

amending the TED regulations, during the transition period before the final rule takes effect. NMFS, Southeast Region accepted the request as an application under 50 CFR 223.207(e)(2), which provides that NMFS may issue permits, subject to such conditions and restrictions as NMFS deems appropriate, authorizing public or private experimentation aimed at improving shrimp retention efficiency of existing approved TEDs and at developing additional TEDs. The authority to issue such permits has been delegated to the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator.

The TED configurations that will be required when the final rule takes effect generally match or exceed the current regulatory standards for TEDs. Thus, fishermen who transition to the new TED configurations, in advance of the rule taking effect, would be in compliance with both the current and future regulatory requirements. The final rule does lift two restrictions on TED configurations under the current regulations. Specifically: (a) currently, accelerator funnels may not be used with the double cover TED. Under the final rule, double cover offshore TEDs may be used with an accelerator funnel. The inside horizontal opening of the funnel must be at least 71 inches (180 cm) in offshore waters and in the inshore waters of Georgia and South Carolina and at least 44 inches (112 cm) in all other inshore waters; and (b) currently, webbing flaps on bottom-opening TEDs in the Shrimp Fishery-Sea Turtle Conservation Areas (SFSTCAs) must be shortened to extend no further than the posterior edge of the TED grid. Under the final rule, the 71-inch (180 cm) offshore TED may be used with a webbing flap extending up to 24 inches (61 cm) behind the posterior edge of the grid on top- and bottom-opening TEDs, in all waters, including the Shrimp Fishery-Sea Turtle Conservation Areas (SFSTCAs).

Because the final rule did not contain any special provisions for the transition period between its publication and effective dates, the specific changes in the final rule that are more permissive than the current TED requirements are technically not approved changes until the final rule takes effect. NMFS, in issuing the final rule however, determined that the newly required 71-inch (180 cm) and double cover offshore TEDs are far more effective than the TEDs approved under the current regulations and that the new TEDs can be used effectively with these changes. Mr. Saunders' permit application requested that fishermen be allowed to use TED configurations, consistent with

the final rule and including these more permissive changes, prior to the final rule taking effect.

Permit Issuance

On March 26, 2003, the Southeast Regional Administrator, NMFS, issued the requested permit, pursuant to 50 CFR 223.207(e)(2). Issuance of the permit is necessary to encourage the early transition by shrimp fishermen to the use of more effective TEDs, furthering NMFS' goal of sea turtle conservation. The newly required TEDs are more effective at releasing sea turtles than those currently required. The use of a funnel with the double cover offshore TED and a long flap with the 71-inch (180 cm) offshore TED have already been determined by NMFS to be effective modifications that may enhance shrimp retention on these highly effective TEDs. This permit will remove regulatory barriers to fishermen's transition to the newly required TEDs and will allow them to experiment with gear configurations to maximize their shrimp retention, prior to the final rule coming into effect.

Dated: April 21, 2003.

Laurie K. Allen,

*Acting Director, Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 042103A]

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings

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

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) will convene public meetings.

DATES: The meetings will be held on May 12-15, 2003.

ADDRESSES: These meetings will be held at the Edgewater Beach Resort, 11212 Front Beach Road, Panama City Beach, FL; telephone: 850-235-4044.

Council address: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 3018 U.S. Highway 301 North, Suite 1000, Tampa, FL 33619.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Wayne E. Swingle, Executive Director,

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; telephone: (813) 228-2815.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Council

May 14

8:30 a.m.—Convene.

8:45 a.m. - 12 noon—Receive public testimony on the Draft Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) Regulatory Amendment and Draft Reef Fish Amendment 21. The draft CMP Regulatory Amendment sets standards for maximum sustainable yield (MSY), optimum yield (OY), overfished and overfishing for king and Spanish mackerel, and cobia. Draft Reef Fish Amendment 21 contains a proposal to extend the time period for the Madison/Swanson and Steamboat Lumps marine reserves beyond their June 16, 2004 expiration date. Final action to approve Reef Fish Amendment 21 will be taken at a subsequent meeting.

1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.—Receive presentations on individual fishing quotas (IFQ).

2:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.—Receive the report of the Reef Fish Management Committee.

4:30 p.m. - 5 p.m.—(Closed Session) Receive the report of the Personnel Committee.

May 15

8:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.—Receive the Mackerel Management Committee report.

9 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.—Receive the Shrimp Management Committee report.

9:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.—Receive the Law Enforcement Committee report.

10:30 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.—Receive the Administrative Policy Committee report.

10:45 a.m. - 11 a.m.—Receive the Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum Management Committee report.

11 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.—Receive a report of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) Advisory Committee.

11:15 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.—Receive a report of the Gulf Safety Committee.

11:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.—Receive a report of the Logo Selection Committee.

11:45 a.m. - 12 noon—Receive Enforcement Reports.

12 noon - 12:15 p.m.—Receive the NMFS Regional Administrator's Report.

