

PUBLIC SUBMISSION

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Docket: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049

Notice of Availability for a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Management of Red Grouper in the Gulf of Mexico

Comment On: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0001

EPA NOA Fed Reg Notice

Document: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0003

Comment from Beneduci, Martha

Submitter Information

Name: Martha Beneduci

Address:

Hudson, 34667

Email: tandm_hall@yahoo.com

Phone: 7272343085

General Comment

I ve been in the commercial fishing industry and owned commercial fishing boats to Hudson Florida since 1987. I ve seen the government rip the commercial fishing industry apart starting in 1990. Since then and with Nafta coming into play under Clinton it has been a BIG down hill struggle to stay in the game. I felt the with the shares system it would be a more even playing field. I know since the 1990 s the U S government wanted Florida to be strictly recreational fishing and end commercial fishing . But hoped it would not happen in my life time . But looks like you are getting pretty close to shutting one of the oldest industries down. We compete against tariff free fish from Mexico and Latin America and our government wants big money from tourists and rich people, you should leave the percentages where they are.

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Comment On: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0001

EPA NOA Fed Reg Notice

Document: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0004

Comment from Booher, Sam

Submitter Information

Name: Sam Booher

Address:

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General Comment

I am very concerned about both over-fishing different species species but even more important is the question does every species have protected areas that allows no fishing to even include scuba diving which really means scuba fishing. No where did I see where over-fish is checked before the fishing season is announced nor did I see any maps or even recognition that protect areas are set aside that do not allow fishing or scuba diving

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Notice of Availability for a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Management of Red Grouper in the Gulf of Mexico

Comment On: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0001

EPA NOA Fed Reg Notice

Document: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0005

Comment from Anonymous

Submitter Information

Name: Anonymous Anonymous

General Comment

Gulf Coast Fishery Management needs look at commercial fishing side of not only red grouper but everything else that commercial industry catches. That's what's hurting our fishing industry not by only over fishing but also on by catch that they are catching and discarding. It's not on the recreational side. Between days that recreational fisherman can get out and even go out in Gulf of Mexico especially in Texas to even catch red grouper is not many days. You guys need keep that in context when your settings these regulations. Last year there was only maybe 30 fishiable days during 60 day snapper season that anybody could even fish due weather and wind. So it's even worse during winter months when you really fish for grouper. Right now month May when Amberjack season is open we've only had maybe three days when people get out fish and next two weeks nobody going be able get out due weather with seas 5 feet plus. You guys need take all these factors in consideration when your making these fishing regulations.

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Notice of Availability for a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Management of Red Grouper in the Gulf of Mexico

Comment On: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0001

EPA NOA Fed Reg Notice

Document: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0006

Comment from Weiss, Les

Submitter Information

Name: Les Weiss

Address:

St Petersburg, FL, 33711

Email: lesa215@aol.com

Phone: 7272440020

General Comment

I feel you should adopt the 59.3/40.7 choice. The commercial fishery impacts the quotas and overfishing than the recreational sector.

If you cut the recreational qouta it will effect every aspect of tourism, local businesses and commerce. That is the last thing we need in this economy. It's bad enough fuel prices are climbing along with everything else.

If you cut the quotas on recreational sector it could be devastating.

Thank You,

Les Weiss

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Notice of Availability for a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Management of Red Grouper in the Gulf of Mexico

Comment On: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0001

EPA NOA Fed Reg Notice

Document: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0007

Comment from Jacques, Harry

Submitter Information

Name: Harry Jacques

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Cape Coral, FL, 33914

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General Comment

I agree with amendment 53 that increases the red grouper recreational allocation.

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Notice of Availability for a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Management of Red Grouper in the Gulf of Mexico

Comment On: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0001

EPA NOA Fed Reg Notice

Document: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0008

Comment from Saussy, Charles

Submitter Information

Name: Charles Saussy

Address:

New Port Richey, FL, 34652

Email: C_SAUSSY@YAHOO.COM

General Comment

I am an avid recreational diver spear fisher in the Gulf Of Mexico for the past 30 years. Dives over the past two/three years have been virtually void of legal size Red Grouper. It's my understanding that Commercial fisherman can keep red grouper 18" and up so I would suggest that is why there are almost no 20" left. It is way past time the size limits and commercial catch shares program for these fish changes. There are catch share brokers leasing their catch shares making limits unlimited and closed season never closed. Just make it a resource recovery plan that is good for all not just one sector or the other. Put slot limits on fish so that mature breeders are allowed to reproduce the species in mass. Move all commercial reef fishing out past 50 miles from shore. Stop the bait shrimper bycatch near shore that is decimating a host of juvenile species. Many of these boats make the nightly bycatch their staple and shrimp secondary. I realize the commercial lobbies and interest are at every meeting and flood money the fishery management while Recreational interest are scattered but this should be about health of of specific resources and not the health of one group or another. Close red grouper season for both recreational and commercial share holders at the same time and you will be managing the resource instead of special interest. My two cents.

