portion of the codend and out of the net through escape openings.

Specifications for these BRDs are set forth in Appendix D to 50 CFR part 622. Diagrams of the Gulf fisheye and Jones-Davis BRDs and construction and installation instructions have been widely distributed to gear manufacturers, net shops and fish houses throughout the Gulf and are also available from Chief, Harvesting Systems Division, Mississippi Laboratories, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, NMFS, P.O. Drawer 1207, Pascagoula, MS 39568-1207 or by calling John Watson or John Mitchell at (228) 762-4591. Fishermen can also obtain this information from their nearest NMFS Law Enforcement Office, NMFS Port Agent, Coast Guard Station or Sea Grant Extension Agent. Every Gulf fisherman who holds a state shrimp license should have already received a copy of a brochure via first class mail that provides detailed instructions on how to install the Gulf fisheye. The brochure has also been posted on the NMFS Southeast Regional Office Internet site: <http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov>

Fishermen can obtain the address and telephone number of their nearest NMFS Enforcement Office by calling (813) 570-5344, NMFS Port Agent by calling (813) 570-5305, Coast Guard Station by calling (504) 589- 6189, or Sea Grant Extension Agent by calling (301) 713-2431.

This interim rule is effective for 180 days and may be extended for an additional 180 days, provided that the public has had an opportunity to comment on the interim rule. Public comments on this interim rule will be considered in determining whether to maintain or extend this rule. Comments must be received no later than June 12, 1998. They must be mailed to the Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702.

This and other Southeast Regional news releases are available on the SERO Internet home page at <http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov>

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