



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Managing Fishery Resources in the U.S. Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico

2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100

Tampa, Florida 33607 USA

Phone: 813.348.1630 • Toll free: 888.833.1844 • Fax: 813.348.1711

www.gulfcouncil.org

February 21, 2012

006010 FEB 20 12

Mr. Samuel D. Rauch, III
Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration
1315 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Rauch:

At its February 2012 meeting, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council), considered a recommendation from its Shrimp Advisory Panel regarding continued funding for the NOAA Fisheries' ongoing program to collect and analyze precise data on shrimp fishing effort through the use of electronic logbooks (ELBs). With little discussion the Gulf Council voted without objection to strongly endorse the continuation of this vital program.

This program is a key component in the Gulf Council's red snapper rebuilding plan and associated regulations in which time/area closures of the shrimp fishery will be implemented to reduce red snapper bycatch mortality if annual estimates of shrimp fishing effort exceed management caps established in juvenile red snapper habitat areas. This management strategy and regulations require accurate estimates of shrimp fishing effort in the geographic areas where juvenile red snapper are most abundant, and these estimates are provided effectively and efficiently through the ELB program.

The ELB program also provides data on shrimp fishing effort that is critical to both the Gulf Council and the NOAA Fisheries in performing annual assessments of the status of shrimp stocks, as well as mortality on a number of bycatch species including overfished blacknose sharks, endangered and threatened species of sea turtles, and endangered smalltooth sawfish.

To date, this program has funded the deployment of ELBs on approximately 500 shrimp vessels. Funding for this program is currently only available through September 2012. This program is a vital component in the management of one of the nation's most valuable fisheries. It is also very cost effective and represents an outstanding example of the agency's commitment to developing and utilizing modern technology through a cooperative research program with the fishing industry to address critical bycatch and fishery management issues. Consequently, the Gulf Council strongly supports the continuation and planned expansion of this program to the largest number of permitted vessels possible in both the Gulf and South Atlantic.

Mr. Samuel Rauch
February 21, 2012
Page Two

Finally, the scientific community has confirmed the importance of this program to their efforts to provide the best scientific information available. On October 11, 2011, the Gulf Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Special Shrimp SSC adopted the following motion which was subsequently transmitted to then Assistant Administrator, Erich Schwaab, on November 1, 2011:

"The SSC strongly recommends that NMFS and the Gulf Council continue Electronic Logbook (ELB) funding for all Gulf shrimp stocks, and that it be made a priority."

We greatly appreciate your consideration and attention to this request. We would be pleased to respond to any questions or requests for additional information.

Sincerely,



Mr. Bob Gill *for*
Chairman

BG:RLL:plk

c: Gulf Council
Technical Staff