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

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups: JUL 19 2013

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

TITLE: *Framework Action to Set the Annual Catch Limit and Bag Limit for Vermilion Snapper, Set Annual Catch Limit for Yellowtail Snapper, and Modify the Venting Tool Requirement (including environmental assessment, regulatory impact review, and regulatory flexibility act analysis)*

LOCATION: Exclusive Economic Zone, Gulf of Mexico

SUMMARY: Recent stock assessments evaluated the condition of the Gulf of Mexico vermilion snapper and yellowtail snapper stocks. Neither stock is overfished or undergoing overfishing. One action of this framework is to set the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) for the vermilion snapper stock. The preferred alternative is no action (maintain the ACL at 3.42 million pounds) because of stakeholder concerns that the stock condition may be lower than indicated by the stock assessment. Another action is to evaluate changing the vermilion snapper bag limit. The preferred alternative is to set a 10-fish vermilion snapper bag limit within the 20-fish reef fish aggregate bag limit, with the intent of capping harvest at current levels. The third action sets the yellowtail snapper ACL. The preferred alternative increased the ACL from 725,000 pounds to 901,125 pounds, consistent with the acceptable biological catch recommendation. Finally, there is an action evaluating the requirement to have and use a venting tool when reef fish fishing. The preferred alternative is to eliminate the requirement providing fishermen more flexibility in how to address barotrauma when releasing fish.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D., Regional Administrator
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The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action 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 supporting Environmental Assessment (EA), 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,

Patricia A. Montanio
NEPA Coordinator

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