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Notice of Availability for a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Management of Red Grouper in the Gulf of Mexico

Comment On: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0001

EPA NOA Fed Reg Notice

Document: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0009

Comment from RUSSELL, E.R.

Submitter Information

Name: E.R. RUSSELL

Address:

NAPLES, FL, 34119

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Phone: 239-591-1368

General Comment

Giving the recreational sector a larger share is an appropriate move. One of the basic problems with your approach is the inclusion of the private boat owner in the group with charter boats and head boats. I have fished for red group out ,of Naples for 20 years. Charter boats and head boat caught most of the fish. The reasons are simple: they know where to go, the go very often and they can go out far. Also I would raise the size limit to 21 minimum and 30 maximum.

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Notice of Availability for a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Management of Red Grouper in the Gulf of Mexico

Comment On: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0001

EPA NOA Fed Reg Notice

Document: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0010

Comment from Southern Offshore Fishing Association

Submitter Information

Email: info@southernoffshorefishermen.com

Organization: Southern Offshore Fishing Association

General Comment

I wish to comment on behalf of the members of the Southern Offshore Fishing Association (SOFA). Amendment 53 has been on going for several years. The majority of the information and data contained in the proposed amendment are also several years old. The statements that the red grouper commercial fishermen made stating red grouper were not as abundant, not as large, and fewer in traditional fishing grounds were true at the time. Since those statements these same commercial red grouper fishermen have provided much testimony that in recent years (2019-2021) that the red grouper fishery is rebounding as more small fish were being harvested and released and these fishermen have stated as those red grouper grew up they would be entering the fishery and catches would increase. Recent catches (Jan-May 2021) have proven those statements to be true as the commercial red grouper catches are greater than 10% higher than the 2018 to 2020 harvest levels. Red grouper commercial fishermen have recorded record catches since Jan 2021.

At the Gulf Council meeting in Galveston, TX in Oct 2018 the NMFS presented the new mrip mail fes recreational survey data for red grouper. This mail fes survey has been ripe with much controversy since it was released. The dramatic increases in historical rec catches of red grouper, indeed all fisheries where there is a rec component, are not only realistic but laughable. These historical rec catches are based on computer modeling based on how fisheries are prosecuted in todays world and assuming the same technology, effort, and desire for rec fishing today existed since 1986. Anyone who fished in those early years knows the data produced by the computers is not possible. Until the high level of controversy about the mail fes survey is fully vetted so all stakeholders have some confidence in the numbers the data from this survey should not be used in amendment 53.

It must be noted that any change in the red grouper allocation from the current 76% commercial/24% recreational will only serve to harm both the commercial fishermen and recreational fishermen. Reducing the commercial allocation by over 16% will significantly harm the commercial fishermen, local small family owned fish houses, the local fishing communities they serve, consumers who purchase fish for self consumption, restaurants who serve multiple thousands of customers, and the many supporting businesses

who fishermen depend on. Increasing the recreational quota by over 16% will provide negative impacts to the recreational anglers and their supporting businesses such as tackle shops, marinas, fuel sellers, hotels, state marine resources departments by lack of rec license sales, and more due to the fact that the mail fes survey shows such high recreational landings that in recent years the rec sector would have overfished their quota meaning drastic changes will have to be made to the current rec season, bag limits, and size limits. The proposed changes to this fishery in amendment 53 provide no benefits to anyone and to the red grouper stock. In essence, the proposed changes only serve to harm all fishing sectors, all local fishing communities, all supporting businesses, all consumers, while doing nothing to improve the red grouper stock.

The members of SOFA strongly recommend status quo on the current allocation and quotas. The vast majority of all involved in the red grouper fishery are of the same opinion and recommendation. The proposed changes in amendment 53 should all be status quo.

Capt Bob Zales, II

Fishery Management Consultant

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EPA NOA Fed Reg Notice

Document: NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0011

Comment from American Sportfishing Association

Submitter Information

Email: kralston@asafishing.org

Organization: American Sportfishing Association

General Comment

Please see the attached comments on behalf of the American Sportfishing Association.

Attachments

GMFMC A53 Red Grouper NMFS Draft EIS comments June 2021



June 21, 2021

Mr. Peter Hood
Southeast Regional Office
National Marine Fisheries Service
263 13th Avenue South
St Petersburg, FL 33701

Dear Mr. Hood:

The American Sportfishing Association (ASA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft environmental impact statement for Amendment 53 to the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico regarding red grouper (NOAA-NMFS-2021-0049-0002). ASA supports Action 1, Preferred Alternative 3; and Action 2, Preferred Alternative 3.

ASA is the nation's recreational fishing trade association and represents sportfishing manufacturers, retailers, wholesalers, and angler advocacy groups, as well as the interests of America's almost 50 million recreational anglers. ASA also safeguards and promotes the social, economic, and conservation values of sportfishing in America that results in a \$129 billion per year impact on the nation's economy and supports 826,000 jobs.

