

OPTIONS TO ESTABLISH A RED SNAPPER SPLIT SEASON FOR VESSELS WITH FEDERAL CHARTER VESSEL/HEADBOAT PERMITS

2.2 Draft Action 2 – Red Snapper Split Season for Charter Vessels and Headboats

Alternative 1: No Action. The red snapper season for federally permitted charter vessels and headboats will open on June 1 and will close on the date when the for-hire allocation of ACT is projected to be reached, or when the combined ACT (charter-for-hire and private recreational quotas combined) is projected to be reached, whichever occurs sooner.

Alternative 2: Effective beginning in 2015, the red snapper season for federally permitted charter vessels and headboats will open on **June 1** and will close on the date when 66 percent of the for-hire ACT is projected to be reached. The season will re-open on October 1 and will close on the date when the for-hire ACT is projected to be reached, or when the total recreational ACT (for-hire and private angling combined) is projected to be reached, whichever occurs sooner.

Alternative 3: Effective beginning in 2016, the red snapper season for federally permitted charter vessels and headboats will open on **March 1** and will close on the date when 66 percent of the for-hire ACT is projected to be reached. The season will re-open on October 1 and will close on the date when the for-hire ACT is projected to be reached, or when the total recreational ACT (for-hire and private angling combined) is projected to be reached, whichever occurs sooner.

Note: Implementation of this action is contingent upon implementation of the sector separation provision in Amendment 40. If sector separation terminates, then the split season in this action will also end. The opening date for for-hire vessels will be the same as for private vessels, unless modified in a subsequent regulatory action.

Discussion:

During the December 2-3, 2014 meeting of the Ad Hoc Red Snapper For-Hire Advisory Panel (AP), the AP passed a motion to recommend that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) establish a split season split season for the for-hire component of the recreational sector, with 66% of the ACT allocated for the first season, and following determination of landings, open a second season in the fall for the remainder of the ACT. This split season would be effective for 2015, or until an electronic reporting method is implemented. The purpose of this section is to establish alternatives for the Council to consider such an action.

If the Council chooses to adopt a split season, this action can be added to the Framework Action to Adjust Recreational For-Hire Red Snapper Management Measures.

The alternatives presented use the AP's recommended allocation of 66% of the ACT in the first season. This allocation is based on the 2/3 and 1/3 of quota allocation used in the commercial red snapper sector from 1996 until implementation of the IFQ program in 2007. Also, in the event that the combined for-hire and private vessel ACT is taken prior to the October opening, which would result in not having a second season, this assures that the for-hire component will have had the opportunity to take the majority of its ACT. However, the Council can choose a different split when it adopts a preferred alternative.

Alternative 1, the no action alternative, retains the single season the for-hire component. The red snapper for-hire season will open on June 1, the same as the private-angling season. Season lengths have not been determined as of the writing of this document, but the for-hire component is expected to have a longer season in federal waters than the private-angling component. However, private vessels will likely have additional fishing days in state waters off several of the Gulf states. For-hire vessels, as a condition of their federal permits, are required to adhere to the more restrictive of state or federal regulations when fishing in state waters. Depending upon the state regulations, private-anglers may be able to participate in extended state seasons while for-hire vessels are constrained by the permit condition.

Alternative 2 establishes a split season as recommended by the AP beginning in 2015. This alternative opens the red snapper for-hire season on June 1 but closes it when 66% of the for-hire ACT is projected to be reached. The for-hire season would then re-open October 1 to allow the remainder of the ACT to be taken. The expected pounds of red snapper available for each season from 2015 through 2017 is shown in Table 2.2. The second season will be adjusted for any over or underharvest in the first season. As a result, the second season could have more than 34% of the ACT remaining, or less, depending on how many red snapper were caught in the first season. In addition, the total amount of ACT could be reduced if there is an overharvest in the preceding year. Any unused ACT will not be carried over to the following year. This would allow for-hire vessels to provide a limited number of trips to customers who would prefer to fish for red snapper in the fall. However, if NMFS determines that the entire recreational ACT (for-hire and private anglers combined) was caught during the first season, then there would be no fall season opening.

Alternative 3 establishes a split season with the first season opening on March 1 rather than on June 1. This alternative is otherwise similar to **Alternative 2**. This alternative cannot be implemented for 2015 due to the time required to review and implement a framework action. However, the Council could choose to adopt **Alternative 2** for 2015 and **Alternative 3** for 2016 and beyond. There is currently a fixed closed season from January 1 through May 31 that would need to be modified as part of this action. The primary benefit of this alternative is to move the for-hire red snapper season out of the summer when heat and frequent storms may discourage some fishermen from fishing. In addition, there seems to be a positive correlation with temperature and depth and mortality of released fish. Shifting the red snapper open season to spring or fall could improve the survival of release fish because the likelihood of barotrauma being fatal is higher in hotter months (Loftus and Radonski 2012). This alternative moves the

for-hire open season out of the red snapper spawning season, which occurs from early April through late August with a peak in late May through July (Lyczkowski-Schultz and Hanisko 2007). Red snapper do not form large spawning aggregations and there is no evidence that fishing for red snapper during spawning season has any greater impact on the stock than fishing at other times. However, many fishermen feel that it is inappropriate to target fish when they are spawning.

The Council could choose to adopt both **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** as preferred alternatives. If both alternatives are adopted, the 2015 for-hire season for red snapper would open on June 1. In 2016 and beyond, the season would open on March 1.

Table 2.1 Calculation of recreational red snapper recreational sector component ACTs. Assumes that headboat collaborative EFP does not continue after 2015.

Year	ABC	Recreational ACL (49% of ABC)	HBC portion 3.9894%	Sector Separation		ACT	
				CFH quota 42.3% of ACL minus HBC portion	Priv. quota 57.7% of ACL	CFH 80% of quota	Priv. Vess.
2015	13,000,000	6,370,000	254,125	2,440,385	3,675,490	1,952,308	2,940,392
2016	13,210,000	6,472,900	0	2,738,037	3,734,863	2,190,429	2,987,891
2017	13,320,000	6,526,800	0	2,760,836	3,765,964	2,208,669	3,012,771

Table 2.2 Season allocation of CFH ACT based on a 66%:34% split. Season 2 quota will be adjusted for any Season 1 over or under harvest. ACT may be reduced if overages occur in the prior fishing year.

Year	CFH ACT	Season 1 66%	Season 2 34%
2105	1,952,308	1,288,523	663,785
2016	2,190,419	1,445,677	744,742
2017	2,208,669	1,457,722	750,947

References

Loftus, A.J. and G.C. Radonski. 2012 FishSmart Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic workshop

on improving the survival of released fish focusing on barotrauma. Workshop summary. 27 p.
http://www.fishsmart.org/sites/g/files/g1490811/f/201404/FS_GULF_12_Full_Report.pdf

Lyczkowski-Schultz, J. and D.S. Hanisko. 2007. A time series of observations on red snapper larvae from SEAMAP surveys, 1982-2003: seasonal occurrence, distribution, abundance, and size. P. 3-23 *in*: Patterson, W. F., III, J. H. Cowan, Jr., G. R. Fitzhugh, and D. L. Nieland, editors. 2007. Red snapper ecology and fisheries in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. American Fisheries Society, Symposium 60, Bethesda, Maryland