



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

Peter Hood Peter.Hood@noaa.gov
727-824-5305, FAX 727-824-5308
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

August 8, 2008
FB08-045

NOAA Fisheries Service is Seeking Comments on a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Gulf of Mexico Grouper Fishery

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) requests comments from the public on the DEIS developed to analyze the impacts of proposed grouper management actions, including measures to end overfishing of gag. The Environmental Protection Agency announced the availability of the DEIS on August 8, 2008 (73 FR 46269).

Red grouper and gag are both in the Gulf of Mexico shallow-water grouper fishery. Recent assessments of these two species indicate changes in stock status. The red grouper stock has recovered and is no longer considered overfished or undergoing overfishing. Gag were found to be undergoing overfishing, but were not overfished. As a result, changes in management measures are needed. Because management measures affecting one species invariably affect the other, this action examines both red grouper and gag management measures within the shallow-water grouper fishery. In addition, this action also examines compliance requirements for operators of federally permitted reef fish vessels when fishing in state waters to further reduce overfishing of reef fish stocks.

The primary purpose of the DEIS developed by NOAA Fisheries Service in cooperation with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) is to evaluate the effects of a range of alternatives for grouper regulatory actions including: 1) Management targets and thresholds for gag consistent with the requirements of the Sustainable Fisheries Act; 2) gag and red grouper total allowable catch; 3) interim allocations for the commercial and recreational gag and red grouper fisheries; 4) annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures for the commercial and recreational gag and red grouper fisheries; 5) commercial quotas and quota management for gag, red grouper, and shallow-water grouper; 6) measures to reduce grouper discard mortality in the reef fish fishery;

7) recreational measures to manage the grouper fishery consistent with proposed ACLs; 8) seasonal area closures to protect gag spawning aggregations; and 9) measures to improve federal regulatory compliance.

The regulatory measures evaluated in this DEIS may be implemented through a final rule for Amendment 30B to the Council's Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico. An interim rule for gag measures may also be needed to end gag overfishing if a final rule from Amendment 30B is not implemented prior to January 1, 2009. This interim rule was requested by the Council.

Request for Comments

Written comments on this proposed rule must be received no later than 5 p.m., Eastern time, on **September 22, 2008**, to be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service. See the **Addresses** section for information on where and how to submit comments.

Addresses

Copies of the DEIS are available on the Council's Web site at <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>, the e-Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>, or in printed form by contacting Peter Hood (address below).

Sustainable Fisheries Division
Southeast Regional Office
NOAA Fisheries Service
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

You may submit written comments by any of the following methods:

- Electronic submissions: Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. All comments received are a part of the public record and will be posted to

www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NOAA Fisheries Service will accept anonymous comments (enter N/A in the required fields, if you wish to remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

- Fax: (727) 824-5308
- Mail: Peter Hood at address above

How Can We Improve These Fishery Bulletins?

If you have any suggestions on how we may improve the contents of future fishery bulletins, please contact:
Kim Amendola, Communication Specialist
Phone: 727-551-5707, FAX: 727-824-5320
e-mail: SERO.Communications.Comments@noaa.gov

If you would like to receive these fishery bulletins via e-mail as soon as they are published, please e-mail us at SERO.Communications.Comments@noaa.gov and include: (1) "Request for Electronic Fishery Bulletins" in the subject line and (2) your preferred e-mail address in the body of the e-mail. You will still receive a print copy of these bulletins through the mail.

FIRST CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
PERMIT NO. 6091

National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Regional Office, F/SER24
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
Official Business
FB08-045