

interested parties on the provisions of the Scoping document for Generic Amendment for Offshore Marine Aquaculture. The scoping document: (1) Summarizes existing Federal statutes, programs, and rules that apply to marine aquaculture of fish and marine organisms in the Federal waters of the Exclusive Economic Zone; (2) lists fishery stocks that may be cultured in marine aquaculture programs carried out under the amendment; (3) discusses the environmental impact and other effects of various marine aquaculture practices to provide a background for selecting alternatives for the best management practices (BMP) for regulating the marine aquaculture process; and (4) sets forth a broad range of management alternatives for public consideration in selecting the best management practices (BMP) possible. Copies of the scoping document will be available at the meetings and are available prior to the meetings from the Council (see **ADDRESSES**).

In accordance with NOAA Administrative Order 216-6, Section 5.02(c), the Council has identified this preliminary range of alternatives as a means to initiate discussion for scoping purposes only. This may not represent the full range of alternatives that eventually will be evaluated by the Council. Depending on the range of alternatives and issues identified during the scoping process, the Council may prepare an Environmental Assessment, with a Finding of No Significant Impact in association with the proposed actions. Should significant issues be identified in regard to the proposed actions, NMFS would publish a Notice of Intent to prepare a DSEIS.

Times and Locations of Scoping Meetings

The scoping meetings will be held at the following locations and dates immediately following the scoping hearings for a Generic Limited Access Amendment (noticed separately) that will begin at 6 p.m. and conclude by 10 p.m.

1. Tuesday, February 17, 2004, Adams Mark Hotel and Resort, 64 South Water Street, Mobile, AL 36602; telephone: 251-438-4000;
2. Wednesday, February 18, 2004, J.L. Scott Marine Education Center and Aquarium, 115 Beach Boulevard, Biloxi, MS 39530; telephone: 228-374-5550;
3. Thursday, February 19, 2004, Larose Regional Park, 2001 East 5th Street, Larose, LA 70373; telephone: 504-693-7355;
4. Monday, February 23, 2004, Holiday Inn Emerald Beach, 1102 South

Shoreline Boulevard, Corpus Christi, TX 78401; telephone: 361-883-5731;

5. Tuesday, February 24, 2004, Moody Gardens Hotel, 7 Hope Boulevard, Galveston, TX 77554; telephone: 409-741-8484;

6. Wednesday, February 25, 2004, National Marine Fisheries Service, Panama City Laboratory, 3500 Delwood Beach Road, Panama City, FL 32408; telephone: 850-234-6541 ext. 201;

7. Thursday, February 26, 2004, Madeira Beach City Hall Auditorium, 300 Municipal Drive, Madeira Beach, FL 33708; telephone: 727-391-9951; and

8. Monday, March 1, 2004, Holiday Inn Beachside, 3841 North Roosevelt Boulevard, Key West, FL 33040; telephone: 305-294-2571.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Trish Kennedy at the Council (see **ADDRESSES**) by February 13, 2004.

Dated: February 9, 2004.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[I.D. 012604C]

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic; Reef Fish; Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico; Vermilion Snapper Rebuilding Plan

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare a draft supplemental environmental impact statement (DSEIS); request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) intends to prepare a DSEIS that describes and analyzes management alternatives associated with establishing a vermilion snapper rebuilding plan based on biomass-based stock rebuilding targets and thresholds. The rebuilding plan will be implemented through an amendment to the Fishery Management Plan for the

Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico (FMP). The purpose of this notice is to solicit public comments on the scope of issues to be addressed in the DSEIS, which will be submitted to NMFS for filing with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for publication of a Notice of Availability for public comment.

DATES: Written comments must be received by the Council by March 15, 2004.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on the scope of the DSEIS and requests for additional information on the Draft Vermilion Snapper Rebuilding Amendment should be sent to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 3018 North U.S. Highway 301, Suite 1000, Tampa, FL 33619; telephone: (813) 228-2815; fax: (813) 225-7015. Comments may also be sent by e-mail to Stu.Kennedy@gulfcouncil.org.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stu Kennedy; phone: (813) 228-2815 ext. 231; fax: (813) 225-7015; e-mail: Stu.Kennedy@gulfcouncil.org.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Council is preparing to amend the FMP to establish a vermilion snapper rebuilding plan that is based on biomass-based stock rebuilding targets and thresholds. The Council will develop a DSEIS that describes and analyzes management alternatives considered in the Draft Vermilion snapper Rebuilding Amendment.

Scoping meetings were held in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida in late August 2003, to take public comment on the scope of issues to be addressed for ending overfishing. At the time, the level of effects did not seem sufficient to warrant a SEIS. On October 30, 2003, NMFS declared Gulf of Mexico vermilion snapper overfished. That determination increases the likelihood of a significant impact as a result of the need for a rebuilding plan. This type of action normally requires an EIS or SEIS and, as a result, the Council is forgoing the initial preparation of an environmental assessment and is developing an SEIS. The scoping meetings held in August, 2003, covered the range of options the Council chose prior to the declaration on the overfished condition and those have not changed since the declaration. Therefore, the previous meetings adequately scoped the issues.

