



PUBLIC HEARING GUIDE

05/17/21

Reef Fish Amendment 53: Red Grouper Allocations and Annual Catch Levels and Targets



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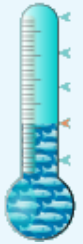
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What is a Public Hearing?

A public hearing gives you an opportunity to comment on a fishery management plan or amendment that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council 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 www.gulfcouncil.org and click the thermometer icon on the homepage.



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.

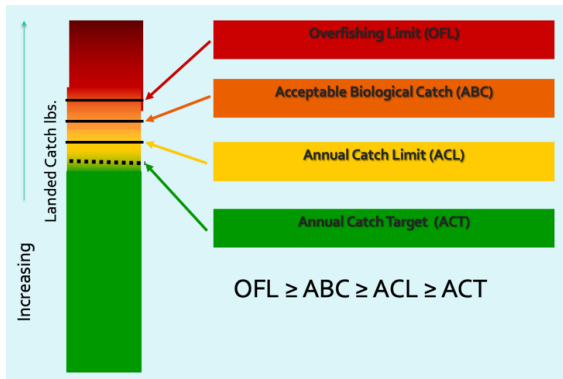
How else can I get involved?

There are many ways you can help the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council identify fishery management needs and develop reasonable management alternatives, each dependent on how actively involved you want to become. The first step to becoming involved is to educate yourself 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 panels and committees that advise the Council on fishery issues, and even apply to become a Council member.

Introduction to Amendment 53

The most recent red grouper stock assessment (SEDAR 61 2019) determined that red grouper is not overfished and is not experiencing overfishing. However, catch levels are still being reduced based on a number of factors outlined below:

First, the current overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) levels were set using a stock assessment (SEDAR 42) that was completed in 2015. The Council's scientific advisors, the Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed the assessment results and agreed with the determination that red grouper was not overfished or experiencing overfishing. However, the OFL and ABC recommendations from the 2015 stock assessment would have increased catch limits in excess of the observed harvest levels over the management history of this species. It was later determined through SEDAR 61 that recruitment to the fishery (red grouper reaching a harvestable size) was overestimated in SEDAR 42.



At the time, fishermen expressed concern about the health of the stock despite the findings of the assessment and recommended taking a more conservative approach to establishing catch limits. The Council followed this recommendation and chose a conservative catch limit. In the following years, the Council continued to be concerned about the health of the red grouper stock because ongoing stakeholder feedback indicated that it was still unhealthy and a red tide event on the west Coast of Florida was thought to be impacting the stock further. Based on updated catch advice from the NOAA's Southeast Fishery Science Center, the annual catch limit (ACL) was set equal to the combined commercial and recreational landings for 2017 despite relatively high OFL and ABC levels.

Second, projections for future harvest contained within the most recent stock assessment (SEDAR 61), were reduced from current catch limits to account for the reduction in size of the red grouper spawning stock and the impact that a 2018 red tide event. The Council's SSC recommended harvest projections which assumed that the 2018 red tide event was as severe as the event that occurred in 2005.

Lastly, changes to the recreational data collection program over time have led the Council to consider modifications to the sector allocations for red grouper and corresponding catch limits. The recent assessment (SEDAR 61) used recreational data from the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES) which is designed to more accurately measure fishing landings and effort. The current allocation, which allows 76% of the ACL to be harvested commercially and 24% to be harvested recreationally, was set using the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS). The current OFL, ABC and ACLs are set using Marine Recreational Information Program's Coastal Household Telephone Survey (MRIP-CHTS) data. The new recreational landings estimates using MRIP-FES, adjusted effort estimates back in time. In comparison to the previous data collection system, the data from MRIP-FES show that recreational catch and effort is larger than previously thought and this impacts recommendations for OFL, ABC, ACLs, and allocations between commercial and recreational sectors.

The resulting catch limits recommended by the Council's SSC based on the results from the SEDAR 61 stock assessment, 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 recommended by the Council's SSC based on the SEDAR 61 stock assessment are lower than current catch limits. For comparison, converting the current recreational ACL of 1,000,000 pounds in MRIP-CHTS to MRIP-FES currency would result in a MRIP-FES equivalent recreational ACL of 2,100,000 pounds. The Council is obligated to act to ensure that harvest does not exceed the newly recommended catch limits. Changes to the recreational sector ACL in



MRIP-FES units are predicted to require reductions to the recreational sector’s season length.

Action 1 – Modify Sector Allocations, OFL, ABC, and ACLs

The current OFL is 14,160,000 pounds, the ABC is 13,920,000 pounds, and the ACL is 4,160,000 pounds (all values in gutted weight). These values were set using the old recreational landings estimates (MRIP-CHTS) data. Since the latest stock assessment used MRIP-FES, new catch limits will be set in MRIP-FES.

