



Dear Reviewer:

NOV - 4 2009

In accordance with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), we enclose for your review the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Amendment 31 to the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico: Addresses Bycatch of Sea Turtles in the Bottom Longline Component of the Reef Fish Fishery.

This DEIS is prepared pursuant to NEPA to assess the environmental impacts associated with NOAA proceeding with regulatory action. The DEIS analyzes the impacts of a range of alternatives intended to reduce sea turtle bycatch in the bottom longline component of the commercial reef fish fishery. The DEIS contains preferred options to establish gear modifications, season-area closures, and a restrictive endorsement program to allow continued participation in the bottom longline component of the reef fish fishery.

Additional copies of the DEIS may be obtained from the Responsible Program Official identified below. The document is also accessible electronically from the Council's Web site at <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>, or the e-Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Written comments should be submitted through mail, facsimile, or via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov> (Docket: NOAA-NMFS-2008-0310). All comments received are part of the public record and will generally be posted to <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NOAA Fisheries Service will accept anonymous comments. Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only. Written comments submitted during the agency's 45 day public comment period must be received by December 28, 2009. When submitting mailed or faxed comments, please include the following document identifier: Comments on Amendment 31.

Responsible Program Official: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator
Southeast Regional Office
National Marine Fisheries Service
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida, 33701-5505
Phone: 727-824-5701
Fax: 727-824-5308

Sincerely,

Paul N. Doremus, Ph.D.
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure