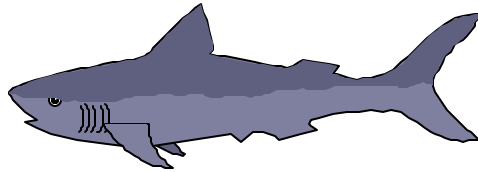


FISH



TALES

Council Considering Permits for the Shrimp Fishery

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) is currently considering requiring all shrimp vessels fishing in federal waters to obtain a license, in the form of either a permit or registration, to record their participation in the fishery. Over the next month the Gulf Council will conduct public hearings around the Gulf before taking final action at their November meeting in Biloxi, MS.

Though this may not sound like the most exciting issue, the absence of a license system in the fishery has significant repercussions on many aspects of fishery management and resource protection in the Gulf of Mexico. The data generated by this license system is crucial to fisheries management in the Gulf as it provides managers with information used to determine shrimp fishing effort, catch, bycatch, and other important parameters needed

to properly manage shrimp and other species. For example, scientists believe the recovery of red snapper in the Gulf is tied to reducing bycatch in the shrimp fishery. Therefore, better data on the amount of red snapper caught incidentally in shrimp trawls will provide managers with a better estimate as to the status of red snapper and what further reductions in bycatch are needed in the shrimp fishery.

(Continued on page 4)

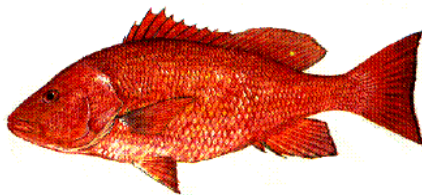
Inside this issue:	
New Shrimp Regulations Adopted in Texas	2
Needed Grouper Regulations put on Hold	3

- Special points of interest:
- Permits for shrimp vessels considered by the Council to help gather better data
 - Council to review a proposal to rebuild red snapper by 2031
 - Grouper management put on hold
 - Annual Status Report on Fisheries Due out in October
 - Texas shrimp regulations passed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Red Snapper Rebuilding Plan Targets 2031

At its November meeting in Biloxi, MS the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) will review a proposal by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to rebuild red snapper by the year 2031. Adoption of a plan will be instrumental in charting a course towards achievement of the elusive goal of rebuilding this incredibly important fishery.

tant reef fish fishery in the Gulf has been under a feder-



Red Snapper. Courtesy of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

level has been moved five times. The Council and the NMFS are currently considering a plan to rebuild red snapper to a level scientists consider healthy by 2031.

Under the proposed 31 year rebuilding plan, red snapper management will be divided into roughly five year intervals to track progress of the recovery. At the end of the intervals the

(Continued on page 2)

Red snapper, the most impor-

ally mandated rebuilding plan since 1990. The target date for recovery to a healthy

Texas Adopts New Shrimp Regulations

On August 31, 2000 the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission (TPW) adopted a set of regulations to ensure a sustainable shrimp fishery and protect marine life. As highlighted in our last edition of *GRN NEWS*, staff of the TPW proposed a series of regulations to help address warning signs in the Texas shrimp fishery and help protect sea turtles and other marine life. The majority of the proposed regulations were adopted by the Commission.

The new rules seek to address problems in the Texas shrimp fishery by protecting small shrimp through deferred harvest, adding additional harvest efficiency measures, and increasing spawning success of adult shrimp entering Gulf waters. They also include measures to help protect other marine life including turtles.

Specifically, the new regulations will:

1. Increase shrimp nursery areas (areas where shrimping is not allowed) from 12 percent of bay waters to 17 percent, effective December 1, 2000. TPW hopes this regulation will help shrimp survival

and growth as well as protect additional bay bottoms from trawling impacts.

2. Shorten the fall bay shrimping season by fifteen days, effective immediately. This regulation will protect smaller shrimp and shift harvest effort in the bays.

3. Establish a Northern Shrimp Zone in the Gulf from the beach out to three nautical miles. Within this zone the number and size of trawls will be restricted and a nighttime shrimping closure will be in effect out to five nautical miles.

