UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

AUG 16 2012

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Temporary Rule for Emergency Action to Allow Limited Harvest of Red Snapper in 2012 (RIN 0648-BC32)

LOCATION: Exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off the Southeast coast

SUMMARY: In a letter dated June 19, 2012, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) requested that NOAA Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) allow harvest and possession of red snapper in 2012 through emergency regulations. At their June 11-15, 2012, meeting, the Council reviewed new information in the form of red snapper rebuilding projections, 2012 acceptable biological catch levels, and 2012 discard mortality levels. After accounting for the 2012 discard mortalities, the Council determined that directed harvest could be allowed without compromising the rebuilding of the stock to target levels. The Council decided to send the request for emergency action by a 12 to 1 vote.

As outlined in their letter to NOAA Fisheries, the Council's request is centered around the following items: (1) Red snapper annual catch limit of 13,067 fish; (2) recreational annual catch limit (ACL) of 9,399 fish; (3) commercial ACL of 3,668 fish or 20,818 pounds gutted weight; (4) for the recreational sector, three-day weekend openings of which the number of weekends would be determined by NOAA Fisheries Service and the opening dates would be subject to modification based on weather conditions; (5) for the commercial sector, seven-day mini-season increments subject to the remaining quota; (6) open the seasons as soon as possible; (7) recreational bag limit of one fish per person per day with no size limit; and (8) commercial 50-pound gutted weight trip limit with no size limit.

NOAA Fisheries has determined that the opening of two weekends and seven days for the recreational and commercial sectors, respectively, are the proper number of days in order to balance expected, positive socio-economic effects while minimizing the probability of ACL overages. The openings would occur as early as possible in 2012 to prevent an opening late in the year when poor weather can lead to unsafe fishing conditions.

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Once commercial landings have been reported for the first seven-day commercial opening, NOAA Fisheries will evaluate if the commercial ACL has been met. If the commercial ACL is not met, the commercial season may be reopened.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL:

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
(727) 824-5305

The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant impact on the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement was not prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI), including the environmental assessment, is enclosed for your information.

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed EA/FONSI we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents. Please submit any written comments to the Responsible Official named above.

Sincerely,

for Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure

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