

# PANAMA CITY BOATMEN ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 4151  
Panama City, Florida 32401

August 9, 2016

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council  
2203 N Lois Avenue  
Suite 1100  
Tampa, Florida 33607

By email: [gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org](mailto:gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org)

Re: Our comments on the triggerfish and greater amberjack closures

To All Council Members:

On behalf of the members of PCBA I would like to make the following comments on the recent actions by the NMFS on triggerfish and greater amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico. Apparently the staff and biologists at the NMFS and Council and the Members of the Council are out of touch with the reality of fishing in the GOM. According to a statement by Dr. Crabtree in *The News Herald* in a front page story in the Sunday August 7, 2016 paper about the triggerfish and amberjack closures, "triggerfish have not responded as well as we would like to regulations", it is clear he does not know where the fishery is.

We don't know where the NMFS wants the triggerfish biomass to be but if you fish from the Panhandle of Florida through Louisiana you find triggerfish almost everywhere. Not only are there plenty of juvenile triggerfish but sizes of 14" and greater are abundant. While fishing you can hardly get bait past the triggerfish. Some areas have more than others but you can find triggerfish everywhere.

The current size requirement for greater amberjack caused the quota to be met early and caused the NMFS to shut the fishery down for the rest of 2016. We argued for an incremental increase in the size limit to prevent this and allow the fishery to grow along with incremental increases in quota. The NMFS and Council told us and provided presentations that a 34" size would provide a 10 month season, we got 5 and it appears we caught more than the allowed quota meaning we will have less for 2017. Legal size amberjack are being caught on 3 hook gears with small pieces of squid intended for vermilion snapper and red porgies. This is while triggerfish are continually released.

The seasons for both species were set to reopen on August 1. Both early seasons closed as required on May 31 and it took the NMFS 6 weeks to notify the public that triggerfish would not reopen and 7 weeks to project that amberjack would not reopen after those closures. After all the years of hearing from charter vessel owners and operators that customers make plans in advance it is apparent that the NMFS and Council still do not understand this business. People make plans to fish based on the information they are provided by the NMFS. These plans are not just for the anglers but also for their families. These people do not want to change their plans to fish in January or February as they come here for the summer and fall season for the good weather and to be where there are other activities to enjoy as well as the fishing. While triggerfish has yet to achieve the level of popularity of amberjack and red snapper, triggerfish are rapidly gaining such popularity, the loss of amberjack trips at the time of year when we are finally able to put money back for the winter does financial harm to small family businesses. This financial loss is never recovered.

We strongly recommend that the SSC look at the data and hear, not just listen to, the testimony of the abundance of these species and readjust the quota to match the reality of fishing. The triggerfish and

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amberjack have achieved dramatic increases in biomass otherwise we would not be catching these fish in the numbers we do. We purposely try to stay away from these species but because of the abundance cannot. The NMFS needs to do a much better job with their computer modeling and provide timely and better projections of open and closed seasons. In this day of technological advances there is really no valid reason for such irresponsible notifications. Our industry has suffered enough with red snapper management; we don't need more economic and social damage with the mismanagement of these species.

We are constantly amazed at how the NMFS can list stocks such as gag and red grouper as not over fished and quotas are never met while listing the species of red snapper, amberjack, and triggerfish as overfished yet quotas are constantly met, open seasons are severely restricted, and continually shortened. It is clear that this picture has serious problems and frankly we would like to have a rational reason as to why this is. To date no reason has made any sense to us or the public we take fishing. Anglers who constantly catch species that they are told are in trouble yet can hardly find a species that is supposedly healthy do not understand how management works and frankly neither do we.

Changes must be made. Management must be improved. We cannot continue to operate in this fiasco where all you catch are species alleged to be in trouble and can't find a fish that is supposed to be healthy.

Thank you,

Capt. Bob Zales, II  
President