



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council February 2013 Update

February 14, 2013

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Mobile, Alabama, February 5 - 8, 2013, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including several related to the management of red snapper. Here are some of the actions taken by the Council last week.

Red Snapper Management

Regional Management of Red Snapper

The Council discussed Amendment 39 - Regional Management of Recreational Red Snapper and reviewed a summary of comments received during scoping.

Regional management considers dividing the federal red snapper quota among states or regions potentially giving them authority to set their own bag limits and seasons. States/regions would have more flexibility in choosing season and bag limits, but this would not necessarily result in more fishing days.

Under a regional management system red snapper would remain a federally managed species subject to federal conservation goals, and the Council would continue to allocate the recreational quota and set the size limit.

The draft document examines:

- Defining boundaries
- Regional allocation
- Program Administration
- Accountability Measures

An Options Paper is currently under development. That document will be presented to the Council during the April Council meeting in Gulfport, Mississippi.

Red Snapper Allocation

Current allocation is 51% commercial and 49% recreational. Since the Commercial Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program was put in place, the commercial sector has not exceeded its quota. In recent years, the recreational sector has exceeded its quota and faced shorter seasons.

The purpose of this amendment is to:

- Increase net benefits from red snapper fishing
- Increase the stability of the recreational red snapper component of the reef fish fishery

The Council put this Amendment on hold until after the current red snapper stock assessment is completed and the results can be analyzed.

Days-at-Sea Program

The Council is considering a Days-at-Sea Pilot Program that would give a portion of for-hire vessels a specific number of days to fish for red snapper. This would allow vessel owners in the program to choose what days to fish, allowing them to make better business decisions.

Issues to consider:

- Should the program be open to all permit holders or a sampling of permit-holders?
- Should electronic reporting be required?

- Should VMS or other tracking devices be required?
- Should bag or trip limits be put in place?

Red Snapper Framework Action

The Council took final action on a framework action that increases the red snapper quotas from 4.121 mp commercial and 3.959 mp recreational to:

Commercial Quota	Recreational Quota
4.315 mp	4.145 mp

All pounds are in whole weight. The framework action also retains the 2-fish per angler bag limit. This action is projected to result in a 27-day recreational season, beginning June 1, provided that Texas maintains its existing state regulations and the remaining Gulf States adopt consistent regulations.

In a related action, the Council requested an emergency rule that gives the Regional Administrator authority to reduce the recreational red snapper season in the EEZ off those states that implement less restrictive regulations by the amount necessary to account for the additional harvest that will occur because of having non-compatible regulations. A more permanent solution will be incorporated into the Recreational Red Snapper Regional Management Amendment for Council review and consideration.

Other Red Snapper Actions

During the February Council meeting, the Council requested that staff prepare a document that looks at issues related to inter-sector trading of red snapper IFQ shares. Inter-sector trading could allow both sectors to acquire and fish red snapper shares and allocation. It may also:

- Help supplement the recreational red snapper season
- Improve stability in the for-hire sector
- Result in a more efficient allocation of red snapper between sectors

A red snapper tag program was also discussed, and the Council agreed to ask the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to initiate discussions with the individual Gulf States to determine:

- Are states supportive?
- What processes are necessary to begin a fish tag system?
- Should the program be an individual or vessel permit system?
- Would the program be for quota limitation or data collection?

Other Actions

Vermilion & Yellowtail Snapper ACL, and Venting Tool Requirement

The Council took final action on framework action to:

- Maintain the vermilion snapper annual catch limits at 3.42 million pounds as specified in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment and set a 10 fish per angler bag limit within the 20-reef fish aggregate.
- Increase the yellowtail snapper annual catch limit from 725,000 pounds to 901,125 pounds
- Eliminate the requirement to have and use a venting tool.*

*Since the rule was implemented in 2008, alternative methods for improving the survival of released fish have been developed, and the Council believes that fishermen should have the flexibility to use whichever release method is most appropriate. For more information, see the FishSmart website at <http://www.fishsmart.org>

In order to become law, the actions must first be approved and implemented by the Secretary of Commerce.

Cooperative Texas Shrimp Closure

The annual cooperative Texas shrimp closure was once again approved by the Gulf Council. The closure is part of cooperative seasonal closure with the State of Texas and runs concurrent with its mid-season closure.

The management objectives of the Texas closure are to increase the yield of brown shrimp and eliminate the waste of the resource caused by discarding undersized shrimp caught during a period in their life cycle when they are growing rapidly.

The closure results in larger shrimp in the fishery and, subsequently, a higher market value. This enables fishermen to harvest premium marketable-sized shrimp, thereby increasing revenues to the shrimp industry. Since 1981, when the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan (FMP) was implemented,

there has been some form of closure off the coast of Texas. The 200-mile seasonal closure has been in effect since 1989.

About Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional Fishery Management Councils established by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council prepares fishery management plans, which are designed to manage fishery resources within the 200-mile limit of the Gulf of Mexico.



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