12:15 p.m. - 12:45 p.m.—Receive Director's Reports.

12:45 p.m. - 1 p.m.—Other Business.

Committees

May 12

8:30 a.m. - 10 a.m.—Closed Session - Convene the Personnel Committee.

10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.—Convene the Shrimp Management Committee to discuss the provisions of Draft Shrimp Amendment 13 Options Paper and consider potential actions regarding Shrimp Amendment 10.

1 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.—Convene the Reef Fish Management Committee to hear presentations regarding the evaluation of the Madison/Swanson and Steamboat Lumps Marine Reserves and the results of a National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) trolling study. There will also be presentations by Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) personnel on fish traps and by NMFS on vessel monitoring systems (VMS). The committee will review public comments and recommendations by the Scientific and Statistical Committee and Reef Fish Advisory Panel on Amendment 21 and make recommendations to be considered by the full Council on Wednesday afternoon.

May 13

8:30 a.m. - 10 a.m.—Convene the Administrative Policy Committee to discuss proposed revisions to the Council's Administrative Handbook.

10 a.m. - 12 noon—Convene the Law Enforcement Committee to discuss criminal penalties for managing game and fish resources and to approve the Enforcement Operations Plan. They will also hear a request by the Worldwide Water Foundation for fishing vessel designation.

1:30 p.m. - 3 p.m.—Convene a joint meeting of the Reef Fish, Mackerel, and Red Drum Management Committees to discuss the proposed scoping document on a generic aquaculture amendment.

3 p.m. - 5 p.m.—Convene the Mackerel Management Committee to review and comment on the final CMP Regulatory Amendment and to discuss a scoping document for Draft CMP Amendment 15.

Although non-emergency issues not contained in the agenda may come before the Council for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA), those issues may not be the subject of formal Council action during this meeting. Council action will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in this notice and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under section 305 (c) of the MSFCMA, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency. A copy of the Committee schedule and agenda can be obtained by calling (813) 228-2815.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Anne Alford at the Council (see ADDRESSES) by May 5, 2003.

Dated: April 21, 2003.

Matteo J. Milazzo,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 042103B]

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council; Technical Workshops

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

ACTION: Notice of workshop series to address Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEP) and Ecosystem Models.

SUMMARY: The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) will hold a series of technical workshops involving selected members from its Habitat and Environmental Protection Advisory Panel, Coral Advisory Panel and invited scientists with background in specific habitat type or species utilization patterns.

DATES: The workshops will be held during the months of May, July, August, September and October. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific dates and times.

ADDRESSES: The workshop series will be held in St. Petersburg, FL, Beaufort, NC, and Charleston, SC. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific locations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kim Iverson, Public Information Officer, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, One Southpark Circle, Suite 306, Charleston, SC, 29407; telephone: (843) 571-4366 or (866) SAFMC-10; fax: (843) 769-4520.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The workshops will take place: May 19-21, 2003, May 21-23, 2003, July 1-2, 2003, August 19-21, 2003, September 23-25, 2003 and October 20-22, 2003.

The workshop process will initiate development of a South Atlantic Council Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) which presents fishery and resource

information for fisheries in the South Atlantic Bight ecosystem in context. The workshop processes will integrate two directives in the Final Rule for Essential Fish Habitat: (1) Review and update Essential Fish Habitat information, and (2) Consider ecosystem-based management through development of a Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the South Atlantic Region.

The Council recognizes the scope of the significant task necessary to meet the new essential fish habitat mandates and directive to begin evaluating ecosystem-based management through the development of a Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) and is again calling upon the Habitat Advisory Panel members and other technical experts involved in the previous Habitat Plan development process to serve as or identify appropriate experts to function on a quasi-plan development team for this task. The Habitat and Coral Advisory Panel are scheduled to meet this fall and will provide additional guidance on the workshop process and ecosystem management.

A Final EFH Rule was published on January 17, 2002 replacing the interim Final Rule of December 19, 1997 on which the original EFH and EFH-Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) designations were made. The Councils have, pursuant to the Final EFH Rule, been directed to update EFH and EFH-HAPC information and designations; in addition, pursuant to revisions to NOAA General Counsel interpretation of the National Environmental Policy Act the Councils will be required to update all Environmental Impact Statements for all Federal Fishery Management Plans under their jurisdiction. Information compiled during this process will further facilitate meeting both the EFH and the NEPA mandate. As was done with the original Habitat Plan, a series of technical workshops will be conducted by Council habitat staff, in cooperation with NOAA Beaufort Laboratory, NMFS Southeast Fishery Science Center Miami Laboratory, NMFS Southeast Regional Office personnel and invited participants. Workshops are intended to build on a review of existing information presented in the Habitat Plan, and focus on updating information pursuant to the new EFH Rule. This effort will begin the integration of comprehensive details of habitat distribution and characterization, the biology of managed species including their biological role in and the characteristics of the food web they exist in.

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) Development and