



PUBLIC HEARING GUIDE

09/29/21



Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 32:

Modifications to the Gulf of Mexico
Migratory Group Cobia Catch
Limits, Possession Limits, Size
Limits, and Framework Procedure



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What is a Public Hearing?

A public hearing gives you an opportunity to comment on a fishery management plan or amendment that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) is developing. Public hearings are conducted later in the amendment development process, after the Council has begun selecting preferred alternatives for proposed actions, but before taking final action. Suggestions, issues, and concerns expressed during the public hearings will be presented to the Council for review and consideration before final action is taken. Focusing your comments on the pros and cons of specific alternatives in each action provides the most useful guidance to the Council. If you are unable to attend a public hearing in person, you are encouraged to submit your comments online. For online comment forms, video presentations, and full amendment documents, visit our website at <https://gulfcouncil.org/amendments-under-development/>.

How does a public hearing affect fisheries management?

Comments provided during the public hearing process are reported to the full Council prior to final action. Your input is considered as the Council deliberates and chooses the most appropriate management measures to address the issue(s) at hand.

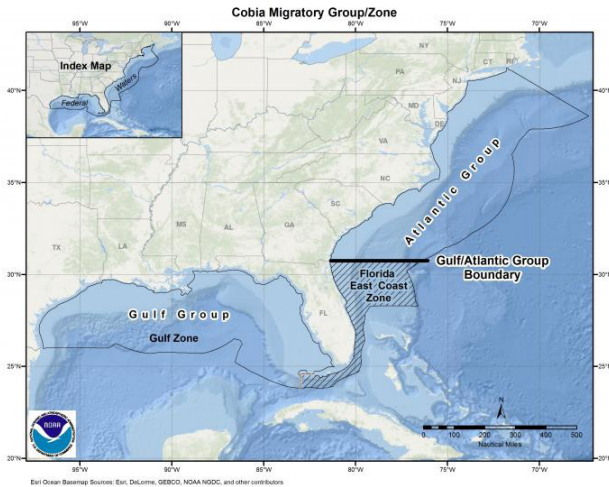
How else can I get involved?

There are many ways you can help the Council identify fishery management needs and recommend reasonable management alternatives, each dependent on how actively involved you want to become. The first steps to becoming involved is to learn about the management process by visiting our website at www.gulfcouncil.org, signing up to receive our communications, and contacting Council members and staff to discuss management concerns. You can attend meetings, serve on advisory panels and committees that advise the Council on fishery issues, participate in stock assessment meetings, and even apply to become a Council member.



Introduction to Amendment 32

Gulf Group Cobia is jointly managed by the Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils. Gulf Group Cobia consists of the Gulf Zone and the Florida East Coast (FLEC) Zone. Atlantic Group Cobia is managed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.



The most recent cobia stock assessment (SEDAR 28 Update) was completed in July of 2020. The last year of data included in the assessment was 2018. The assessment determined that Gulf Group Cobia is undergoing overfishing with biomass at reduced levels, which puts the stock at risk of becoming overfished if no change in management is implemented. Cobia landings in both Gulf and FLEC Zones have been decreasing since 2011. For-Hire and recreational fishermen have been reporting a decrease in the presence of and the average size of Gulf Zone Cobia. In fact, the assessment determined that the stock has experienced overfishing every year from 1975 through 2018, with the exceptions of 1983 and 2009.

SEDAR 28 Update used recreational data from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES), which is designed to more accurately measure recreational catch and effort. In this assessment, MRIP-FES calibrated historical effort estimates date back in time to 1981. In comparison to the previous data collection system, the data from MRIP-FES show that recreational catch and effort is greater than previously thought. This impacts recommendations for Overfishing Limits (OFLs), Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs), and Annual Catch Limits (ACLs).

The Council’s SSCs reviewed results of the SEDAR 28 Update stock assessment and recommended new catch limits. These new catch limits, which are in MRIP-FES, appear higher than the current catch limits, which are in MRIP-CHTS. However, if the current catch limits are converted to MRIP-FES for comparison purposes, then the resulting catch limits are approximately 33% lower than current catch limits.