The DSEIS will evaluate biomass-based stock rebuilding targets and thresholds, will consider various rebuilding schedules, consistent with the legal mandate provided by § 304(e)(4) of the Magnuson-Stevens

Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) to rebuild overfished stocks in ten years or less except in cases where the biology of the overfished stock, other environmental conditions or international agreements dictate otherwise, and will consider management alternatives to limit harvest to levels consistent with the selected rebuilding plan. The rebuilding period for vermilion snapper will be ten years or less based on Magnuson-Stevens Act guidelines. The DSEIS will consider various alternatives to achieve the rebuilding goal in either seven or ten years based on constant catch strategies, constant fishing mortality rate strategies or stepped strategies that holds harvest constant for three or four year periods consistent with the average of the harvests under a constant fishing mortality strategy. The status of the stock would be reviewed every 3 to 5 years to evaluate the need for additional management measures.

Management alternatives considered by the Council could include, but would not be limited to, seasonal closures, quotas, minimum size limits, bag limits and trip limits.

Written comments on the range of alternatives and scope of issues to be addressed in the DSEIS may be sent to the Council (*see ADDRESSES*).

Once the Council completes the DSEIS associated with the Draft Vermilion snapper Rebuilding Amendment, it will submit the document to NMFS for filing with the EPA. The EPA will publish a Notice of Availability of the DSEIS for public comment in the **Federal Register**. The DSEIS will have a 45-day comment period. This procedure is pursuant to regulations issued by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 40 CFR parts 1500–1508) and to NOAA Administrative Order 216–6 regarding NOAA's compliance with NEPA and the CEQ regulations.

The Council will consider public comments received on the DSEIS in developing the final supplemental environmental impact statement (FSEIS) and before adopting final management measures for the Vermilion Snapper Rebuilding Amendment. The Council will submit both the final Amendment, including the supporting FSEIS, to NMFS for Secretarial review, approval, and implementation under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

NMFS will announce, through a notice published in the **Federal Register**, the availability of the final Vermilion Snapper Rebuilding Amendment for public review during

the Secretarial review period. During Secretarial review, NMFS will also file the FSEIS with the EPA for a final 30-day public comment period. This comment period will be concurrent with the Secretarial review period and will end prior to final agency action to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the final Vermilion Snapper Rebuilding Amendment.

NMFS will announce, through a notice published in the **Federal Register**, all public comment periods on the final Vermilion Snapper Rebuilding Amendment, its proposed implementing regulations, and its associated FSEIS. NMFS will consider all public comments received during the Secretarial review period, whether they are on the final Amendment, the proposed regulations, or the FSEIS, prior to final agency action.

Dated: February 9, 2004.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[I.D. 012604B]

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic; Draft Generic Amendment to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Region and to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico; Scoping Meetings

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare a draft supplemental environmental impact statement (DSEIS); notice of scoping meetings; and request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) intends to prepare a DSEIS that describes and analyzes management alternatives associated with limiting access in the king mackerel and reef fish fisheries. The purpose of this notice is to solicit public comments on the scope of issues to be addressed in the DSEIS, which will be submitted to NMFS for filing

with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for publication of a Notice of Availability for public comment.

DATES: Written comments must be received by the Council by 5 p.m. on March 5, 2004 (*see ADDRESSES*). A series of scoping meetings will be held in February and March 2004. *See SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION* for specific dates and times.

ADDRESSES: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 3018 North U.S. Highway 301, Suite 1000, Tampa, FL 33619; telephone: (813) 228–2815; fax: (813) 225–7015. Comments may also be sent by e-mail to:

Rick.Leard@gulfcouncil.org.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rick Leard; phone: (813) 228–2815 ext. 228; fax: (813) 225–7015; e-mail: *Rick.Leard@gulfcouncil.org.*

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: King mackerel and reef fish in the Gulf of Mexico are managed under their respective FMPs. Both fisheries operate under a moratorium on the issuance of new commercial vessel permits. The moratorium on new king mackerel permits was established by Amendment 8 to the Mackerel FMP in March 1998, and was extended with the implementation of Amendment 12 to the Mackerel FMP. It is scheduled to expire on October 15, 2005. The moratorium on the issuance of new commercial reef fish permits was established by Amendment 4 to the Reef Fish FMP in May 1992. The moratorium has been maintained since that time with the implementation of Amendments 9, 11, and 17 to the Reef Fish FMP. It is scheduled to expire on December 31, 2005.

The Council intends to develop a DSEIS that describes and analyzes management alternatives to limit entry in the king mackerel and reef fish fisheries. Those alternatives include, but are not limited to the following: (1) A “no action” alternative regarding each fishery, which would allow the moratoria to expire; (2) An extension of the existing moratoria for a designated time frame; or (3) The establishment of some form of license limitation system for each fishery, including individual fishing quotas. If a license limitation system is chosen, the Council may also consider alternatives for different classes of licenses, initial qualification, initial allocations by license classes, transferability, and appeals regarding eligibility.

In accordance with NOAA Administrative Order 216–6, Section 5.02(c), the Council has identified this