

Public Hearing Summary

Reef Fish Amendment 54: Modifications to the Greater Amberjack Catch Limits and Sector Allocations

Virtual Hearing
October 3, 2022

Council/Staff

Tom Frazer
John Froeschke
Emily Muehlstein
Carrie Simmons
Lisa Hollensead
Carly Somerset

9 Member of the public attended
1 Member of the public spoke

Rachal Hisler: Commercial Fisherman, Texas

Supports Action 1, Alternative 5 because it uses the longest time series and most up-to-date landings. Since 2008, the numbers that have been informed by the original allocations and the longer time series should be considered the best available. The historical landings may not be as accurate. She also supports Preferred Alternative 3 in Action 2.

Galveston, Texas
October 4, 2022

Council/Staff:

Billy Broussard
Lisa Hollensead
Carly Somerset

13 members of the public attended
10 members of the public commented

Bubba Cochran: Commercial and federal for-hire

Bubba said there is an obvious problem with greater amberjack; the stock has been reduced and they are harder to catch. There was a similar problem with red snapper in the commercial sector, but implementation of the IFQ system solved that problem. He is disappointed that the Council has not gone in that direction. He questions how management through reallocation will help the stock rebound. It only takes quota away from the commercial sector that has been accountable. He is in favor of Action 1, Alternative 2.

Dan Green: Commercial and for-hire in Galveston, TX

Dan finds greater amberjack to be more difficult to catch; he has to travel farther to catch them on charter trips. He agreed with Mr. Cochrane that it's not fair to take quota from the accountable commercial sector and give it to the recreational sector. The IFQ program works great. A for-hire catch share program for greater amberjack should be considered, now that the federal for-hire sector is providing more real-time accurate data. He agrees with the preferred alternative 3 in Action 2.

Saul Martinez: For-hire in Galveston

He agreed with Mr. Cochrane and Mr. Green.

Buddy Guindon: Commercial vessel owner, fish house owner, dealer

He said the Council should reduce catch limits to be compliant with MSA, but not change allocations. He's in favor of Action 1, Alternative 2. Reallocating to the recreational sector will not help rebuild the stock and, in fact, goes against the MSA. An allocation review is needed to determine how reallocation will help with stock management. The Council needs a better understanding and management of private angler discards and fishing effort. MRIP-FES needs to be reconsidered as a management tool. Conversion didn't account for the type of gear or vessels used historically. He is in favor of requiring all private anglers to have a federal angler permit to better determine recreational effort.

Hans Guindon: Commercial fisherman in Galveston, TX

He spends more time on the water than nearly anyone else. Reallocating to the recreational sector will not help the greater amberjack stock. He thinks it should be an IFQ species. He is in favor of Action 1, Alternative 2.

Chris Guindon: Commercial fisherman in Galveston, TX

He thinks the IFQ system works very well. He supports Action 1, Alternative 2.

Shane Cantrell: Federal for-hire owner/operator in Galveston, TX

He started attending meetings in 2010 discussing greater amberjack, but not much has changed since then. The stock is still in trouble because recreational access has been prioritized over conservation of species. The Council enacts measures, but not enough, and then wonders why they don't work. Regarding MRIP-FES, it's using current technology and moving it back in time to essentially rewrite history based on current events. He wants limits reduced, but no reallocation. He's in favor of Action 1, Alternative 2. If changes are made now it seems like the decision would be in violation of MSA, similar to Amendment 53. A formal allocation review is needed prior to making a decision, as well as better understanding of recreational discards. He wants the recreational sector to be required to have a federal permit to fish in federal waters to better understand sector effort.

Patrick Hayes: Owns commercial shrimp boat, current recreational angler

He was glad to be able to attend the meeting and provide public testimony. It was his first foray into the public hearing process. He enjoys fishing for greater amberjack; he has caught

more now than in the past because he has a larger boat and better technology. However, most fish he catches are undersized, but the dead discard rate is low when he uses his descending device. He thinks multiple management changes should not be made at one time because it's difficult to determine which measures help or hinder the fishery.

