



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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December 18, 2007
FB07-052

An Advisory for Reef Fish Fishermen Fishing in the Gulf of Mexico in 2008

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) expects to complete the implementation of new management measures for the commercial and recreational reef fish fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico during 2008. In October, NOAA Fisheries proposed new requirements for fishermen to use non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing with natural baits, and to have a dehooking device and a venting tool onboard their vessel.

Dehooking devices are commonly available at fishing tackle outlets, or may be made by the fishermen. As proposed, the hook removal device would be required to be constructed to allow the hook to be secured and the barb shielded without re-engaging during the removal process. That would require the dehooking end to be blunt, and all edges rounded. The device would have to be of a size appropriate to secure the range of hook sizes and styles used in the reef fish fishery.

At least one venting tool would be needed onboard to deflate the swim bladders of reef fish that fishermen intend to release. This tool would need to be a sharpened, hollow instrument, such as a hypodermic syringe with the plunger removed, or a 16-gauge needle fixed to a hollow wooden dowel. Use of a tool such as a knife or an ice-pick would not be permissible. For best results, the venting tool should be inserted into the fish at a 45-degree angle approximately 1 to 2 inches behind the base of the pectoral fin. The tool should be inserted just deep enough to release the gases, so that the fish may be released with minimum damage.

Background

The intent of these requirements is to reduce discard mortality when releasing fish. These new measures are part of a recent amendment to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico (Reef Fish FMP) developed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council). NOAA Fisheries Service announced the availability of this amendment for public comment on July 26, 2007, and accepted comments on the amendment through September 24, 2007. NOAA Fisheries Service partially approved Amendment 27 on October 19, 2007, including these measures to reduce discard mortality when releasing fish. NOAA Fisheries Service published a proposed rule to implement the measures in Amendment 27 on October 23, 2007, and accepted comments on the proposed rule through December 7, 2007. A final rule implementing the approved portions of Amendment 27 is expected to be published in early 2008, and to be effective in the 2008 fishing year.

How Can We Improve These Fishery Bulletins?

If you have any suggestions on how we may improve future fishery bulletins please contact:
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