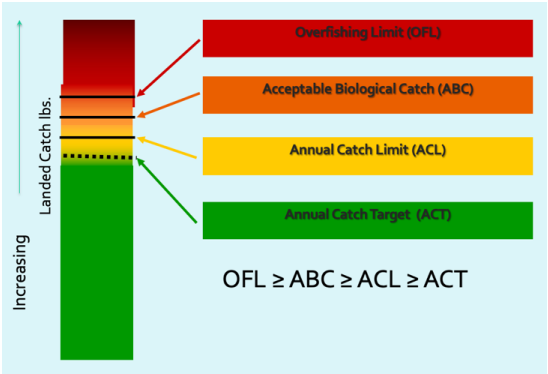
	Year	Data Currency	OFL	ABC	ACL
Current	2016+	MRIP-CHTS	2,660,000	2,600,000	2,600,000
		MRIP-FES	4,870,000	4,500,000	4,500,000
Newly Recommended	2021	MRIP-FES	3,030,000	2,340,000	2,340,000
	2022		3,210,000	2,600,000	2,600,000
	2023		3,310,000	2,760,000	2,760,000

The Councils are obligated to act to ensure that harvest does not exceed the newly recommended catch limits to end overfishing.

Action 1 – Cobia OFL, ABC, ACL

The current OFL is 2,660,000 pounds, the ABC is 2,600,000 pounds, and the ACL is set equal to the ABC (all values in landed weight). Those values were set using the old recreational landings estimates (MRIP-CHTS) data. Since the SEDAR 28 Update used MRIP-FES, new catch limits will be set in MRIP-FES.

The Councils are obligated to act on the results of the recent stock assessment (SEDAR 28 Update) and adjust the Gulf Group Cobia OFL and ABC based on the recommendations of their SSCs. The Councils must also adjust the cobia ACL to ensure that it doesn’t exceed the newly recommended ABC.



Alternative 1: No action. Retain the Gulf Group Cobia stock OFL, ABC, ACL as implemented in 2015 by Amendment 20B.

This is not a legally viable alternative because it is not based on the best scientific information available (BSIA), and it would retain catch levels that are above those produced by SEDAR 28 Update and recommended by the SSCs.

Preferred Alternative 2: Modify the Gulf Group Cobia stock OFL, ABC, and ACL based on the recommendation of the SSCs for an increasing yield stream for 2021 to 2023+. The stock ACL is set equal to the stock ABC.

Alternative 3: Modify the Gulf Group Cobia stock OFL, ABC, and ACL as a constant catch value for 2021 and subsequent fishing years. The stock ACL is set equal to the stock ABC.

A Comparison of Catch Limits Under Each Alternative in Action 1 (expressed in pounds landed weight)

Alternative	Year	Data Currency	OFL	ABC	ACL
1	2016+	MRIP -CHTS	2,660,000	2,600,000	2,600,000
		MRIP-FES	4,870,000	4,500,000	4,500,000
2 (preferred)	2021	MRIP-FES	3,030,000	2,340,000	2,340,000
	2022		3,210,000	2,600,000	2,600,000
	2023+		3,310,000	2,760,000	2,760,000
3	2021+	MRIP-FES	3,030,000	2,340,000	2,340,000

Action 2 – Apportionment Between the Gulf Zone and the Florida East Coast (FLEC) Zone

Current apportionment of Gulf Group Cobia between the Gulf Zone and the FLEC Zone is based on MRIP-CHTS average landings for the years 1998 – 2012. New MRIP-FES landings indicate that, compared to MRIP-CHTS, a slightly greater proportion of landings can historically be attributed to the FLEC Zone.

The Councils must consider adjusting the apportionment between the zones to be consistent with the best scientific information available.

Note: Zone ACLs in this Action will be based on the Gulf Group Cobia ACL selected in Action 1, given the transition to the new monitoring system and BSIA .

Alternative 1: No Action. Retain the current Gulf Group Cobia stock ACL apportionment of 64% to the Gulf Zone and 36% to the FLEC Zone based on MRIP-CHTS average landings for the years 1998 – 2012.

This is not a legally viable alternative because it is not based on the BSIA.

Alternative 2: Retain the Gulf Group Cobia stock ACL apportionment between the zones at 64% to the Gulf Zone and 36% to the FLEC Zone, and use this apportionment to update both Zone ACLs using MRIP-FES units based on the Gulf Group Cobia stock ACL(s) selected in Action 1.

Preferred Alternative 3: Modify the Gulf Group Cobia stock ACL apportionment at 63% to the Gulf Zone and 37% to the FLEC Zone, based on the MRIP-FES average landings for the years 1998 – 2012, and use this apportionment to update the Zone ACLs based on the Gulf Group Cobia stock ACL(s) selected in Action 1.

Alternative 4: Modify the Gulf Group Cobia stock ACL apportionment at 59% to the Gulf Zone and 41% to the FLEC Zone, based on the MRIP-FES average landings for the years 2003 – 2019, and use this apportionment to update the Zone ACLs based on the Gulf Group Cobia ACL(s) selected in Action 1.

