



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

RIN 0648-BO31

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of America, and South Atlantic; Shrimp Fishery of the Gulf of America; Amendment 19

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Announcement of availability of fishery management plan amendment; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS seeks public comment on the management measures proposed in Amendment 19 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Shrimp Fishery of the Gulf (Shrimp FMP). The Gulf Council (Council) has submitted Amendment 19 for review, approval, and implementation by NMFS. If approved, Amendment 19 would extend the moratorium on the issuance of new commercial shrimp permits in the Gulf of America (Gulf) that is set to expire after October 26, 2026. NMFS implemented the permit moratorium to create stability and prevent overcapacity in the Gulf shrimp fishery. Amendment 19 would extend the permit moratorium for an additional 10 years and maintain historical limits on shrimp fishing effort.

DATES: Written comments on Amendment 19 must be received no later than August 4, 2026.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2026-1387, by either of the following methods:

- *Electronic Submission:* Submit comments electronically via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Visit <https://www.regulations.gov> and type NOAA-NMFS-2026-

1387 in the Search box. Click on the “Comment” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- *Mail:* Send written comments to Frank Helies, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

Instructions: Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period will not be considered by NMFS. All comments received are part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on <https://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information, such as, name, address, *etc.*, confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments - enter N/A in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous.

An electronic copy of Amendment 19 is available from <https://www.regulations.gov> or from the Southeast Regional Office website at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/amendment-19-shrimp-permit-moratorium>. Amendment 19 includes an environmental assessment, Regulatory Flexibility Act analysis, regulatory impact review, and fishery impact statement.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rich Malinowski, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, telephone: 727-824-5305, or email: rich.malinowski@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The shrimp fishery in the Gulf of America (Gulf) is managed under the Shrimp FMP. The Shrimp FMP was prepared by NMFS and the Gulf Fishery Management Council (Council), and is implemented by NMFS through regulations at 50 CFR part 622 under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act, 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*). The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that each regional fishery management council submit any FMP or FMP amendment to the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) for

review and approval, partial approval, or disapproval. The Magnuson-Stevens Act also requires that upon receiving an FMP or FMP amendment, NMFS must publish an announcement in the **Federal Register** notifying the public that the FMP or amendment is available for review and comment.

Background

Prior to 2001, approximately 4,000 vessels fished for shrimp annually in Federal waters of the Gulf. To improve the collection of fishing effort and catch data, NMFS implemented a Federal permit requirement for all vessels harvesting shrimp commercially from Gulf Federal waters through the final rule for Amendment 11 to the Shrimp FMP (67 FR 51074, August 7, 2002). Between 2002 and 2006, NMFS issued permits to approximately 2,951 vessels. During that time, the shrimp fishery experienced economic losses, primarily because of high fuel costs and reduced shrimp prices caused by competition from imports. These economic losses resulted in the exodus of vessels from the fishery and reduced fishing effort. Despite this exodus, the fishery remained overcapitalized, with more vessels than needed to harvest the available shrimp resources at the most profitable level. To prevent effort from returning to former levels that further reduced or removed profitability for the fleet overall, the Council recommended a 10-year moratorium on the issuance of new Federal commercial shrimp vessel permits through Amendment 13 to the Shrimp FMP, while still allowing for permit transferability. NMFS implemented the final rule for the moratorium on October 26, 2006 (71 FR 56039, September 26, 2006), and issued 1,933 vessel permits under the qualifying criteria of the 2006 rule by 2008.

The Council subsequently considered the need to continue limiting access in the fishery in Amendment 17A to the Shrimp FMP. The Council chose to recommend extending the permit moratorium for an additional 10 years to maintain stability and prevent overcapacity in the shrimp fishery. The Council chose not to permanently limit

access to the fishery at that time, because economic conditions could change in the future. NMFS implemented the final rule continuing the 10-year moratorium on August 22, 2016, and the moratorium was extended through October 26, 2026 (81 FR 47733, July 22, 2016).

Only a valid Gulf shrimp permit can be used to commercially harvest Gulf shrimp. A shrimp vessel permit remains valid if it is renewed, and is renewable within 1 year of its expiration date. After 1 year from the expiration date with no renewal, a permit is terminated and permanently removed from the pool of available permits. From 2019 through 2023, the average annual number of vessels with valid Gulf shrimp moratorium permits was 1,376, though the number of vessels with permits declined each year during this time. In 2024, 1,287 moratorium permits were valid or renewable. Accordingly, since NMFS renewed the 1,933 shrimp vessel permits in 2008, the number of permits has decreased by 646. NMFS has permanently removed those 646 permits from the permit pool.

Actions Contained in Amendment 19

If approved, Amendment 19 would extend the moratorium on the issuance of new commercial shrimp vessel permits in the Gulf for an additional 10 years, through October 26, 2036. The purpose of Amendment 19 is to continue limiting the total number of permits and, thereby, the maximum potential shrimping effort in the Gulf. Gulf shrimp stocks are currently healthy, but the previously mentioned non-regulatory issues continue to hinder the profitability of the commercial shrimp fleet and to cause the decline in shrimping effort throughout the Gulf.

NMFS expects Amendment 19 would continue to result in positive impacts for those who hold Federal Gulf commercial shrimp permits because the permits would retain value as a limited asset, which would be lost if the moratorium were to expire. Permits would continue to be transferable, allowing for entry to and exit from the shrimp

fishery. While new entrants would be required to pay more for a moratorium permit versus an open access permit, NMFS expects the benefits of this action to current permit holders would outweigh the cost to any new entrants. The cost of acquiring a shrimp moratorium permit, when compared to similar limited access commercial permits in other fisheries, is comparably low. For example, from 2022 through 2024, the median price to transfer a Federal Gulf shrimp permit was \$5,250.

Extending the moratorium would also provide the Council with time to re-evaluate the minimum shrimp permit threshold for optimizing yield in the fishery in light of new science and the current economic condition of the fishery. The Council established a threshold of 1,072 Gulf shrimp permits in Amendment 17B to the Shrimp FMP (82 FR 60564, December 21, 2017), and currently there are approximately 1,200 valid or renewable Gulf shrimp permits. The minimum permit threshold represents the predicted number of vessels needed to achieve aggregate optimum yield in the fishery, while accounting for high shrimp catch per unit effort and landings, and reducing the risk of exceeding thresholds of sea turtle and juvenile red snapper bycatch.

Proposed Rule for Amendment 19

A proposed rule to implement Amendment 19 has been drafted. In accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NMFS is evaluating the proposed rule to determine whether it is consistent with the Shrimp FMP, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable law. If that determination is affirmative, NMFS will publish the proposed rule in the **Federal Register** for public review and comment.

Consideration of Public Comments

The Council has submitted Amendment 19 for Secretarial review, approval, and implementation. Comments on Amendment 19 must be received no later than August 4, 2026. Comments received during the respective comment periods, whether specifically directed to Amendment 19 or the proposed rule, will be considered by NMFS in the

decision to approve, partially approve, or disapprove Amendment 19. Comments received after the comment periods will not be considered by NMFS in this decision. All comments received by NMFS on the amendment or the proposed rule during their respective comment periods will be addressed in the final rule.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: June 3, 2026.

Kelly Denit,

Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.