More Frequently Asked Questions

The acceptable biological catch may not be set above the overfishing level and should take into account scientific uncertainty, which includes the uncertainty around the estimate of a stock's biomass and overfishing limit, among other factors.

Once the Council accepts the SSC recommendation for ABC, it must then set an annual catch limit, which cannot exceed the acceptable biological catch.

Annual catch limits should take into account management and scientific uncertainty. Management uncertainty occurs when there is insufficient information about catch, which may result from late catch reporting, misreporting, and underreporting of catch.

Can ACLs be changed?

ACLs may be changed through a framework action, which is based on a framework procedure established for a fishery management plan. Framework procedures are a means to more quickly modify or establish fishery regulations. ACLs, AMs and ACTs may also be changed through the traditional amendment process when needed.

Which Gulf of Mexico species have ACLs and AMs?

Red Snapper (IFQ Program/Amendment 27)
Greater Amberjack (Amendment 30A)
Gray Triggerfish (Amendment 30A)
Gag (Amendment 30B)
Red Grouper (Amendment 30B)
Shallow-Water Grouper (Amendment 30B)

Which species still need ACLs & AMs?

Stone Crab, Red Drum, Other Reef Fish Resources, Coastal Migratory Pelagics (king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, cobia), spiny lobster.

What you should know about Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures

Revised April 2010

New provisions in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require regional fishery managment councils to develop annual catch limits and accountability measures for managed species by 2010 for species subject to overfishing and by 2011 for all other species to ensure that overfishing does not occur.

Frequently Asked Questions About Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures

What is an Annual Catch Limit (ACL)?

An Annual Catch Limit is the level of annual catch of a stock or stock complex that, if met or exceeded, triggers accountability measures such as a seasonal closure or quota closure. "Catch" includes the total quantity of fish, measured by weight or numbers of fish, taken in all fishing and includes discard mortality. Discard mortality is the total weight or number of fish that are released and subsequently die.

Annual catch limits may incorporate management and scientific uncertainty, and take into account the amount of data available and level of vulnerability to overfishing for each species.

Separate accountability measures may be established for each sector of a fishery, i.e., commercial and recreational. However, the combined total of all sector accountability measures may not exceed the total annual catch limit for a species or species complex.

What are Accountability Measures (AM)?

Accountability Measures are management controls to prevent annual catch limits from being exceeded and to correct or mitigate overages of the annual catch limit if they occur.

NOAA Fisheries Service has identified two categories of accountability measures: in-season accountability measures that can be implemented during a fishing season, and post-season accountability measures that take effect in the following season.

Examples of in-season accountability measures include: quota closure, trip or bag limit changes, gear restrictions, individual fishing quotas, and catch shares.

Examples of post-season accountability measures include: seasonal closures, reduced trip or bag limits, shortening the fishing season implemented in the subsequent year.

What is an Annual Catch Target?

An annual catch target is an amount of annual catch that serves as the management target, set below the annual catch limit to account for management uncertainty. The use of ACTs is recommended in the system of AMs so that ACLs are not exceeded.

Why do we need ACLs and AMs?

As reauthorized in 2007, the Magnuson-Stevens Act includes these new requirements to improve management of fishery resources. Regional Fishery Management Councils are required to develop annual catch limits for each of the fisheries managed, and include in each fishery management plan a mechanism for specifying a harvest level that prevents overfishing, which includes measures to ensure accountability.

Are there exceptions to the ACL requirement?

The Magnuson-Stevens Act provides limited exceptions to annual catch limit requirements. Those exceptions include:

- Species that have a life cycle of one year or less
- Stocks subject to management under an international fishery agreement
- Ecosystem component species; i.e., species that are federally managed but are non-target species, not subject to overfishing or overfished nor likely to become so; and are generally not retained for sale or personal use.

When are ACLs and AMs required for Gulf of Mexico Species?

Fishery Management Plans or Amendments must establish ACLs and AMs in 2010 for species subject to overfishing. ACLs and AMs must be established in 2011 for all other federally managed fisheries.
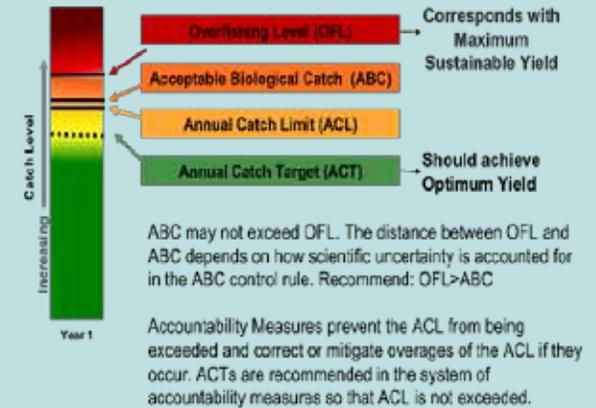
How are ACLs developed?

ACLs may be set for the fishery as a whole, or for various fishery sectors (e.g., commercial or recreational). Separate state and federal ACLs may be set for populations that are targeted in state waters as well as federal waters.

Setting ACLs begins with specifying an overfishing limit. An overfishing limit is an annual estimate of the maximum yield a stock can withstand without being put in jeopardy of overfishing.

Once an overfishing level is specified, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) recommends to the Council an acceptable biological catch (ABC).

Overview of ACLs and AMs

ABC may not exceed OFL. The distance between OFL and ABC depends on how scientific uncertainty is accounted for in the ABC control rule. Recommend: OFL>ABC

Accountability Measures prevent the ACL from being exceeded and correct or mitigate overages of the ACL if they occur. ACTs are recommended in the system of accountability measures so that ACL is not exceeded.

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