The Council is obligated to act on the results of the recent stock assessment (SEDAR 61) and adjust the red grouper OFL and ABC based on the recommendations of its SSC. The Council used a range of historical landings that were converted into MRIP-FES to consider an array of sector allocations. Afterward, the Council requested the Science Center use the range of sector allocations to project the corresponding OFL and ABC yield streams. After review, the SSC determined that the range of OFLs and ABCs represented scientifically valid alternative yield projections including the status quo allocation. The resulting alternatives for allocations and catch limits are as follows:

Recreational Survey Used	Time Series	Commercial Allocation	Recreational Allocation	OFL**	ABC**
MRFSS/CHTS*	1986-2005	76%	24%	5,350,000	4,900,000
FES	1986-2005	59.3%	40.7%	4,660,000	4,260,000
	1986-2009	60.5%	39.5%	4,700,000	4,300,000
	1986-2018	59.7%	40.3%	4,670,000	4,260,000

*Allocations were set using MRFSS and CHTS was used to determine OFL, ABC, and ACL.

**expressed in pounds gutted weight.

The Council can set the total ACL (commercial and recreational) at or below the ABC. Since the current MRIP-FES equivalent stock ACL of 5,260,000 pounds exceeds all newly recommended ABCs, the Council must also adjust the red grouper total ACL.

It is important to note, once these actions are implemented, changes to the recreational sector ACL are predicted to impact the recreational sector's season length. Under all possible alternatives, the recreational sector ACL will be lower than the MRIP-FES equivalent of the current recreational sector ACL.

Assuming no changes to the commercial ACL/ACT buffer, changes to the commercial ACL will impact the commercial ACT, which determines the amount of allocation distributed to each vessel with red grouper individual fishing quota. In the following alternatives, the commercial sector would see an ACL reduction except in Alternative 2 which would result in an increase to the commercial ACL, and in Alternative 6 which would result in a commercial ACL that is equivalent to the current level.

Alternative 1: No Action – Maintain the 76% commercial and 24% recreational sector allocations derived from the average landings using Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) data from the years 1986 through 2005. Maintain the current OFL, ABC, and ACLs.

This is not a legally viable alternative because it is not based on the best scientific information available, and it would retain catch levels that are above those produced by SEDAR 61 and recommended by the SSC.

Alternative 2: Maintain the sector allocations of the total ACL as 76% commercial and 24% recreational. Revise the OFL and ABC as based on Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) 61 (2019). Set the stock ACL equal to the stock ABC.



Preferred Alternative 3: Revise the sector allocations of the total ACL between the recreational and commercial sectors as the average landings using Fishing Effort Survey (FES)-adjusted Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP FES) data during the years 1986 through 2005. The allocations for red grouper are 59.3% commercial and 40.7% recreational. Revise the OFL and ABC based on SEDAR 61 (2019). Set the stock ACL equal to the stock ABC.

Alternative 4: Revise the sector allocations of the total ACL between the recreational and commercial sectors as the average landings using MRIP FES data during the years 1986 through 2009. The allocations for red grouper are 60.5% commercial and 39.5% recreational. Revise the OFL and ABC based on SEDAR 61 (2019). Set the stock ACL equal to the stock ABC.

Alternative 5: Revise the sector allocations of the total ACL between the recreational and commercial sectors as the average landings using MRIP FES data during the years 1986 through 2018. The allocations for red grouper are 59.7% commercial and 40.3% recreational. Revise the OFL and ABC based on SEDAR 61 (2019). Set the stock ACL equal to the stock ABC.

Alternative 6: Revise the sector allocations of the total ACL between the recreational and commercial sectors, such that the commercial ACL is retained at 3.16 million pounds gutted weight. The allocations for red grouper are 68.7% commercial and 31.3% recreational. Revise the OFL and ABC to retain the commercial ACL. Set the stock ACL equal to the stock ABC.

A comparison of Catch Limits under each Alternative expressed in pounds gutted weight:

Alternative	Data Survey "currency"	OFL	ABC	Total ACL	Comm ACL	Rec ACL
Alt 1*	CHTS	14,160,00	13,920,000	4,160,000	3,160,000	1,000,000
	FES equivalent			(5,260,000)		(2,100,000)
Alt 2*	FES	5,350,000	4,900,000	4,900,000	3,720,000	1,180,000
Preferred Alt 3	FES	4,660,000	4,260,000	4,260,000	2,530,000	1,730,000
Alt 4	FES	4,700,000	4,300,000	4,300,000	2,600,000	1,700,000
Alt 5	FES	4,670,000	4,280,000	4,280,000	2,560,000	1,720,000
Alt 6	FES	5,030,000	4,600,000	4,600,000	3,160,000	1,440,000

**Allocations for both of these alternatives were set using MRFSS, with Alternative 2 then using FES to determine OFL, ABC, and ACL.