A Comparison of Alternatives in Action 2 Based on Selection of Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1 (Expressed in pounds landed weight)

Alternative	Zone Apportionment Gulf:FLEC	Year	Gulf Zone ACL	FLEC Zone ACL
1	64:36	2021+	1,660,000	930,000
2	64:36	2021	1,497,600	842,400
		2022	1,664,000	936,000
		2023+	1,766,400	993,600
3 (Preferred)	63:37	2021	1,474,200	865,800
		2022	1,638,000	962,000
		2023+	1,738,800	1,021,200
4	59:41	2021	1,380,600	959,400
		2022	1,534,000	1,066,000
		2023+	1,628,400	1,131,600

Action 3 – FLEC Zone Cobia Allocation

The current allocation between the commercial and recreational sector in the FLEC Zone is based on the South Atlantic Council's allocation formula for Atlantic Group Cobia based on MRIP-CHTS landings, which balanced historical catches (2000 – 2008) with more recent landings (2006 – 2008):

$$\text{Sector allocation} = (50\% * \text{average of Atlantic cobia long catch range (lbs) 2000 – 2008} + (50\% * \text{average of recent catch trend (lbs) 2006 – 2008}))$$

MRIP-FES landings incorporated into the SEDAR 28 Update indicate an increase in the proportion of recreational landings in the FLEC Zone. The Councils must consider adjusting the allocation in the FLEC Zone to be consistent with the best scientific information available.

Note: Sector ACLs will be based on ACLs and zone apportionments selected in Actions 1 and 2.

Alternative 1: No Action. Retain the FLEC Zone Cobia ACL allocation of 8% to the commercial sector and 92% to the recreational sector based on the South Atlantic Council's allocation formula for Atlantic Group Cobia based on MRIP-CHTS landings which balanced historical catches (2000 – 2008) with more recent landings (2006 – 2008):

$$\text{Sector allocation} = (50\% * \text{average of Atlantic cobia long catch range (lbs) 2000 – 2008} + (50\% * \text{average of recent catch trend (lbs) 2006 – 2008}))$$

Alternative 2: Modify the FLEC Zone cobia ACL allocation to 5% to the commercial sector and 95% to the recreational sector based on the South Atlantic Council's allocation formula for Atlantic Group cobia, which balanced historical catches landings (2000 – 2008) with more recent landings (2006 – 2008), but use MRIP-FES data:

$$\text{Sector allocation} = (50\% * \text{average of Atlantic Group cobia long catch range (lbs) 2000 – 2008} + (50\% * \text{average of recent catch trend (lbs) 2006 – 2008}))$$

Preferred Alternative 3: Retain the FLEC Zone cobia ACL allocation of 8% to the commercial sector and 92% to the recreational sector and update the ACL(s) selected in Action 2 based on MRIP-FES landings.



Alternative 4: Modify the FLEC Zone cobia ACL allocations to be calculated based on maintaining the current commercial ACL (i.e., 70,000 lbs) beginning in the 2021 fishing season and allocating the remaining revised total ACL to the recreational sector. The allocation percentages will remain in following years.

Action 4 – Catch Targets (ACT) for the Gulf Group Cobia Zones



Currently, the Gulf Zone ACT is set equal to 90% of the Gulf Zone ACL using the Gulf ACL/ACT Control Rule. The FLEC Zone ACT equals 83% of the FLEC Zone ACL based on this equation:

FLEC Zone ACL multiplied by [(1-Proportional Standard Error [PSE] of the FLEC Zone recreational landings) or 0.5, whichever is greater].

Alternative 1: No Action. The Gulf Zone ACT equals 90% of the Gulf Zone ACL. The FLEC Zone ACT equals the FLEC Zone ACL multiplied by [(1-Proportional Standard Error [PSE] of the FLEC Zone recreational landings) or 0.5, whichever is greater].

Preferred Alternative 2: Use the Gulf Council’s ACL/ACT Control Rule to calculate ACTs for the Gulf Zone and the recreational sector in the FLEC Zone.

Alternative 3: Establish an ACT for the commercial sector in the FLEC Zone using the Gulf Council’s ACL/ACT Control Rule

Alternative	Zone	Commercial ACT Buffer	Recreational ACT Buffer	Stock ACT Buffer
1	Gulf	-	-	10%
	FLEC	-	24%	-
2 Preferred	Gulf	-	-	10%
	FLEC	-	10%	-
3	Gulf	-	-	-
	FLEC	10%	-	-

Action 5.1 – Gulf Zone Possession, Vessel, and Trip Limits in the Gulf Zone

The commercial and recreational daily possession limit in the Gulf Zone is currently 2 fish per person regardless of number or duration of trips. There is no commercial or recreational trip or vessel limit.

