

Charter of Recreational For-Hire Fishing Boats To Conduct Sampling of Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Species to Evaluate Seafood Safety

A Response to the DEEPWATER HORIZON oil spill

C.1 SCOPE OF WORK:

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Page – 18 this will be for recreational fishing for-hire boats with the equipment identified elsewhere in this document; captain and crew; bait; fuel; food and accommodations equal to that of the crew for up to three (3) NOAA Fisheries personnel; and all other material necessary to complete the work identified below. These charters will be used to collect samples for evaluating seafood safety and to support data collection efforts required to make an informed decision concerning a Federal fishing closure. The chartered boats shall conduct sampling by hook and line in closed fishing areas not impacted by the oil spill from Brownsville, Texas to Key West, Florida, with special emphasis on areas under consideration for reopening, to provide reef fish samples for sensory and chemical analysis. Pelagic finfish samples such as yellowfin tuna shall be collected to monitor oil contaminants in higher trophic levels.

C.2 BACKGROUND:

C.2.1. A fire and explosion occurred at approximately 11:00 PM CDT, April 20, 2010 on the DEEPWATER HORIZON, a semisubmersible drilling platform, with more than 120 crew aboard. The DEEPWATER HORIZON is located some 50 miles SE of the Mississippi Delta and contained an estimated 700,000 gallons of #2 Fuel Oil or Marine Diesel Fuel. Crude oil is being discharged from the severed well head at an estimated rate of 40,000 gallons per day. The resulting oil slick is an imminent threat to marine habitat and fauna throughout the Northeastern Gulf of Mexico.

C.2.2. The NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Mississippi Laboratories is developing a response to monitor the effect of the oil spill on offshore reef fish species in the path of the oil spill. Baseline information on the health and distribution of fish within Gulf of Mexico reef fish assemblage in zones of potential oil spill impact will be needed to allow marine researchers to accurately assess post-spill effects.

C.2.3. Baseline health and distribution information will need to be obtained through the collection of samples of reef fish species from offshore areas which may be impacted by the oil spill. The most effective means of collecting these samples will be by means of hook and line (rod and reel) in areas of hard bottom or reef habitat. Samples will need to be collected on a daily basis and returned to shore for shipment to the NOAA Seafood Inspection Laboratory in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

C.2.4. NOAA Research vessels which are currently staged in the Gulf of Mexico are not capable of making the quick round-trip transit from port to sample area and back which is required to maintain effective health monitoring of reef fish species. Smaller vessels which can operate at greater speeds are needed.

C.2.5. The vessels and crew should be capable of using rod and reel fishing equipment to catch reef fish species in depths of up to 300 feet. Vessels must return to port each day to offload the fish for shipment to a NOAA testing facility.

C.3 PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE:

C.3.1. A sea day is defined as all efforts that are required to stage the deployment, travel to the sampling site, perform actual sampling and return to the dock. It is estimated that a sea day will be 12 hours, but this estimate will be impacted by running distance to actual sample site.

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C.3.2. The work may be performed on consecutive days, but all work is weather dependent. If weather causes the vessel to return to shore before completion of a scheduled trip, the vessel may be required to continue fishing efforts once the weather allows the return to the fishing/sample site. NOAA Fisheries is not responsible for paying for weather days that require the boat to remain in port. ADDITIONALLY, fishing/sampling may be discontinued once the oil spill reaches the sampling area, regardless of the number of fishing days conducted.

C.4 DESCRIPTION OF WORK:

C.4.1 Fishing/sampling trips shall be conducted in the offshore waters out to 150 fm of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico.

C.4.2. Sampling stations may be randomly chosen, but final determination of each day's fishing location will be made by the NOAA Fisheries field party chief (FPC) in close consultation with the vessel captain and with due caution to weather conditions, bottom conditions, potential hangs, or adverse currents. Sampling shall be conducted in accordance with protocols established by the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center. The NOAA Fisheries FPC will meet with the vessel Captain prior to initiating a sampling trip in order to review sampling protocols and the sampling plan for that day.

C.4.3. On a given fishing day, the Contractor shall receive instruction from the NOAA Fisheries FPC as to the locations and/or chart positions which will be sampled. Multiple positions shall be fished each day. The vessel shall transit to the fishing location and using rod and reel equipment, conduct fishing operations at or near the ocean bottom to catch a sample of reef fish species from the location. All fish caught shall be considered the property of NOAA Fisheries and shall be tagged and labeled by NOAA staff for later processing and testing. While onboard the vessel, the fish shall be placed on ice and shall be maintained in a manner to ensure maximum freshness until the vessel returns to the dock and the fish are removed by NOAA staff for shipment. At the end of each sampling day-trip fish samples will be removed from the vessels by NOAA Fisheries staff and shipped to the NOAA Seafood testing laboratory.

C.4.4. The list at Table 1 identifies the fish species that shall be targeted for sampling by the Contractor:

Table 1. Priority Reef Fish Species to be collected by Contractor

Groupers
Rock Hind
Yellowfin

Scamp
Red Hind
Goliath
Nassau
Red
Gag
Yellowedge
Snowy
Snappers
Red
Mutton
Blackfin
Gray
Lane
Silk
Yellowtail
Vermillion
Other
Gray Triggerfish and Jack
Greater and Lesser Amberjack
Sharks
Tunas
Mackerels

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Up to 3 NOAA Fisheries personnel may be on board the vessel during a given charter day. Vessel crew will be expected to assist in fishing operations.

C.5. Vessel Requirements:

1. Vessels must be of an adequate size and endurance/speed to ensure sampling may be conducted out to 150 fm in depth and return to port daily.
2. Vessel shall be capable of allowing a minimum of two (2) hook and line (rod and reel) fishing operations to be conducted simultaneously.
3. Designated freezer or ice cooler space to accommodate up 500 lbs of fish samples
4. Vessel is responsible for maintaining all appropriate State and Federal fishing permits and licenses.

C.6. Other Vessel Equipment Requirements:

The vessel shall have the following:

- a. VHF Radio
- b. Fathometer- for determining bottom depth.
- c. Radar
- d. GPS vessel positioning unit.
- e. Vessel track plotter.
- f. All charters must meet Federal requirements for the size vessel being used for safety at-sea operations (US Coast Guard).

C.7. Crew Requirements:

1. Captain and crew shall be well experienced in hook and line bottom fishing with salt water rod and reel equipment.
2. Captain shall be well experienced in the fishing productivity, conditions and bottom types associated with reef fish habitat in offshore areas of the Gulf of Mexico of locale from which deployed.
3. Captain shall possess a USCG 6-passenger license, at a minimum.