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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 5, 2012

NOAA predicts above-average season for commercial harvest of brown shrimp in western Gulf of Mexico

The harvest of brown shrimp in the western Gulf of Mexico is expected to be 59.2 million pounds, which is above the historical 50-year average of 56.5 million pounds, according to NOAA's annual forecast. The prediction covers the period from July 2012 through June 2013 for state and federal waters off Louisiana and federal waters off Texas.

NOAA scientists make the annual prediction of brown shrimp catches based on monitoring of juvenile brown shrimp abundance, growth estimates and environmental indicators. They predict shrimp catches for state and federal waters off Louisiana from west of the Mississippi River to the Texas-Louisiana border to be approximately 31.8 million pounds this season. The Texas portion of the catch is predicted to be 27.4 million pounds.

Most of the shrimp harvested in the U.S. – 68 percent – comes from the Gulf of Mexico, especially Texas and Louisiana. Total domestic shrimp harvest brought in \$414 million in 2010, the latest figures available.

"Brown shrimp are important to the economy of Gulf coast communities," said Roger Zimmerman, Ph.D., director for NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center's Galveston Laboratory. "They are popular among seafood consumers and are used as bait by recreational anglers, so hopefully we'll see plenty of brown shrimp available in seafood markets and local bait shops this year."

Young brown shrimp begin entering estuaries in Texas and western Louisiana in mid-February and continue through July, depending on environmental conditions. This year, three environmental indicators – warm air temperatures, more saline water in marshes, and strong southerly winds that sustain tidal height – increased favorable nursery area, thus allowing for greater distribution of juvenile brown shrimp within estuaries.

Juvenile brown shrimp abundance and growth estimates are obtained by monitoring the inshore commercial shrimp fisheries in Texas and the inshore and nearshore fisheries in Louisiana. Data for these forecasts are obtained from NOAA Fisheries Galveston Laboratory, NOAA port agents, NOAA's National Climatic Data and Weather centers, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and the commercial shrimp industry.

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