FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR SEAFOOD DEALERS

PROJECT BACKGROUND

What is the Deepwater Horizon Oceanic Fish Restoration Project?

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has partnered with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to work with the pelagic longline fishery in the Gulf of Mexico to implement the Deepwater Horizon Oceanic Fish Restoration Project. This project includes a temporary and voluntary repose — a six-month period during which participating vessel owners will receive financial compensation to refrain from pelagic longline fishing. Participants will be encouraged to fish for yellowfin tuna and swordfish using alternative gear, which result in lower bycatch, so they can continue to bring fish to market. The project is tailored to restore resources injured by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and does not affect existing management practices or regulations.

Why was this project launched?

Many species of oceanic (or pelagic) fish in the Gulf of Mexico were injured during the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, including tuna, billfish and mackerel, as well as deepwater fish such as lancetfish. The goal of this project is to help restore a portion of the pelagic fish injured by the spill. The project is funded with money made available by BP. It was developed by federal and Gulf state natural resource trustees, including NOAA, according to the Oil Pollution Act (OPA) and with opportunities for public review and comment.

Were past project years successful?

Yes, the project has been successful in achieving reduced bycatch. For the 2017 project year, seven vessel owners from Louisiana participated in a four-month pelagic longline repose and fished using greenstick gear.
for a collective total of 280 sea-days. In the 2018 project year, seven vessel owners from Louisiana and three vessel owners from Florida participated in a six-month pelagic longline repose; they used greenstick, buoy and deep drop rod and reel gear for a collective total of almost 500 sea-days. Data show clear bycatch benefits: the amount of bycatch species caught using alternative gear is significantly below the levels experienced with pelagic longline gear, and many of the species caught were released alive.

**WORKING WITH DEALERS**

**Will this project affect dealers?**

- This project may affect some dealers but is designed to mitigate potential impacts. For example: Participation in the pelagic longline fishing repose is limited and voluntary — only a portion of the approximately 35 vessels comprising the Gulf of Mexico pelagic longline fishing fleet will be selected to participate. This will help offset economic impacts of the repose.

- Participation is expected to take place in two separate regions in the Gulf of Mexico — one in the western Gulf (vessels with a hailing port of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas) and one in the eastern Gulf (vessels with a hailing port of Florida and the Atlantic Coast). Holding the auction in two regions accounts for operational differences between the two areas and encourages broader geographic distribution of participants to help minimize impacts to any one region or local dealer.

- The repose period will last from January 1 to June 30, 2019 and fishermen can return to normal pelagic longline fishing operations for the remainder of the year. In addition, the majority of the vessels in the fleet are not participating in the project and will be fishing as normal. This will help ensure that vessels throughout the Gulf of Mexico continue to deliver high-quality products for both domestic and international markets.

- Participants are encouraged to use alternative fishing gear — greenstick, buoy and deep drop rod and reel gear — during the repose. The option to use these multiple gears is intended to provide alternative opportunities to bring fish to market and help offset economic impacts of the repose.

**Will potential impacts to dealers result in any changes to the project?**

NOAA and NFWF are working directly with dealers to find additional ways to address concerns and have already modified the project, including:

- **More alternative gear choices.** NFWF and NOAA added more alternative gear choices to allow fishermen to continue to catch and sell fish during the repose period. Participants have the option to continue to fish using up to two of three alternative gear types provided by the project: greenstick gear, buoy gear and/or deep drop rod and reel gear. The addition of deep drop rod and reel gear provides participants with more options to target swordfish, and buoy gear opportunities have been expanded to include the option to harvest yellowfin tuna under an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP). The project has included these additional gear options to offer participants more flexibility to explore fishing strategies that provide alternative harvest opportunities.

- **Additional training.** NFWF and NOAA will continue to train participants to improve their proficiency with the alternative gear.

- **Greater stakeholder engagement.** NFWF and NOAA will continue to have an ongoing dialogue with dealers and other stakeholders to make this project as strong as possible. In October 2017, NFWF held a meeting with the Audubon Nature Institute’s Gulf United for Lasting Fisheries (G.U.L.F.) program.
to gather information from participants in the Gulf of Mexico supply chain for tuna and swordfish. Meeting attendees included dealers, fish distributors and restaurateurs who discussed their views and ideas for the fishery, options to strengthen the overall viability of the pelagic longline fishery in the Gulf, including, but not limited to, improvements to this project. NFWF and NOAA are actively working with the industry to identify opportunities to implement some of these ideas.

- **Dealer liaison.** New for the project this year, NFWF and NOAA designated Gary Graham as the liaison to dealers. Mr. Graham will provide dealers with project updates and is available to answer questions from dealers. He will work to improve communications with dealers and other upmarket stakeholders. (See contact information on page 1.)

**Will fishing with the alternative gear affect the quality of the fish that are caught?**

Using buoy gear or deep drop rod and reel gear to catch swordfish does not result in lower-quality product. While greenstick gear may yield tuna of a lesser quality, this has yet to be fully validated in the Gulf of Mexico. The quality of yellowfin tuna caught with buoy gear in the Gulf has not yet been evaluated.

**PROJECT DETAILS**

**How did this project come about?**

Federal and state agencies are authorized under the Oil Pollution Act (OPA) to act as trustees on behalf of the public, to assess injuries to natural resources that result from an oil spill and to plan for restoration to compensate for those injuries. Under the OPA, natural resource trustees develop and implement plans for restoring natural resources under their trusteeship.

NOAA is authorized under the OPA to conduct the Natural Resources Damage Assessment process as a federal trustee and to carry out restoration efforts to implement the project. The project was included and evaluated in the *Deepwater Horizon* Final Phase IV Early Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessments, which was subject to public review and comment. In September 2015, the trustees selected this project for implementation to help restore oceanic fish injured by the spill.

