



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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FB12-001

Proposed Changes to Regulations for Bycatch Reduction Devices and Shrimp Effort Restrictions in the Southeastern Shrimp Fisheries

On January 9, 2012, NOAA Fisheries Service began accepting public comment on proposed changes to shrimp regulations. One action would certify two new bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) for use in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic region. Another action would relax a restriction regarding the level of allowable shrimp effort in the Gulf of Mexico.

Both of the new BRDs represent modifications to the Composite Panel BRD, which is provisionally certified through May 24, 2012. The proposed rule would add these BRDs to the list of allowable BRDs, and provide technical specifications for the construction and subsequent legal enforcement of the BRDs. One version incorporates the addition of a square mesh panel (SMP Composite Panel BRD); the other version incorporates the addition of a “spooker” cone in the cod-end of the trawl behind the BRD (Cone Deflector Composite Panel BRD).

The proposed rule would also relax a shrimp effort reduction threshold for the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery. Regulations implemented in 2008 require that shrimp effort in the 10-30 fathom depth zone west of Mobile Bay, Alabama, be at least 74 percent less than effort levels documented during 2001 through 2003. In accordance with the framework procedures set forth in Amendment 14 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Shrimp Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico, this rule would adjust the threshold to require a 67 percent reduction in effort in the 10 to 30 fathom depth contours compared to the designated baseline years.

The intended effect of this proposed rule is to improve bycatch reduction in the shrimp fishery, provide greater flexibility to the industry, reduce social and economic impacts to fishing communities, and better meet the requirements of National Standard 9 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

Background

BRDs have been required in shrimp trawls in the South Atlantic since 1997, in the western Gulf of Mexico since 1998, and since 2004 for the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

In 2008, NOAA Fisheries Service provisionally certified the Composite Panel BRD for use in federal waters throughout the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, and changed the classification for the Extended Funnel BRD in the Gulf of Mexico from “fully certified” to “provisionally certified.” Provisional certifications only allow the use of the BRD for a 2-year period. In 2010, NOAA Fisheries Service extended these provisional certifications to allow industry greater time to make modifications that would fully certify the BRDs. Such testing occurred on the Composite Panel BRD, resulting in the two modified versions being proposed for certification. No additional information is available for the Expanded Mesh BRD in the Gulf of Mexico.

Therefore, as of **May 25, 2012**, the original Composite Panel BRD will be decertified for use in both the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic federal waters, and the Extended Funnel BRD will be decertified for use in Gulf of Mexico federal waters. Shrimp fishers who use the original Composite Panel BRD would have until May 25, 2012, to make the modifications to their BRDs to meet the new BRDs’ construction specifications.

Dates and Addresses

Written comments on these proposed changes must be received no later than 5 p.m., eastern time, **February 8, 2012**.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by [NOAA-NMFS-2011-0274], by any one of the following methods:

Electronic Submissions: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Mail: Steve Branstetter, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

Instructions: All comments received are a 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.

To submit comments through the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>, enter "NOAA-NMFS-2011-0274" in the keyword search, then select "Send a Comment or Submission." To view posted comments during the comment period, enter "NOAA-NMFS-2011-0274" in the keyword search and click on "search." 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. Comments received through means not specified here will not be considered.

Comments received by **February 8, 2012**, will be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service in its decision to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the proposed actions. Comments received after that date will not be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service in this decision. All comments received by NOAA Fisheries Service will be addressed in the final rule.

This bulletin provides only a summary of the information regarding the proposed rule. Any discrepancies between this bulletin and the proposed rule published in the *Federal Register* will be resolved in favor of the *Federal Register*.

If you would like to receive these fishery bulletins via e-mail as soon as they are published, please e-mail: sero.communications.comments@noaa.gov.

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