4. Establish a closed shrimping area in South Texas from the beach out to five nautical miles from December 1st until approximately July 15th. During the period between July 15th and December 1, restrictions on the number and size of trawls will be in effect. A nighttime closure will be in effect out to five nautical miles. Establishment of the northern and Southern zones is designed to help sea turtles and protect spawning shrimp.

5. Require the use of turtle excluder devices in all trawls in the Gulf except when specifically exempted.

6. Require the use of bycatch reduction devices in all trawls, except bait and recreational trawls, to reduce the catch of unwanted species such as blue crabs, croaker, and flounder. This requirement will go into effect September 1, 2001.

For a more detailed look at all of the regulations adopted, see the TPW website at: www.tpwd.state.tx.us

The GRN thanks all of our members and friends who were involved in the process of developing these regulations.



Red Snapper....

(Continued from page 1)

Council and the NMFS will assess the condition of the stock to determine what types of management measures will be necessary to ensure recovery. This is a welcome change to management as the current state of management conducts an assessment on the health of red snapper on essentially a yearly basis showing little to no change in the condition of the stock while utilizing time and money that could be devoted to assessing the condition of other Gulf fisheries.

With that said, many of the alternatives

provided for rebuilding adopt a “pay later approach” that maintains the status quo for the first five years. For example, a current proposal will keep the 9.12 million pound catch level until 2004. After that time, the Council will have to significantly reduce the catch under a new management regime depending on the results of the assessment. Future management measures may include a reduction in catch or a reduction in the bycatch of red snapper in shrimp trawls in order to meet rebuilding goals. Obviously, both would pose a difficult decision for managers as both are very im-

portant fisheries in the Gulf.

We need your help to ensure that the Council adopts a plan that is consistent with the best available scientific information and the Sustainable Fisheries Act. Please check our website at www.gulfrestorationnetwork.org for ways to get involved.

Grouper Management Measures on Hold Until January 2001

Efforts by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) to address problems in the grouper fishery remain on hold as their scientific advisory panels continue analyzing scientific data. In previous editions of *Fish Tales*, we have highlighted the problems with both red and gag grouper populations in the Gulf of Mexico. In the summer of 1999, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) found that red grouper, the most important grouper fishery in the Gulf, is significantly overfished. Based on this analysis the Gulf Council began drafting a fishery management plan amendment in November of 1999 to address this fishery and other groupers in the reef fish complex. Unfortunately, this amendment will remain on hold until January 2001 so that questions over the length of time necessary to rebuild this fishery, currently believed to be nine to eighteen years, are resolved.

Actions taken by the NMFS can be instrumental in ensuring that this process is completed in a timely manner. In October 2000 the NMFS will issue its annual report to Congress on the status of our nations fisheries. The GRN is urging the NMFS, consistent with the requirements of federal law, to list red grouper in this report as overfished, triggering a one year deadline for the Gulf Council to enact management measures to help end overfishing of red grouper.

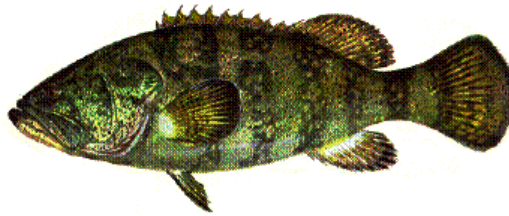
Please call or write Dr. Roy Crabtree of the NMFS urging him to list red grouper as an overfished species. The rationale for this is clear: red grouper were identified last year as significantly overfished and need prompt attention. Dr. Crabtree can be reached at (727) 570-5305.

A Closer Look at Groupers of the Gulf

Throughout the year, the GRN will continue to highlight grouper species in the Gulf of Mexico. Here is our second section of the series.

Jewfish

The largest grouper in the Gulf of Mexico, jewfish can reach sizes of seven feet and 800 pounds. They are thought to live for over 40 years. Jewfish are found from North Carolina to Brazil and in the Gulf of Mexico. Jewfish aggregate to spawn. Aggregations in the 1980s declined from 50-100 fish per site to less



Jewfish. Courtesy of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

than 10. Fortunately, some aggregations have rebounded to 20-40 fish per site.

