UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

OCT 4 2012

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act, an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Environmental Assessment for Reef Fish Amendment 34 Commercial Reef Fish Permit Requirements and Crew Size on Dual-Permitted Vessels in the Gulf of Mexico [RIN: 0648-BB72]

LOCATION: Gulf of Mexico

SUMMARY: The actions analyzed in this environmental assessment eliminate the earned income qualification requirement for the renewal of Gulf of Mexico commercial reef fish permits and increase the maximum number of crew members for dual-permitted vessels. The existing earned income requirement in the reef fish fishery has been determined to no longer be necessary. The regulation pertaining to the maximum number of crew stipulates that dual-permitted vessels without a certificate of inspection are limited to a three-person crew when fishing commercially. The increase to four crew members would most directly benefit commercial spear fishermen. This would allow two persons to remain aboard while there are two divers in the water, thereby increasing the safety of commercial diving operations.

The environmental assessment analyzes the impacts of these actions. By itself, this amendment is not controversial because the proposed actions would allow more flexibility for the reef fish fishery.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator
Southeast Regional Office
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701
(727) 824-5305
FAX (727) 824-5308.

The environmental review process led us to conclude that these actions will not have a significant impact on the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement was not prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI), including the environmental assessment, is enclosed for your information.

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed EA/FONSI we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents. Please submit any written comments to the Responsible Official named above.

Sincerely,

for Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure

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