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**LATEST TESTS OF NOAA GULF FISH SURVEYS
SHOW NO NEGATIVE IMPACT ON SEAFOOD QUALITY**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced today that analyses of the second and third round of toxicology survey results from Gulf water, marine species, and sediment samples show no elevated toxins or bacteria from recent hurricanes.

Agency scientists have been collecting samples since two weeks after Katrina made landfall. The initial samples contained no elevated toxins or bacteria. The latest analyses also found no cause for concern.

The samples were tested for toxins that might have been released into the marine ecosystem after hurricane flooding, such as PCBs, pesticides, and fire retardants. All samples show the levels of these compounds are well below federal guidelines for safe seafood consumption.

The samples also were tested for potential bacteria such as *E. coli*, which is associated with human fecal contamination. None of the samples harbored the bacteria, although other vibrio bacteria that normally inhabit the marine environment were found.

Dr. Steven Murawski, director of scientific programs at NOAA Fisheries Service, said that the presence of vibrio bacteria is expected, and the FDA recommends that fish, crab and shrimp be thoroughly cooked prior to consumption.

The survey results are consistent with similar findings recently announced by the FDA, the EPA, and the States of Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama, which concluded Gulf seafood was deemed safe for human consumption. NOAA continues its sampling program in the Gulf of Mexico to detect potential trends or changes that might occur over time.

Also, a just completed NOAA survey also shows that Hurricanes Katrina and Rita did not cause a reduction in fish and shrimp populations in offshore areas of the Gulf of Mexico.

NOAA's annual survey of shrimp and bottomfish – completed in November 2005 – shows some species, such as the commercially valuable and overfished red snapper, had a higher population in 2005 than in 2004. The survey found that the Atlantic croaker population doubled in 2005.

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“Marine life in the Gulf of Mexico is resilient and well-adapted to the natural environment,” said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service. “We had some concerns about the possible impacts of the Gulf hurricanes on fish and shrimp populations in the region, particularly in wetlands and nursery areas, but we’ve found that the fish stocks withstood the country’s most devastating natural disaster.”

Hogarth noted that there have not been any reported fish die-offs in the Gulf due to the hurricanes. He also said that the reduction in fishing activities in the Gulf of Mexico since the hurricanes could be a contributing factor to the population up tick for some of the shorter-lived species. The agency will continue to monitor potential population changes due to damaged habitats, nursery areas and wetlands.

Overall abundance of shrimp and bottom fish increased by about 30 percent from 2004 levels, with increases in Atlantic croaker, white shrimp and red snapper contributing much of the change. Agency scientists have conducted the survey, known as SEAMAP, every year since 1972. Information from the annual survey is compared to survey results in previous years and the data are used in fish stock assessments. Fish and shellfish populations are designated each year as either overfished or not overfished based on these assessments.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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