



Mississippi State University Extension Service

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Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station

Gulf Coast Fisherman

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VESSEL MONITORING SYSTEM REQUIREMENT FOR GULF OF MEXICO REEF FISH FISHERY DELAYED UNTIL MAY 6, 2007

NOAA Fisheries Service announces a 60-day delay until May 6, 2007, in the effective date for the Gulf of Mexico reef fish vessel monitoring system (VMS) requirements. The delay is necessary to: (1) resolve an unanticipated technological problem with one of the approved VMS units, and (2) allow vendors additional time to meet the demand for purchase and installation of VMS units that are currently backlogged. For questions regarding the 60-day delay contact Jason Rueter or Peter Hood at (727) 824-5305. Also, NOAA Fisheries Service Office for Law Enforcement (OLE) announces the Faria WatchDog 750VMS is now type-approved for use in the reef fish fishery of the Gulf of Mexico. Current information and frequently asked questions on the VMS program including the type-approved units, Boatracs, Faria, and Thrane & Thrane, can be found at the Southeast Regions Web site: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/vms/vms.htm>.

Additionally, OLE would like to remind reef fish permit holders of the availability of a VMS reimbursement program for the Gulf of Mexico reef fish fishery. These funds will be used to reimburse vessel owners and/or operators for the purchase price of the VMS. There are a limited amount of funds available for reimbursement. New VMS programs are being implemented around the United States in 2007, and these programs will be eligible for reimbursement through the same funds. Therefore, it is important to apply for reimbursement as soon as possible. Reimbursement requests will be handled on a first-come first-serve basis. The reimbursable expense is the purchase price of the least expensive VMS unit type-approved for the reef fish fishery. Currently, the least expensive unit costs \$3,095.

For questions about VMS units, contact the VMS Support Center (phone: 888-219-9228) or the Southeast Region OLE, 263 13th Avenue South, Suite 109, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701 (phone: 800-758-4833).

For questions regarding reimbursement applications, contact the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, 205 SE Spokane Street, Suite 100, Portland, Oregon 97202, phone: 503-595-3100, fax: 503-595-3232.

FISHING VESSEL SAFETY COURSE SCHEDULED

The 1988 Commercial Fishing Industry Safety Act mandates that all documented commercial fishing vessels operating beyond the Boundary Line (12 miles offshore in the Gulf) or with more than 16 persons on board conduct monthly emergency drills. The drills must be conducted by a Certified Drill Instructor.

On April 30, 2007, a one-day course providing training necessary for Drill Instructor Certification will be offered in Biloxi

at the Mississippi State University Coastal Research & Extension Center on Poppo Ferry Road beginning at 8:30 am. The course is being provided by McMillan Offshore Survival Training. The course fee of \$150 per participant covers lunch and all classroom materials.

This USCG approved, one day course provides both theoretical (classroom) and practical (hands on) exercises designed to assist fishermen in developing a survival strategy, familiarize trainees with required USCG lifesaving equipment, rehearse in-water survival skills and increase their level of self confidence. Persons completing this course will be nationally certified fishing vessel drill conductors. Subjects covered in training include:

- Abandonment procedures from the vessel
- Fighting a fire in different locations on board the vessel
- Recovering an individual from the water
- Launching procedures for survival craft (life rafts)
- Donning immersion suits and other wearable PFDs
- Making a voice radio distress call and using visual distress signals
- Activating alarm systems

To register for the course, telephone John or Mary McMillan at (800) 379-6678 or contact Dave Burrage (228) 546-1028.

FEDERAL COURT RULES ON RED SNAPPER MANAGEMENT PLAN

A federal judge found that a previous rebuilding plan for red snapper set forth by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) violates the Administrative Procedures Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act according to media reports. The ruling orders NMFS to issue a new red snapper rebuilding plan in the next nine months. The case, filed in 2005 by Ocean Conservancy and the Gulf Restoration Network, deals with a rebuilding plan that is no longer relevant. An interim rule for the U.S. shrimp industry, commercial red snapper fishermen, and recreational fishermen is expected to go into effect shortly and proposed changes to the rebuilding plan are scheduled to be in effect within nine months.

While the case applies to a plan that is outdated, the underlying issue remains. Red snapper are overfished, meaning that the increasing stock will not reach its historical levels by 2032. This is extremely disappointing to the U.S. shrimp industry, which made significant financial sacrifices and met the stringent goals that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) set in 1999 to reduce red snapper mortality due to shrimp nets by 50%.

The most recent Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) red snapper stock assessment, which set forth proposals to manage the overfished red snapper stock, calls for significant reductions in the total allowable catch for the directed fisheries. The current Council proposal also calls for an additional 50%-74% reduction of juvenile red snapper bycatch mortality by 2007. The shrimp industry bycatch mortality has been reduced already by more than 60% according to scientists at the National Oceans and Atmospheric Administration Southeast Bycatch Workshop.

2007 OFFSHORE AQUACULTURE LEGISLATION SENT TO CONGRESS

On March 12, 2007, U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez announced the formal transmittal of the Administration's 2007 National Offshore Aquaculture Act to Congress. The purpose of the Act is to create a regulatory framework that allows for safe and sustainable aquaculture operations in U.S. federal waters. A copy of the 2007 Act and background information is available at www.aquaculture.noaa.gov.

CRAB TRAP REMOVAL PROGRAM RECYCLES OVER 9,800 TRAPS

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) and the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL) recently contracted with 45 Mississippi resident commercial crab trap fishermen to remove a total of 9,862 derelict crab traps from Mississippi marine waters. The project was funded through the Mississippi Hurricane Katrina Disaster Restoration, Enhancement and Monitoring Program to Study the Recovery of Gulf Fisheries. Eligibility for the program required Mississippi crab trap fishermen to have been licensed commercially in the year 2005 (license years 2004-2005 or 2005-2006), hold a current crab trap license and show proof of residency.

Mississippi's closed season for crab traps began February 5 at 6 a.m. and reopened February 17 at 6 a.m. Licensed crab trap fishermen were allowed to remove their traps from the water during the first seven days of the closure. After February 11, any traps remaining in public waters were considered abandoned and subject to removal. Crab traps may become derelict in many ways but are primarily lost by storms, which can break the buoy lines. Although crab fishermen brought their traps in from the water to keep them safe as Hurricane Katrina approached, the storm surge consumed the traps anyway.

Three drop-off sites were set up to receive the derelict traps: Bayou Caddy in Bay St. Louis, the Point in Pascagoula and Ocean Springs Harbor in Ocean Springs. DMR and GCRL staff manned the sites and loaded the traps into dumpsters. The dumpsters were taken to David Motor & Scrap where the traps were recycled.

Since the program's inception in 1999, over 15,000 abandoned and derelict traps have been removed from Mississippi marine waters.

This information was compiled by [Dave Burrage](#) and [Benedict Posadas](#). For more information, contact our office at 1815 Popp's Ferry Road, Biloxi, MS 39532 or telephone (228) 388-4710.

Sincerely,



Dave Burrage

Marine Resources Specialist
MSU Coastal Research and Extension Center