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FORTY-SECOND ANNUAL REPORT OF THE



P.O. Box 726
Ocean Springs, MS 39564
(601) 875-5912

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

FORTY-SECOND ANNUAL REPORT (1991)

To the

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

And to the

GOVERNORS AND LEGISLATORS

of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas

Presented in compliance with the terms of the Compact and
the State enabling Acts creating such Commission and
Public Law 66 - 81st Congress assenting thereto

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

P.O. Box 726

Ocean Springs, Mississippi 39564

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GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

Forty-second Annual Report (1991)

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GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
CY 1991 ADMINISTRATIVE COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT
JANUARY 1, 1991 THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 1991

NMFS STATUS REPORT ON FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN (FMP) RULES

Amendment 1 to Coral FMP was implemented.
Certain areas of Tortugas Sanctuary were opened to shrimp fishing in 1991.
Proposed rule implementing Shrimp Amendment 5 was published for comment.
Stone Crab Amendment 4 was approved.
Spiny Lobster Amendment 3 was implemented.
Proposed rule implementing Reef Fish Amendment 3 was published for comment.
Commercial fishery for king mackerel in Eastern zone was closed.
The Gulf recreational fishery for Gulf king mackerel was closed.
Notice of withdrawal of Swordfish Amendment 1 was published.

COUNCIL ACTION ON FMPs

Coral FMP. Amendment 1 providing a definition of overfishing and regulating the harvest of octocoral was implemented. A petition on harvest of "live" rock was received. Action on a petition on harvest of "live" rock was deferred to March 1992.

Groundfish FMP. A stock assessment for the butterfish fishery was prepared by NMFS for the Council's review in the fall. A stock assessment for the butterfish fishery was reviewed by the Council and submitted to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) for peer review and to the Advisory Panel (AP) for advice on development of an FMP.

Mackerel FMP. Staff completed the options paper for Amendment 6 to the FMP. Options paper for Amendment 6 to the FMP was acted on by Gulf and South Atlantic Councils. Staff revised document. Stock Assessment Panel set Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) for Gulf and south Atlantic groups of mackerel. AP, SSC, and Council revised Assessment Panel report. Council set Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and bag limits and quotas for 1991/1992. These were submitted to NMFS by regulatory amendment. Draft Amendment 6 to the FMP was acted on by Gulf and South Atlantic Councils. Public hearings and AP/SSC reviews of the draft amendment were scheduled. Draft Amendment 6 was reviewed by the AP, SSC and public at seven hearings. Final action by the Council was scheduled for January 1992. An options paper for a limited entry system for the fishery was completed by staff and submitted to the management committee.

Red Drum FMP. Stock assessments by NMFS, FDNR and LDWF were reviewed by the Stock Assessment Panel, Socioeconomic Panel and SSC. The Stock Assessment Panel recommended ABC = zero. The Council set TAC at zero for the EEZ. The Council took action on an options paper for Amendment 3 to the FMP.

Reef Fish FMP. The Council's bag limit and quota under a TAC of 4 million pounds submitted as Regulatory Amendment for 1991 was approved. Amendment 3 to set the target date for restoration

of red snapper to the year 2007 was approved. The Council reviewed the use of explosives for removal of oil rigs with MMS and recommended the practice be terminated until studies on the impact of fish are completed. Staff drafted Amendment 4 to the FMP. The Council's bag limit and quota under a TAC of 4 million pounds submitted as Regulatory Amendment for 1991 was implemented. Amendment 4 was approved by the Council for implementation after holding public hearings (6) and AP/SSC reviews. Amendment 4 includes a four-year moratorium on issuance of commercial vessel permits. The stock assessment panel was convened to review assessments for red grouper, vermilion snapper, and amberjack. Stock assessments on red grouper and vermilion snapper and updated information on greater amberjack prepared by NMFS were reviewed by the Stock Assessment Panel who set ABC ranges for red grouper and vermilion snapper. The stock assessment and stock assessment panel report were reviewed by the Socioeconomic Assessment Panel, Reef Fish AP and SSC. The Council after considering recommendations of these groups and the public set TAC for shallow-water grouper in 1992 at 1.6 million pounds above the level for 1991. A regulatory amendment/RIR implementing this proposed change was submitted to NMFS. Amendment 4 instituting a three-year moratorium on issuing vessel permits was submitted to NMFS for review and implementation. NMFS and FMFC/FDNR were requested to complete biological and economic analyses related to adjusting the longline prohibited area and stressed area for Council review in May 1992. The Reef Fish Quota Monitoring Panel reported on projected commercial grouper and snapper landings for 1991.

Shark FMP. Council reviewed the Secretarial Shark FMP and recommended changes to NMFS. The Final Secretarial Shark FMP was distributed to Council for review in January 1992. Staff summarized previous Council comment on the draft FMP.

