

bycatch in South Atlantic penaeid shrimp fisheries included in the amendment.

Draft Amendment 2 would also modify the management unit to include the populations of brown and pink shrimp occurring along the U.S. Atlantic coast from the east coast of Florida, including the Atlantic side of the Florida Keys, to the North Carolina/Virginia border. This amendment includes measures to reduce bycatch only in the penaeid shrimp fishery.

Shrimp trawls have a significant bycatch of non-target finfish and invertebrates, most of which are discarded dead. This may reduce ecosystem diversity, adversely impact other fauna, and significantly reduce yield in other fisheries directed at these discarded species. The Council is proposing regulations to address a mandate established by the Atlantic States Marine Fishery Commission to minimize the impact of bycatch on Spanish mackerel and weakfish resources.

Also, the South Atlantic states, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida are directed under the interjurisdictional weakfish management plan to implement management measures that will reduce bycatch of weakfish in shrimp trawls by 50 percent for the 1996 shrimp season. The Council, in order to create compatible regulations with the South Atlantic states, is addressing bycatch in Federal waters to ensure effective reduction of weakfish bycatch throughout the range of the species.

#### *Management Measures under Consideration*

The following management measures are under consideration by the Council for inclusion in Amendment 2 to the Shrimp FMP:

1. Add brown and pink shrimp to the management unit,
2. Define overfishing for brown and pink shrimp,
3. Define optimum yield for the pink and brown shrimp fisheries,
4. Require the use of certified BRDs in all penaeid shrimp trawls in the South Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). All shrimp nets (any net with mesh less than 2 1/2 inches (6.35 cm) stretch mesh) and all nets greater than 15 ft (4.6 m) in footrope length (or compatible with Turtle Excluder Device requirements for try nets) that are used as try (test) nets would be required to use a certified BRD.

A. Upon implementation of Amendment 2, BRDs that have passed the operational testing phase of the NMFS cooperative bycatch research

program (fish eyes, extended funnels and large mesh) are de facto certified for use in the EEZ.

B. Other BRDs will subsequently be certified according to procedures and criteria specified in item 5.

5. Establish a BRD certification process and specify certification criteria for new or modified BRDs. The Council is specifically requesting input from industry members concerning protocol options for future BRD certification of new or modified BRDs:

A. The following are options for BRD certification protocol being considered by the Council:

*Option 1:* The Council makes final recommendations for certification to the NMFS Regional Director;

*Option 2:* The Regional Director makes the decision based on direct application to NMFS; and

*Option 3:* BRDs developed, tested and approved by state agencies, meeting the criteria specified in the amendment, may be used in the EEZ in lieu of BRDs certified by NMFS.

Three geographical sub-options are identified for Option 3 to specify where state-approved BRDs would be allowed for use in the EEZ:

- i: Adjacent to the state in which the BRD was approved,
- ii: Throughout the EEZ in the South Atlantic region, or
- iii: In the EEZ by vessels registered in the state where BRDs have been approved.

B. The Amendment will also establish certification criteria for new or modified BRDs. New or modified BRDs must be certified or approved by NMFS for use in the South Atlantic penaeid shrimp fishery based on the following criteria:

- i. The BRD must reduce the bycatch component of fishing mortality for Spanish mackerel and weakfish by 50 percent, and
- ii. The shrimp loss rate (by weight) must be acceptable to fishermen.

The Council intends to finalize both Amendments at its meeting in St. Augustine, FL, from February 12-16, 1996. The public will have an opportunity to comment at the full Council session before the Council takes final action to adopt the amendment's management measures. Once finalized, the amendment will be submitted to NMFS for review, approval and implementation. NMFS will provide a 60-day public comment period on the amendment and a 45-day public comment period on the proposed implementing rule during its 110-day review period.

#### *Special Accommodations*

These hearings are physically accessible to people with disabilities.

Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to the Council office (see **ADDRESSES**) by December 27, 1995.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: December 15, 1995.

Richard W. Surdi,

*Acting Director, Office of Fisheries Conservation and Management, National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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## **50 CFR Part 655**

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### **Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fisheries; 1996 Specifications**

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

**ACTION:** Proposed 1996 initial specifications; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS proposes initial specifications for the 1996 fishing year for Atlantic mackerel, squid, and butterfish (SMB). Regulations governing these fisheries require NMFS to publish specifications for the upcoming fishing year and provide an opportunity for the public to comment. This action is intended to promote the development of the U.S. SMB fisheries.

**DATES:** Public comments must be received on or before January 17, 1996.

**ADDRESSES:** Copies of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's quota paper and recommendations are available from David R. Keifer, Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Room 2115, Federal Building, 300 South New Street, Dover, DE 19901.

Comments should be sent to Dr. Andrew A. Rosenberg, Director, Northeast Region, NMFS, 1 Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Please mark the envelope "Comments—1996 SMB specifications."

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Myles Raizin, 508-281-9104.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Regulations implementing the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fisheries (FMP)