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## PRESS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Stock Assessment Report for Gulf of Mexico Gulf Menhaden (SEDAR32A) and Adoption of Reference Points**

**Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida** – The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) has completed an assessment of the Gulf menhaden population in the northern Gulf of Mexico. The assessment was accomplished through the SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review Program (SEDAR) as SEDAR32A. The final stock assessment report is available on the SEDAR website at:

[http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/Sedar\\_Workshops.jsp?WorkshopNum=32A](http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/Sedar_Workshops.jsp?WorkshopNum=32A)

The SEDAR report is the culmination of a three-year effort to gather and analyze available data for Gulf menhaden from the commercial purse-seine fishery and the fishery-independent sampling programs of the Gulf States. The Gulf's five marine resource agencies provided experts through the GSMFC's Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC), which served as the technical committee throughout the assessment process.

A Review Workshop was held in August 2013 to present the assessment to six independent reviewers: three from the Center for Independent Experts (CIE), two from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and one representing the GSMFC. The reviewers approved the SEDAR report, but were unable to comment on the biological reference points and the stock status because the GSMFC's MAC had not defined management goals or objectives and had not adopted formal reference points for management. However, given a suite of reference point options provided in the SEDAR report, the reviewers agreed that, given commonly applied benchmarks in the region, it was unlikely that the Gulf menhaden stock is experiencing overfishing or that overfishing is occurring.

Since the completion and approval of the SEDAR32A Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment, the MAC and the GSMFC have approved the adoption of reference points for inclusion as

recommendations in the draft Fishery Management Plan, which should be available for public comment in 2014. The approved overfishing rates are expressed as  $F_{\%SPR}$  values. The overfishing threshold and target and the harvest rates associated with the equilibrium yield at those rates are a threshold of  $F_{30\%}$  [= 680,765 metric tons (mt)] and target of  $F_{35\%}$  (= 663,583 mt). Included was the approval of benchmark assessments every five years. Additionally, a request for an immediate update assessment would be triggered by two fishing years exceeding the target or by one year exceeding the threshold. The overfished status is defined in terms of equilibrium spawning stock biomass (SSB) based on fecundity. The SSB values associated with the accepted target and threshold are  $SSB_{30\%}$  and  $SSB_{35\%}$  and were adopted for inclusion in the draft management plan. Based upon these recommended benchmarks, the Gulf menhaden fishery is not overfished and not undergoing overfishing and has not experienced overfishing since the early 1990s.

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The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) was established by an act of Congress (P.L. 81-66) in 1949 as a compact of the five Gulf States. Its charge is

Ato promote better utilization of the fisheries, marine, shell and anadromous, of the seaboard of the Gulf of Mexico, by the development of a joint program for the promotion and protection of such fisheries and the prevention of the physical waste of the fisheries from any cause.@

The GSMFC is composed of three members from each of the five Gulf States; the head of the marine resource agency of each state, a member of the state legislature, and a citizen appointed by the governor. The GSMFC is empowered to make recommendations to the governors and legislatures of the five Gulf States on action regarding programs helpful to the management of the fisheries. The states do not relinquish any of their rights or responsibilities in regulating their own fisheries by being members of the GSMFC. Recommendations to the states are based on scientific studies made by experts employed by state and federal resource agencies and advice from law enforcement officials and the commercial and recreational fishing industries. The GSMFC is also authorized to consult with and advise the proper administrative agencies of the member states regarding fishery conservation problems. In addition, the GSMFC advises the U.S. Congress and may testify on legislation and marine policies that affect the Gulf States. One of the most important functions of the GSMFC is to serve as a forum for the discussion of various problems, issues, and programs concerning marine management.