



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Managing Fishery Resources in the U.S. Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico

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August 2017 Council Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in San Antonio, Texas, August 7-10, 2017, to discuss a number of fishery issues. The following is a summary of the Council's actions:

Stock Assessment Schedule

The Council reviewed the stock assessment schedule and requested that Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) move the cobia stock assessment from 2018 to 2019 to ensure that gray triggerfish is prioritized. In addition to the 2017 red snapper assessment that is being conducted currently, the Council requested that SEDAR conduct another red snapper assessment in 2019 and ensure that harvest data from 2017 and 2018 are incorporated.

Greater Amberjack Annual Catch Limits and Management Measures

The Council took final action on a Framework Action that considers modifying the greater amberjack rebuilding plan. The previous stock assessment was completed in 2016. The Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed the assessment and determined that the greater amberjack stock continues to be overfished and experiencing overfishing, and that the stock is not making adequate progress towards rebuilding. The Council must modify the rebuilding plan within two years of receiving notification that the stock is overfished so, the Council chose to use the ACL/ACT Control rule to establish a 13% buffer to the commercial sector and a 17% buffer to the recreational sector. The revised annual catch limits and targets are as follows:

Year	ABC	Recreational		Commercial	
		ACT	ACL	ACT	ACL
2018	1,182,000	862,860	716,173	319,140	277,651
2019	1,489,000	1,086,970	902,185	402,030	349,766
2020	1,794,000	1,309,620	1,086,985	484,380	421,411

The Council also chose to temporarily modify the recreational closed season to be January 1 – June 30. The Council also initiated two new framework amendments to continue to consider modifying the recreational fishing season to allow for split spring and fall recreational season openings, and the second will consider recreational vessel limits and modifying commercial trip limits.

Federal Charter For-Hire and Headboat Management

The Council reviewed draft referendum requirements for Amendment 41 which considers allocation based management for federally permitted charter vessels for reef fish species, and Amendment 42 which considers allocation based management for federally permitted headboat survey vessels for reef fish species. For Amendment 41, the Council decided to add an option that would consider allowing the unique number of federal permit holders to vote and also to consider a weighted option by unique permit holders and total permits held. For Amendment 42, the Council selected a preferred alternative that would define eligible voters as for-hire federal permit holders whose vessels landed an annual average of at least 100 fish combined of red snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, red grouper, and gag. Annual average landings are based on harvests recorded by the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey between 2011 and 2015. Each eligible permit will have one vote. The Council will discuss final action on referendum requirements in October.

The Council also decided to convene a joint meeting of the Charter For-Hire and Headboat Advisory Panels before the end of the year.

For-hire Permit Moratorium and Permit Transfers

In 2006, the Council established an indefinite limited access program capping the number of available permits for both Reef Fish and Coastal Migratory Pelagic federal for-hire fisheries. The Council discussed the results of the 2010-2014 for-hire permit moratorium review that included a summary of permit transfer behaviors for federal for-hire permits. It was noted by NOAA law enforcement that once a federal for-hire permit is assigned to a vessel that the vessel is considered a federally permitted vessel throughout the year even if the permit is removed or transferred during the year.

Modifications to Federal For-Hire and Private Angler Red Snapper Annual Catch Targets

The Council reviewed a draft framework action that considers changing the buffers between the red snapper annual catch limits and annual catch targets for federal for-hire and private angler components of the recreational sector. Since 2014, when the annual catch target was put in place, the private angler component has exceeded its annual catch target twice and its annual catch limit once. The for-hire component has not exceeded its annual catch target or annual catch limit. The Council has asked the Scientific and Statistical Committee review this document before the October meeting relative to the potential for reducing the harvest buffer for the for-hire component.

Ad-Hoc Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Advisory Panel

The Council has decided to disband the Ad Hoc Red Snapper IFQ Advisory Panel and form a new Ad Hoc Red Snapper/Grouper IFQ Advisory panel so participants in both red snapper and Grouper/Tilefish IFQ programs can work together in an advisory role to the Council. The Council will solicit members for the newly formed Advisory Panel before the October meeting.

Grouper/Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program 5-year Review

The Council heard a presentation on the 5-year review of the grouper/tilefish individual fishing quota program. The presentation included an overview of the program including share and allocation ownership and transfers, the influence of the IFQ program on ex-vessel prices, technical efficiency, and safety at sea. The review will be discussed by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee and the to-be formed Red Snapper/Grouper IFQ Advisory Panel before it is finalized.

Modifications to Commercial Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Programs

The Council reviewed an options paper for Amendment 36B, which considers program participation, distribution of shares from non-activated accounts, quota redistribution or set-asides, and allocation caps. The Council specified that the quota set-asides are intended to assist small participants and entry by the next generation of fishermen into the IFQ program as well as to reduce discards in the fishery. The Council also requested an option that would reclaim quota from IFQ accounts that become inactive in the future for redistribution through a quota bank, and removed allocation caps from further consideration.

Status Determination Criteria and Optimum Yield

The Council heard a presentation on an options paper that considers setting or revising the maximum sustainable yield proxies, status determination criteria (minimum stock size threshold and maximum fishing mortality threshold), and optimum yield for reef fish and red snapper. These reference points are the basis for determining the health of each stock and are required under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and National Standard 1 guidelines. Staff will further develop the options paper and will present an updated draft of this document at the October meeting.

State Management of Recreational Red Snapper

The Council reviewed a series of draft amendments that would enable the Gulf States to establish management programs for the recreational harvest of red snapper out to 200 nautical miles. The Council selected a preferred alternative that would allow each state to choose whether to manage its private angling component only, or to manage both private and federal-for hire components. The Council added alternatives that would consider allocation among states based on: the distribution of biomass and recreational trips; historical landings series ending in 2009; and each state's best ten years of landings throughout the entire historical landings series. The Council decided not to consider changing the recreational minimum size limit. Finally, the Council reviewed state specific documents for Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama and added additional amendments for Florida and Texas. Staff will revise the draft documents and the Council will review them at the October meeting.

The next Council meeting will be held on October 2-6, 2017 in Biloxi, Mississippi.