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NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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'RACE' FOR RED SNAPPER TO END IN GULF OF MEXICO COMMERCIAL FISHERY *New Individual Fishing Quota Program Begins January 2007*

NOAA Fisheries Service announced a new Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program for the commercial red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. This program was approved by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and will begin on January 1, 2007. It is the first IFQ program implemented in the Gulf of Mexico designed to eliminate problems associated with derby-style fishing in the red snapper fishery.

IFQ programs are a type of Dedicated Access Privilege Program (DAPP), which allocate harvesting privileges to individual fishermen or corporations. Fishermen are allowed to take a specific share of the total allowable catch of a species each fishing year and can fish until their individual quota is met.

The Bush Administration outlined doubling the number of DAPPs in the United States by 2010 as an Ocean Action Plan priority. IFQ programs create market-based incentives to reduce fishing capacity to a level that is more appropriate to the amount of fish available to the fishery.

The rapid growth and overcapitalization of the red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico have intensified the "race for fish." This is a situation where participants compete with each other to harvest as many fish as possible before the season is closed each month. The competition creates negative social and economic conditions by reducing or eliminating considerations about weather conditions affecting safety at sea, flooding the market with fish certain times of year, and making it difficult to comply with and enforce fishery regulations.

"IFQ programs provide participants more flexibility in deciding when, where and how to fish," said Dr. Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service. "This flexibility can improve the quality of fish sold at the market, enhance safety at sea and increase the profitability of fishing operations."

The Bush Administration's U.S. Ocean Action plan is focused on making the oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes cleaner, healthier, and more productive. It encourages the development of management strategies that ensure continued conservation of coastal and marine habitats and living resources, while at the same time ensuring that the American public enjoys and benefits from those same resources. As such, the Ocean Action Plan provides the foundation for the next generation of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes policy emphasizing responsible stewardship of ocean and coastal resources for the benefit of all Americans.

This IFQ program will replace the previous license limitation program, which was designed to cap the number of participants in the commercial red snapper fishery and prolong the duration of the fishery throughout the year. The license limitation program was not successful in decreasing fleet harvesting costs, overcapacity and derby fishing conditions. Approximately 750 commercial fishermen and 200 seafood dealers will be eligible to enter the new program.

The Gulf of Mexico red snapper IFQ program also may help reduce bycatch of undersized red snapper and other reef fish species by encouraging fishery participants to be more selective in targeting fish.

IFQ programs have been used worldwide since the late 1970s in countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and Iceland. They were first implemented in the United States in 1990 when the Mid-Atlantic surf clam and ocean quahog IFQ program was adopted. Other domestic fisheries with IFQ programs are South Atlantic wreckfish (1992), Alaskan halibut and sablefish (1995), and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands crab (2005). Regional fishery management councils are currently considering similar programs for fisheries such as the Pacific groundfish, South Atlantic snapper-grouper and Gulf of Mexico grouper.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats 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.

In 2007 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by 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, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

Frequently Asked Questions – Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper IFQ Program:

http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/RedSnapper/pdfs/Red_Snapper_IFQ_FAQ_112906.pdf

NOAA:

<http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Service:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council:

<http://www.gulfcouncil.org>