The project is the first developed by the *Deepwater Horizon* Trustees focused directly on working with fishermen to restore fish species injured as a result of the spill. The settlement with BP allocated $400 million in funding for restoration projects for fish and marine invertebrates, including the *Deepwater Horizon* Oceanic Fish Restoration Project.

**What impacts did the spill have on pelagic fish?**

In addition to killing fish at various life stages, the 2010 oil spill also had detrimental effects to those fish that survived the initial spill and cleanup. At various depths of Gulf of Mexico waters, scientists found negative impacts to fish, including cardiac (heart) toxicity and other developmental deformities such as a curved spine, reduced growth rates, impaired immune function, reduced swimming performance and inhibited reproduction.

**What are the long-term benefits of this project?**

The project will help to restore pelagic fish that were affected by the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. Reducing fish mortality will allow fish to grow and reproduce, helping to increase the amount of pelagic fish throughout the Gulf.

**When does the 2019 project start?**

The repose period starts on January 1, 2019. Request for Quotation forms will be accepted from eligible vessel owners through October 5, 2018. Quotes received by that date will be evaluated, and all interested vessel owners will
be notified by mid-October 2018 about whether they have been selected to participate. Materials for eligible vessel owners, including the Request for Quotation form, are available in English and Vietnamese on the project website at www.nfwf.org/pll.

Is the project permanent? How long will it run?
No, it is not permanent. The project began in 2017 and NOAA and NFWF anticipate it will last for five to 10 years, but there is no set expiration timeframe. The full length of the project will depend on the level of participation to meet restoration goals. The project is temporary, voluntary and is tailored to meet specific goals to restore a portion of the fish species that were injured by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Why did the project start so long after the oil spill?
The project was developed under the Deepwater Horizon $1 billion early restoration framework between BP and the Natural Resource Trustees, as part of a suite of projects for which BP agreed to provide funding before the full settlement was reached. The Deepwater Horizon early restoration funding approach was novel and unprecedented because it allowed projects to commence, when there was agreement between BP and the trustees, but before finalizing the Natural Resource Damage Assessment or reaching a settlement. Deepwater Horizon early restoration projects commenced earlier in the restoration planning process than trustees are normally able to start projects for most oil spills. Since the settlement was reached in 2016, the trustees have been actively planning additional restoration activities for Fish and Water Column Invertebrates. It is expected that new project planning and implementation will continue over the duration of the 15-year settlement payout period and beyond.

How did you notify the public about this project?
The Deepwater Horizon Trustees held public meetings on this project as part of the Deepwater Horizon Phase IV Early Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessments, released in draft for public review and comment in May 2015. The trustees incorporated the public feedback into the final Phase IV Early Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessments, released in September 2015. Once the Restoration Plan was finalized and BP funding for the project was available, NOAA and NFWF began outreach to the public to implement the project.

Are there new fishing regulations for the pelagic longline fishery in the Gulf of Mexico because of this project?
No. The project is voluntary, temporary and tailored to restore a portion of fish affected by the oil spill. The project does not change existing management practices or regulations. As a voluntary project, no new regulations are being issued by NOAA or any other government agency.

PARTICIPATION DETAILS

Who can participate? What are the eligibility criteria for participating in the project?
Vessel owners interested in participating in the project must be active in the Gulf of Mexico, having made at least one pelagic longline set in the Gulf over the last two years (Jan. 1, 2016 – Dec. 31, 2017). They must own a pelagic longline vessel that is seaworthy and operational. Participants must possess sufficient Individual Bluefin Quota (IBQ) to make a pelagic longline set in the Gulf of Mexico. They must also possess all three valid limited access permits necessary to engage in pelagic longline fishing
in the Gulf of Mexico: (1) a directed or incidental swordfish permit, (2) a directed or incidental shark permit and (3) an Atlantic Tuna Longline category permit.

Who are the potential participants and where do they come from?

To encourage participation from throughout the Gulf of Mexico region, two separate auctions will be held: one in the western Gulf (vessels with a hailing port of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas) and one in the eastern Gulf (vessels with a hailing port of Florida and the Atlantic Coast). Holding the auction in two regions accounts for operational differences between the two areas and encourages broader geographic distribution of participants to help minimize impacts to any one region or local dealer. Participation in the repose is limited and voluntary – only a portion of the overall Gulf pelagic longline fishing fleet (estimated around 35 active vessels) will be selected to participate in any given year.

How will the Request for Quotation forms be evaluated?

NFWF and NOAA will evaluate all complete Request for Quotation forms received. Offerors will be ranked in their respective region based on the lowest cost quotes received; quotes will not be compared between regions. If there are two identical quotes for compensation in the same region, NFWF and NOAA will give preference to participants who have not participated in past project years and those who are willing to use the alternative gear. The type(s) of alternative gear chosen by applicants will not determine their prioritization or selection to participate in the project.

If vessel owners choose to participate, can they still fish during the pelagic longline repose?

Yes, they can fish but not with pelagic longline gear. Participants may still fish using other gear types, including greenstick, buoy, deep drop rod and reel, bottom longline or any other gear associated with other active permits. In fact, during the pelagic longline repose period, participating vessels will be encouraged to use greenstick, buoy and deep drop rod and reel gear to harvest yellowfin tuna and swordfish.

Why can’t participants fish with pelagic longline gear in other areas beyond the Gulf of Mexico?

Species injured by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill include those that are highly migratory — moving over very long distances within and outside of the Gulf of Mexico. Participants agree not to fish with pelagic longline gear inside or outside of the Gulf, because fishing for these species outside of the Gulf would reduce the benefits of the project and its goal to allow fish to grow, reproduce and contribute to the Gulf ecosystem.