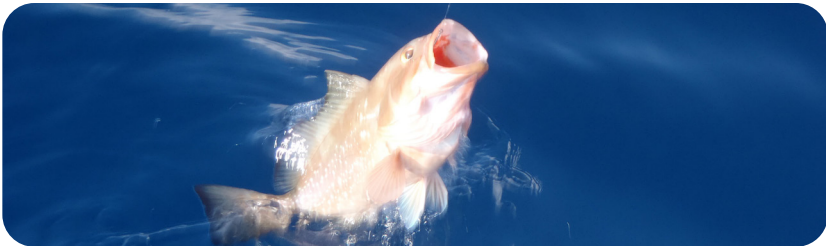
Changes to the recreational sector ACL in MRIP-FES units are predicted to impact the recreational sector’s season length. The table below estimates recreational season closure dates under each alternative:

Action 1 Alternative	Rec ACL	Predicted Closure Date	Season Length (95% Confidence Interval)
Alt 1	2.10	No Closure	October 25 - No Closure
Alt 2	1.18	August 8	June 13 - No Closure
Preferred Alt 3	1.73	December 19	August 15 - No Closure
Alt 4	1.70	December 13	August 11 - No Closure
Alt 5	1.72	December 17	August 14 - No Closure
Alt 6	1.44	October 11	July 10 - No Closure

***A confidence interval is a measure of uncertainty around the predicted closure date estimate. In this case, it refers to the likelihood (95%) that the recreational ACL will be harvested between the dates in confidence intervals.**

Action 2 – Modify the Red Grouper Annual Catch Targets

Currently, both commercial and recreational sectors have ACL/ACT buffers. Annual catch targets are used to account for management uncertainty and reduce the likelihood that the annual catch limit is exceeded and that accountability measures are triggered. The recreational sector’s ACT serves as a post-season accountability measure. Meaning, if the recreational ACL is exceeded then, during the following year the season will be based on the ACT instead of the ACL. The Council’s ACL/ACT Control Rule is used to determine the buffer between the ACL and the ACT, using a 4-year reference period of recent landings from 2016-2019. This control rule adjusts the buffer based on a number of factors including the number and magnitude of quota overages in the reference period, accountability measures in place to account for any quota overages, and the method by which the quota is monitored. The commercial buffer would be set to zero based on this methodology but, the use of gag multi-use shares in the individual fishing quota program require a buffer to ensure the ACL is not exceeded.



Currently, there is a 5% commercial buffer and an 8% recreational buffer between the annual catch limit and annual catch target.

Alternative 1: No Action – Maintain the current buffer between the ACL and ACT for each sector. The commercial buffer is 5%, and the recreational buffer is 8%.

Alternative 2: Apply the ACL/ACT Control Rule to revise the buffer between the ACL and ACT for each sector. The commercial buffer is 0%, and the recreational buffer is 9%.

A commercial buffer of 0% would mean the gag multi-use allocation would be zero, and only gag could be landed with gag allocation.

Preferred Alternative 3: Maintain the current buffer between the ACL and ACT for the commercial sector, and apply the ACL/ACT Control Rule to revise the buffer between the ACL and ACT for the recreational sector. The commercial buffer is 5%, and the recreational buffer is 9%.

Public Hearing Meeting Information

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

**Monday, June 7, 2021 -
Madeira Beach**
City Hall in The City Centre
300 Municipal Drive
Madeira Beach, FL 33708
(727) 391-9951

Thursday, June 10, 2021
Via Webinar
Register for [Webinar](https://tinyurl.com/3zh9yk57)
<https://tinyurl.com/3zh9yk57>

Wednesday, June 16, 2021
Via Webinar
Register for [Webinar](https://tinyurl.com/3zh9yk5)
<https://tinyurl.com/3zh9yk5>

**Tuesday, June 8, 2021 -
Fort Myers**
Crowne Plaza Ft. Myers at Bell Tower
Shops
13051 Bell Tower Drive
Ft. Myers, FL 33907
(239) 482-2900

Monday, June 14 - Panama City
Hilton Garden Inn
1101 U.S. Highway 231
Panama City, FL 70808
(850) 392-1093

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/54kpc98d> or scan the QR code with your mobile phone.





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