Shrimp FMP. Staff prepared an options paper for an amendment to FMP. Shrimp Amendment 5 addressing overfishing was approved by NMFS for implementation. The SSC and Shrimp AP reviewed monitoring information on the Tortugas closure. Ad Hoc Limited Entry Committee reviewed the first draft of a limited entry options paper. The Council approved and submitted to NMFS a regulatory amendment seasonally opening three small areas of the Tortugas Sanctuary. The Council approved Draft Amendment 6 for public hearings this fall. The amendment includes a definition of overfishing for white shrimp and proposed permits for all shrimp vessels. The Council referred the discussion paper for a shrimp limited access system to the AP for review and advice on setting up industry workshops. The Council participated in the regional Bycatch Steering Committee which is developing an industry-driven research program to monitor finfish bycatch and develop gear that reduces bycatch. Staff participated in a NMFS-funded economic task team that is developing an ITQ system. Staff participated in the shrimp resources workshop hosted by NMFS. The SSC, Shrimp AP and public at 11 hearings reviewed Draft Amendment 6/RIR. The amendment proposes permitting all vessels, requiring observers on vessels and defines overfishing for white shrimp. The Council will take final action on the amendment in January 1992. The limited entry options paper was reviewed by the AP who recommended workshops not be held until the States considered actions on limiting shrimping effort in their waters. The Council contracted the States regarding their proposed actions. The Council's representatives participated in the Bycatch Steering Committee which is developing the research protocol for assessing bycatch associated with shrimping and gear to reduce bycatch. Staff participated in the NOAA task team that is developing a discussion paper on ITQ systems for the fishery.

Spiny Lobster FMP. The Florida legislature approved a limited entry system for the fishery. Staff drafted an options paper for Amendment 4 which will extend the effort reduction system adopted by the Florida Legislature to the EEZ. This will be acted on in January and submitted to South Atlantic Council for their action.

Swordfish. Emergency rules were implemented. The final rule became effective.

Generic Amendment. The Council and committee took final action on an options paper to standardize the permitting and data collection provisions of the seven FMPs administered by the Council. Staff is developing the amendment for action in January 1992.

OTHER ACTIONS

Habitat Protection

Expressed Council's concern to Minerals Management Service about the effects of removing obsolete oil and gas production structures with explosives on Gulf finfish populations, especially red snapper, and requested that removal of structures consisting of more than three supports with explosives be halted until MMS completes its studies to determine fish mortality from explosives, and to determine effects of losing the platform environment on fish stocks.

Expressed dissatisfaction to EPA with their response to Council letter pertaining to their Mitigation Memorandum of Agreement with the Corps of Engineers, and listed specific questions for them to answer.

Sent reminders to agencies that failed to meet the 45-day response requirement within two weeks following due date.

Reviewed and endorsed the habitat protection recommendations of the National Symposium on Coastal Fish Habitat and the National Coalition for Marine Conservation's resolution to protect America's wetlands.

Texas Habitat Protection AP, Mississippi/Louisiana Habitat Protection AP and the Florida/Alabama Habitat Protection AP were convened to address habitat problems in those states. The Council modified its habitat policy (SOPPs) to provide for more expeditious action by the Council in addressing projects that impact the habitat. The Council commented on and supported the Corps of Engineers' feasibility report for the Sargent Beach segment of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway project. The Council indicated to the chief of the Corps of Engineers the Council's interest in the completion of their Gulf Intracoastal Waterway investigation of maintenance dredging problems, stressing the importance of continued funding. The Council apprised the EPA, Texas Water Commission, and other institutions of Dream, Incorporated's experience with high mortality of shrimp nauplii when culturing in waters from Galveston Bay and vicinity and requested information on their awareness of the phenomenon, stressing the need for investigating it.

Limited Entry

Staff completed the first draft of a limited entry options paper of the shrimp fishery which was then reviewed and modified by the Ad Hoc Limited Entry Committee. NMFS (Washington) initiated contractual agreements for developing the shrimp limited entry system for the Gulf with fishery economists. The Council submitted the discussion paper for the limited access system for the shrimp fishery to the AP and requested the States advise them of plans for effort control systems for state waters.

The spiny lobster limited entry program was drafted as a bill, introduced before the Florida legislature and subsequently enacted. Staff drafted an FMP amendment for spiny lobster to extend the state effort management system into the EEZ.

The Council submitted for implementation of Amendment 4, providing for a three-year moratorium on issuance of permits in the reef fish fishery, while provisions for a limited entry system are developed.

The Council proposed a similar moratorium in Draft Amendment 6 to the Mackerel FMP that was reviewed at public hearings.

Staff completed and submitted to the Committee an options paper for limited entry in the coastal migratory species (mackerel) fishery.