The Councils are considering options to reduce harvest and mortality to constrain Gulf Group Cobia harvest to its ACL. Reducing the number of legal-size cobia retained on a fishing trip would be expected to constrain harvest on Gulf Group Cobia; however, analyses show the reductions have minimal effects.

Alternative 1: No Action.

Preferred Alternative 2: Reduce the daily possession limit to 1 fish per person, regardless of the number or duration of trips.

Preferred Option 2a: for the recreational sector

Preferred Option 2b: for the commercial sector

Preferred Alternative 3: Create a recreational vessel limit. Fishermen may not exceed the per person daily possession limit.

Preferred Option 3a: The vessel limit is two fish per trip.

Option 3b: The vessel limit is four fish per trip

Option 3c: The vessel limit is six fish per trip.

Preferred Alternative 4: Create a commercial trip limit. Fishermen may not exceed the per person daily possession limit.

Preferred Option 4a: The trip limit is two fish.

Option 4b: The trip limit is four fish.

Option 4c: The trip limit is six fish.



Estimated percent reduction in Gulf Zone cobia landings for Action 5.1 generated from 2017 – 2019 landings data

Alternative	Details	Percent Reduction of Total Cobia Landings
1	2 Fish per Person per Day Commercial and Recreational Sector	0%
Preferred Alternative 2: 1 Fish per Person per Day		
Preferred 2a	Recreational Sector	1.2%
Preferred 2b	Commercial Sector	<1%
Preferred Alternative 3 Recreational Vessel Limit per Trip		
Preferred 3a	2 Fish per Vessel per Trip	9.0%
3b	4 Fish per Vessel per Trip	<1%
3c	6 Fish per Vessel per Trip	<1%
Preferred Alternative 4 Commercial Trip Limit		
Preferred 4a	2 Fish per Trip	<1%
4b	4 Fish per Trip	<1%
4c	6 Fish per Trip	0%

Action 5.2 – FLEC Zone Possession, Vessel, and Trip Limits

The commercial and recreational daily possession limit in the FLEC Zone is currently 2 fish per person regardless of number or duration of trips. There is no commercial or recreational trip or vessel limit.

The Councils are considering options to reduce harvest and mortality to constrain Gulf Group Cobia harvest to its ACL in the FLEC Zone.

Alternative 1: No Action.

Preferred Alternative 2: Reduce the daily possession limit to 1 fish per person, regardless of the number or duration of trips.

Preferred Option 2a: for the recreational sector

Preferred Option 2b: for the commercial sector

Preferred Alternative 3: Create a recreational vessel limit. Fishermen may not exceed the per person daily possession limit.

Preferred Option 3a: The vessel limit is two fish per trip.

Option 3b: The vessel limit is four fish per trip.

Option 3c: The vessel limit is six fish per trip.

Preferred Alternative 4: Create a commercial trip limit. Fishermen may not exceed the per person daily possession limit.

Preferred Option 4a: The trip limit is two fish.

Option 4b: The trip limit is four fish.

Option 4c: The trip limit is six fish.

Calculated percent reduction in FLEC Zone landings for Action 5.2 using recent recreational data (2017 – 2019).

Alternative	Details	% Reduction of total FLEC Zone cobia landings
1	2 Fish per Person per Day Commercial and Recreational Sector	0%
Preferred Alternative 2: 1 Fish per Person per Day		
Preferred 2a	Recreational Sector	11%
Preferred 2b	Commercial Sector	14%
Preferred Alternative 3 Recreational Trip Limit		
Preferred 3a	2 Fish per Vessel per Trip	18.9%
3b	4 Fish per Vessel per Trip	4.6
3c	6 Fish per Vessel per Trip	<1%
Preferred Alternative 4 Commercial Trip Limit		
Preferred 4a	2 Fish per Trip	9%
4b	4 Fish per Trip	3%
4c	6 Fish per Trip	3%

Action 6 – Gulf Group Cobia Minimum Size Limit

Currently, the minimum size limit in the Gulf Zone is 36 inches fork length (FL), and in the FLEC Zone it is 33 inches FL. An increase in the minimum size limit is expected to reduce the harvest rate and potentially the total catch.

Alternative 1: No Action. Retain the current recreational and commercial minimum size limit of 36 inches FL in the Gulf Zone and 33 inches FL in the FLEC Zone.

Preferred Alternative 2: Retain the current recreational and commercial minimum size limit of 36 inches FL in the Gulf Zone and increase the recreational and commercial minimum size limit to 36 inches FL in the FLEC Zone.

Alternative 3: Increase the recreational and commercial minimum size limit to 39 inches FL.