General Comments:

This amendment adjusts recreational and commercial quotas based on the newest SEDAR 61 results and recommendations. This action is coupled with a technical correction to the allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors based on the newest and most scientifically accurate Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES). MRIP FES was implemented after technical reviews found the past recreational data collection program (MRIP Coastal Household Telephone Survey) deficient. The Introduction in Amendment 53 details the history and changes to the data collection program, which is extremely important for understanding the rationale for the amendment's actions and alternatives. We conclude that many comments that have been made publicly relative to this amendment are not based on the facts presented in the Introduction.

There is an assumption, unfortunately with minimal correction by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) or National Marine Fisheries Service, that the allocation action in the amendment is an attempt by the recreational sector to reallocate the fishery. The recreational sector did not bring this issue to the Council, and a full allocation review is not scheduled until 2026 under current Council schedules.

AMERICAN SPORTFISHING ASSOCIATION

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Action 1 represents a technical correction to allocation, OFL, ABC, and ACT based on incorporating the revised MRIP FES numbers as the newest and best scientific data that show recreational fishers have been catching more fish than recorded by the old MRIP CHTS data collection system, which did not collect representative samples across the entire fishing day along with the new angler survey methods. The newest and best scientifically available data correct the historic records and the results require a fix in the allocation because the current allocations are based on incorrect MRIP information. As stated by NMFS numerous times, to not adjust the allocation across sectors based on the best available data is in fact a *de facto* reallocation without a public process.

ASA also realizes that as a result of SEDAR 61, which includes the new data stream from the recreational sector, we will experience a reduction in ACL. If the current allocation is not revised to match the new data, then the ACL will be not be equitable to the recreational sector and it will not be based on the best scientific data available and will be a *de facto* reallocation.

ASA realizes that red grouper is a commercial IFQ fishery and that each IFQ holder will have a reduction in their quota. When IFQs were implemented, it was with the understanding that these shares in the fishery were based on privilege and not a fixed or "only increases" allotment per share. Based on the best scientific data now available (MRIP FES), the original (and current) allocation to the commercial sector was erroneous and the sector has benefited from that allocation for many years. While ASA does not want reductions for anyone, we do want management to be fair. While on paper it may seem that the recreational sector is the benefactor of this new and best available science, the recreational sector will face reductions in fishing days as a result of the revised allocation and stock assessment results because their landings were historically miscalculated.

Specific Comments:

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for Amendment 53 is clearly stated below and lays the terms for the proper actions and alternatives with focus on revising allocation to reflect historic participation and adjusting quotas based on the recent stock assessment.

The purposes are to revise the red grouper allocation between the commercial and recreational sectors using the best scientific information available and to modify the allowable harvest of red grouper based on results of the recent stock assessment and subsequent OFL and ABC recommendations from the SSC.

*The need is to use the best scientific information available to establish Gulf red grouper sector allocations, ACLs, and ACTs, **ensuring that the historical participation by the recreational and commercial sectors is accurately reflected** by the sector ACLs, and that the recreational ACL is consistent with the data used to monitor recreational landings and trigger accountability measures (AM).*

Action 1

Alternative 1: status quo.

We do not support this alternative. This alternative has been determined to be illegal and will result in quota overages. There is no supporting science to dispute this fact.

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

ASA does not support this Alternative. It is a conscious reallocation without review which is scheduled for 2026. We do not support reallocation at this time. We support a technical revision to the current allocation based on new best available information. This Alternative does not support the stated Purpose and Need.

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, based on the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) ACL monitoring datasets. The allocations for red grouper are 59.3% commercial and 40.7% recreational. Revise the OFL and ABC as recommended by the SSC based on SEDAR 61 (2019). Set the stock ACL equal to the stock ABC.

ASA supports this Alternative as the preferred. It is based on the best available data and provides a technical fix to the allocation while using the exact years previously used to determine allocation.

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, based on the SEFSC ACL monitoring datasets. The allocations for red grouper are 60.5% commercial and 39.5% recreational. Revise the OFL and ABC as recommended by the SSC based on SEDAR 61 (2019). Set the stock ACL equal to the stock ABC.

ASA considers this Alternative acceptable as it uses best scientific data but not preferred, because it uses a different set of years to determine allocation.

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, based on the SEFSC ACL monitoring datasets. The allocations for red grouper are 59.7% commercial and 40.3% recreational. Revise the OFL and ABC as recommended by the SSC based on SEDAR 61 (2019). Set the stock ACL equal to the stock ABC.

ASA considers this Alternative acceptable as it uses best scientific data but not preferred, because it uses a different set of years to determine allocation.

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.

ASA does not support this Alternative. It is an arbitrary reallocation that is based solely on keeping the commercial quota static, which ASA cannot agree is appropriate as it is not based on the best available information. A reallocation review is scheduled for 2026 or a new amendment to review and reallocate red grouper is needed to implement this alternative. This Alternative also does not support the stated Purpose and Need.

Action 2

This action considers the ACT based on the allocation and revised ACLs. **ASA supports the preferred Alternative 3** but do not object to Alternatives 1 or 2.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kellie Ralston".

Kellie Ralston
Southeast Fisheries Policy Director