

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
SOUTHEAST REGION**

NEWS RELEASE

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**NOAA FISHERIES FORECASTS ABOVE AVERAGE 2002 SEASON FOR BROWN SHRIMP
IN WESTERN GULF OF MEXICO**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) announces that the western Gulf of Mexico should expect brown shrimp production of approximately 65.6 million pounds during the 2002-2003 season. This is above the 1960-2000 historical average of 56.2 million pounds for Texas and Louisiana. The Galveston Bay bait index forecasts an average year at 26.6 million pounds from offshore Texas waters from July 2002 through June 2003. The 2002 Louisiana indices point to an above average yield of approximately 39.0 million pounds of brown shrimp this season from west of the Mississippi River to the Texas-Louisiana state line.

“In preparing the annual forecast, we depend on data from many partners and factor in several environmental variables to assess the amount and type of habitat required for growth and survival of young shrimp,” said Roger Zimmerman, the director of NOAA Fisheries’ Galveston Laboratory. “Collectively, these indices provide the estimate of stock strength before the shrimp move into the offshore fishery.”

Each June, scientists at the Galveston Laboratory forecast brown shrimp production from the western Gulf of Mexico for the upcoming year (July 2002 – June 2003). The laboratory bases the forecast on data obtained by its fishery management staff, NOAA Fisheries port agents, NOAA’s National Climatic Data and Weather Centers, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Texas Parks and Wildlife

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Department, and the commercial shrimp industry. Juvenile brown shrimp abundance and growth estimates are obtained through monitoring the inshore commercial shrimp fisheries in Texas and the inshore and nearshore fisheries in Louisiana.

Peak recruitment of postlarval brown shrimp in Texas and western Louisiana estuaries typically occurs from February to early April after water temperatures exceed 60 degrees, with optimal growth occurring after the temperature reaches 68 degrees. This year environmental conditions in January through early March delayed the recruitment of brown shrimp by approximately three weeks.

“Favorable nursery area appears to be related to the distribution of high salinity waters as well as tidal water height in interior marshes,” said Zimmerman. “Rainfall this year has been below normal for the region and cooler than average temperatures in February combined with a cold front in early March that brought us record low temperatures held down optimal water temperatures and tidal height in most nursery areas.”

According to Zimmerman, warmer temperatures in mid-March through early May accompanied by high salinities allowed for optimal recruitment, growth, and survival of young shrimp. But record low temperatures in mid-May negatively affected growth and movement of young shrimp. By the end of the month, however, conditions improved and catch rates increased which indicates continued recruitment into the fishery.

This and other news releases are available on NOAA Fisheries’ Southeast Region’s homepage at <http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov>. To obtain considerable recorded information about our missions, services, and management measures, call our toll free public service line at 1-866-570-5301. If the information you need is not available on that line, you can leave us a message and we’ll get back to you within one business day. For more information about the Galveston Laboratory, visit their Web site at <http://galveston.ssp.nmfs.gov/galv>.

NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The agency conducts scientific research and provides services and products to support fisheries management, fisheries development, trade and industry assistance, enforcement, and protected species and habitat conservation programs.

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