Option 3a: in the Gulf Zone

Option 3b: in the FLEC Zone

Alternative 4: Increase the recreational and commercial minimum size limit to 42 inches FL.

Option 4a: in the Gulf Zone

Option 4b: in the FLEC Zone

Estimated percent reduction in commercial landings for the Gulf and FLEC Zones for the proposed alternatives.

Alternative	Size Limit (Inches FL)	% Reduction
Gulf Zone		
Alternative 1 No Action	36	0
Preferred Alternative 2	36	0
Alternative 3a	39	20.3
Alternative 4a	42	45.2
FLEC Zone		
Alternative 1 No Action	33	0
Preferred Alternative 2	36	27.2
Alternative 3b	39	48.9
Alternative 4b	42	60.3



Estimated percent reduction in recreational landings for the Gulf and FLEC Zones for the proposed alternatives.

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Alternative	Size Limit (Inches FL)	Gulf Zone % Reduction	FLEC Zone % Reduction
Texas			
Alternative 1 No Action	36	0	NA
Preferred Alternative 2	36	0	NA
Alternative 3a	39	20.3	NA
Alternative 4a	42	39.9	NA
Louisiana			
Alternative 1 No Action	36	0	NA
Preferred Alternative 2	36	0	NA
Alternative 3a	39	20.3	NA
Alternative 4a	42	46.5	NA
Headboat: All Gulf of Mexico States and Both Coasts of Florida			
Alternative 1 No Action	33	NA	0
Preferred Alternative 2	36	0	23.4
Alternative 3a, b	39	19.3	43
Alternative 4a, b	42	37.6	65.2
MRIP: Mississippi, Alabama, and Both Coasts of Florida			
Alternative 1 No Action	33	NA	0
Preferred Alternative 2	36	0	33.9
Alternative 3a, b	39	19.6	55.4
Alternative 4a, b	42	38.7	74.4

Action 7 – Modify the Framework Procedure

The Coastal Migratory Pelagics framework procedure allows the Councils to change specific management measures through framework amendments. Typically, these changes can be implemented within a shorter timeframe than a plan amendment. The Councils would like to update the language in the framework to match our current management practices and consider expanding South Atlantic responsibilities for managing FLEC Zone cobia.

Alternative 1: No action.

Preferred Alternative 2: Modify the framework procedure to expand the South Atlantic responsibilities for the FLEC Zone cobia by allowing setting vessel trip limits; closed seasons or areas; gear restrictions; per person bag and possession limits; size limits; in-season and post-season accountability measures; and specification of ACTs or sector ACTs to be addressed via framework action.

Preferred Alternative 2 would expand the South Atlantic Council’s responsibilities in the management of FLEC Zone cobia beyond what they currently can do, which is: to set vessel trip limits, closed seasons or areas, or gear restrictions. This alternative would add to the list: per person bag and possession limits, size limits, in-season and post-season accountability measures, and specification of ACTs or sector ACTs

Public Hearing Meeting Information

In-Person Public Hearings will be hosted beginning at 6:00pm local time at the following dates and locations:

Monday, October 4, 2021 - Destin

Destin Community Center
100 Stahlman Avenue
Destin, FL 32541

Tuesday, October 5, 2021 - Gulfport

Holiday Inn Gulfport-Airport Hotel
9515 Highway 49
Gulfport, MS 39503

Wednesday, October 6, 2021 - Corpus Christi

Omni Bayfront
900 North Shoreline Boulevard
Corpus Christi, TX 78401

Thursday, October 7, 2021 - Galveston

Hilton Galveston Island
5400 Seawall Boulevard
Galveston, TX 77551

Wednesday, October 13, 2021 - Madeira Beach

The City Centre at City Hall
300 Municipal Dr.
Madeira Beach, FL 33708

Thursday, October 14, 2021 - Baton Rouge

Crowne Plaza Baton Rouge
4728 Constitution Avenue
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

Monday, October 18, 2021 - Ft. Myers

Crowne Plaza Ft. Myers at Bell Tower Shops
13051 Bell Tower Drive
Ft. Myers, FL 33907

Webinar Hearing

Tuesday, October 19, 2021: 6-9 PM, EDT

Register for the Webinar
<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2394715852160838667>

Monday, October 25, 2021 - Orange Beach

Perdido Beach Resort
27200 Perdido Beach Resort Boulevard
Orange Beach, AL 36561

Send Us Your Comments

If you are unable to attend a public hearing, your input is still important. Submit your comments online by visiting <https://tinyurl.com/y485n3pp> or scan the QR code with your mobile phone.



Notes

Notes



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