PELAGIC RESOURCES OF THE GULF OF MEXICO AND SOUTHERN ATLANTIC (FMP) FOR REVIEW, APPROVAL, AND IMPLEMENTATION BY NMFS. THE PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT 9 IS TO ENHANCE THE SOCIOECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM THE COMMERCIAL QUOTAS FOR GULF GROUP KING MACKEREL AND TO ASSURE A MORE EQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF THESE BENEFITS AMONG FISHERY PARTICIPANTS, TO REDUCE THE HARVEST OF IMMATURE KING MACKEREL AND MINIMIZE THE POSSIBILITY OF RECREATIONAL KING MACKEREL FISHERY ALLOCATION RUNS, AND TO INCREASE REVENUE AND DECREASE WASTE IN THE KING AND SPANISH MACKEREL FISHERIES.

-Amendment 9 is made available for public comment.

-DATES: Written comments must be received on or before September 7, 1999.

-ADRESSES: Comments must be mailed to Mark Godcharles, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702.

-Requests for copies of Amendment 9, which includes an environmental assessment, a regulatory impact review (RIR), and an initial regulatory flexibility analysis (IRFA), may be obtained from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf of Mexico Council), Suite 1000, 3018 U.S. Highway 301 N., Tampa, FL 33619; Phone: 813-228-2815; Fax: 813-228-7015; E-mail: gulf.council@noaa.gov; or from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council), Southpark Building, One Southpark Circle, Suite 306, Charleston, SC 29407-4699; Phone: 843-571-4366; Fax: 843-769-4520; E-mail: safmc@noaa.gov.

-FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mark Godcharles or Steve Branstetter, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL; Phone: 727-570-5305; Fax: 727-570-5583.

-SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires Regional Fishery Management Councils to submit any proposed FMP or FMP amendment to NMFS for review, approval, and implementation. The Magnuson-Stevens Act also requires that NMFS, upon receiving such FMP or FMP amendment, immediately publish a document in the Federal Register stating that the FMP or FMP amendment is available for public review and comment.

-Amendment 9 was prepared and submitted by the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Councils. Amendment 9 contains 10 proposed conservation and management amendments to establish separate commercial hook-and-line fishery quotas for the proposed new northern and southern subzones in the Florida west coast subzone; (4) implement a moratorium on issuing any new gillnet endorsements for commercial vessel king mackerel permits in the run-around gillnet fishery in the proposed southern Florida west coast subzone; (5) establish eligibility criteria to reissue gillnet endorsements for commercial vessel king mackerel permits only to traditional fishermen in the run-around gillnet fishery in the proposed southern Florida west coast subzone; (6) restrict the transfer of gillnet endorsements for commercial vessel king mackerel permits only to the Florida west coast subzone; (7) restrict the operational area for vessels harvesting king mackerel under the run-around gillnet quota to the proposed southern Florida west coast subzone.

-Amendment 9 also proposes three additional actions to: (1) Establish a 3,000-lb (1,361-kg) daily trip limit for the commercial vessels harvesting Gulf group king mackerel under the quota for the western zone (Texas through Alabama); (2) increase the minimum size limit from 20 inches to 24 inches (50.8 to 61.0 cm) fork length for both the Gulf and Atlantic groups of king mackerel; and (3) allow the sale of cut-off (damaged) fish from both the Gulf and Atlantic groups of king and Spanish mackerel as long as the cut-off fish meet or exceed the appropriate minimum size limit and are possessed within the established commercial trip limits.

-The specific proposed management measures, their supporting rationale, and analyses of potential impacts are contained in Amendment 9. Amendment 9 is intended to enhance the socioeconomic benefits from the commercial quotas for Gulf group king mackerel and to assure a more equitable distribution of these benefits among fishery participants. Measures proposed for fisheries in the eastern zone would equitably distribute the quota among participants using hook-and-line gear and prevent expansion of the run-around gillnet sector while the Gulf of...