

SEA GRANT
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Local fishermen interested in red snapper regulations will have a chance to see first hand some of the debate over the issues when the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council meets in Point Clear later this month. The meeting runs from January 22nd – 26th at the Grand Hotel Marriott.

Most of the in-depth discussion will occur in the Joint Reef Fish / Shrimp Management Committee meeting which takes place Tuesday, January 23rd from 8:30 to 12:00 pm and 1:30 to 4:00 p.m. There is no public testimony scheduled during this period.

The full Council will meet Thursday, January 25th at 8:30. Public testimony is scheduled for exempted fishery permits and The Vermillion Snapper Regulatory Amendment. Following these two issues, there will be an Open Public Comment Period. This will be an opportunity for fishermen to comment on the proposed temporary rule to address overfishing of red snapper during 2007. That proposed temporary rule would:

- Reduce the red snapper total allowable catch quota to 6.5 million pounds resulting in a commercial quota of 3.315 million pounds and a recreational quota of 3.185 million pounds.
- Reduce the red snapper recreational bag limit from four fish to two fish per person per day to meet the quota.

- Prohibit the captain and crew of for-hire vessels from retaining the recreational bag limit.
- Reduce the commercial minimum size limit from 15 inches to 13 inches total length.
- Establish a target red snapper bycatch mortality reduction goal for the shrimp fishery that equates to 50% of the bycatch mortality that occurred during 2001-2003 and a level of shrimp effort equal to that observed in the fishery in 2005.

After the public testimony, the Council will hear reports from the various committees. At this time, it is likely that the Council will approve a schedule for public hearings on the proposed Joint Reef Fish 27 / Shrimp 14 Amendment. This Amendment addresses the longer term rebuilding plan for red snapper and bycatch reduction. Fishermen will have further opportunities to comment on these proposed regulations later in the year. For more information on the up-coming Council meeting, you can contact the Council at 1-888-833-1844.