Jewfish are considered "overfished" by the Gulf Council and the NMFS. They are also a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act. As a result, no capture is allowed in the Gulf of Mexico. As jewfish are a long lived species that do not become sexually mature until 4-7 years of age, recovery of the species is expected to be slow.

Speckled Hind

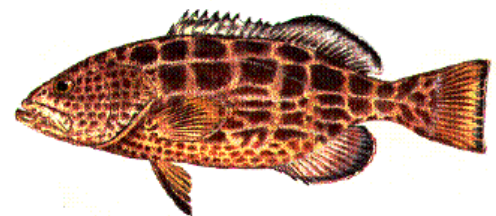
Speckled hind range from Bermuda through the Florida keys and the Gulf of Mexico. Speckled hind are usually found in water depths of between 150 and 300

feet on hard bottom reef sites. Speckled hind are protogynous hermaphrodites, meaning they begin life as females with larger individuals becoming male over time. They are believed to aggregate to spawn. Females reach sexual maturity at about four to five years. Fertilized eggs are pelagic with newly hatched young born at the surface before migrating to greater depths.

Speckled hind are considered "overfished" by the NMFS as well as a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Under Council management, speckled hind are part of the 5 fish aggregate bag limit for recreational fishermen with no minimum size limit and are part of the commercial deep-water grouper quota.

Black Grouper

Black grouper are managed under the Gulf Council's shallow water grouper subgroup. Black grouper range from Massachusetts to Brazil and are found in



Black Grouper. Courtesy of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

the Gulf of Mexico. Black grouper are also protogynous hermaphrodites and are thought to aggregate for spawning. The health of black grouper in the Gulf is considered "unknown" by the NMFS. Council regulations include a minimum size limit and bag and quota limits consistent with the shallow water grouper com-



Gulf Restoration Network
P.O. 2245
New Orleans, LA 70176

Cynthia Sarthou, Executive Director
Chris Dorsett, Program Director for Fisheries
Susie Little, Office Administrator

Phone: (504) 525-1528
Fax: (504) 525-0833
Email: : cdgrn@igc.org

“Working to Protect and Preserve the
Gulf of Mexico”

This publication is the product of the GRN working on the following issues of concern: overfishing, essential fish habitat, full implementation of the Sustainable Fisheries Act, and public education on the importance of sustainable fisheries management.

The GRN would like to thank Pew Charitable Trusts, Rockefeller Brothers, Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, and the Trull Foundation for making our work possible.

Shrimp Permits...

Without a permit or registration system, fishery managers are forced to estimate the amount of shrimp boats fishing in federal waters. This creates a good deal of uncertainty and erodes public confidence in the fishery management process.

Thus, better data generated by a licensing system can help stakeholders. Clearly, the most contentious issue between fishermen and regulators is the quality of the data used to make fishery management decisions. A licensing system will allow data collectors to obtain more precise numbers on the amounts and types of vessels fishing in federal waters thereby addressing many of the data problems that currently plague fisheries management in the Gulf.

After deciding whether or not to implement this system, the Gulf Council will also decide whether to use a permit system or registration system. The main difference between the two cen-

ters around law enforcement. A registration cannot be revoked by law enforcement making fines the only deterrent to violations. A permit on the other hand can be revoked, removing an offender from the fishery.

During the month of October, the Gulf Council will be conducting public hearings across the Gulf of Mexico allowing the public to comment. The GRN urges all of our members and friends to attend a meeting asking the Council to help improve data collection by requiring either a permit or registration system. Here are the meeting dates and locations:

Texas

October 2– Port Isabel, TX
October 4– Palacios, TX
October 5– Galveston, TX

Louisiana

October 6– Cameron, LA
October 9– Larose, LA
October 10– Kenner, LA

Mississippi

October 10– Biloxi, MS

Alabama

October 11– Mobile, AL

Florida

October 12– Apalachicola, FL
October 23– Key West, FL
October 25– Fort Meyers, FL
October 26– Tampa, FL

For specific location information please see the Gulf Council website at www.gulfcouncil.org