Taylor Borel: Federal for-hire owner/operator in Galveston, TX
He favors Action 1, Alternative 2. He agrees with Mr. Guindon's comments and noted that recreational anglers have more access to the fishery because they have bigger and faster boats.

Paul Fischer: Commercial and recreational angler in Galveston, TX
Prefers Action 1, Alternative 2. His comment on recreational angler access was similar to Mr. Borel's.

Kenner, Louisiana

October 5, 2022

Council/Staff:

Patrick Banks
Carly Somerset
Lisa Hollensead

0 members of the public attended
0 members of the public commented

Orange Beach, Alabama

October 6, 2022

Council/Staff:

Kevin Anson
Lisa Hollensead
Carly Somerset

10 members of the public attended
3 members of the public commented

Bryan Reeves: For-hire owner/operator in Orange Beach, AL
He has been a captain for 10 years and a deckhand prior for 17 years. He is in favor of Action 1, Alternative 4 and Action 2, Alternative 2. Overfishing in Orange Beach is not a cause of the stock assessment issue. Most boats in his area now run two half-day trips, rather than one long 10-12-hour trips so they no longer travel as far to target greater amberjack often. He has run two trips per day and caught his limit without going past 10 miles. He caught mostly undersized ones. He thinks some fish have left due to hurricanes. Last year he caught zero greater

amberjack. Perhaps they relocate after storms, then return. He thinks the size limit needs to be reduced for both sectors, especially when fishing in deeper water where discard mortality is high.

Johnny Greene: For-hire owner/operator in Orange Beach, AL

He prefers Action 1, Alternative 5 because it uses the longest time series and established historical allocation policies, although MRIP-FES may have skewed that. He likes Action 2, Alternative 3, but would prefer to see a new option that has a higher buffer to account for more management uncertainty, especially when so many management measures have been made inconsistently that it becomes difficult to know which measures help or hinder the stock. He mentioned issues with water quality impacting greater amberjack, but these issues are not limited to just this species.

Virtual Hearing
[October 11, 2022](#)

Council/Staff

Billy Broussard
John Froeschke
Emily Muehlstein
Jessica Matos

6 Member of the public attended
1 Member of the public spoke

Randy Sobieraj: Commercial Fisherman, Louisiana

Wonders if shifting allocation away from the commercial sector is the right way to go. If there are more fishermen that will harvest on the recreational side, is it productive to continue to give them more fish, especially in an overfished stock. The recreational sector shouldn't keep getting more just because they're catching more. Their harvest is not accountable like the commercial sector is and their discards are higher. A lottery system might be beneficial; like they use with wild game, it might work for greater amberjack. I want my son to fish and I want the overfishing to stop.

Written Public Comment Summary

Comments summarized through October 19, 2022

53 Comments received

Action 1: Modifications to Allocations, OFL, ABC, and ACL

- An allocation shift should not occur. Not even the de facto reallocation created by FES.
- Giving more fish to the recreational sector, which is responsible for the overfishing, is unlawful.
- Commercial allocation should be decreased and recreational limits should be increased.
- Support for Alternative 3 because the adjusted allocation of 84% recreational and 16% commercial would be based on the same years on which the incorrect current allocation was initially set.
- Support for Alternative 5.

Action 2: Modifications to ACTs

- Support for no action because it sets the most conservative buffer between the ACL and ACT for both the recreational and commercial sectors. Since this fishery has been struggling for the last several years, a more precautionary approach is warranted to end overfishing and truly begin rebuilding the stock.

Other comments related to greater amberjack

- The greater amberjack stock is definitely in trouble and catch limits should be modified to meet rebuilding targets.
- Greater amberjack are plentiful.
- Management actions should aim to maximize the number of days open to the recreational sector.
- The recreational sector is not the issue; commercial overfishing is to blame.
- The for-hire sector harvests too many greater amberjack.
- Greater amberjack have worms and are undesirable.
- Amberjack are fun for the fight, not for food. They should be catch and release.
- The greater amberjack stock has failed to rebuild, in part because the implementation of high-risk status determination criteria. Options for constant catch ACLs should be included to ensure that greater amberjack can meet its rebuilding target.
- Separate recreational sector allocations should be created for greater amberjack.
- The commercial size limits should be increased.
- The charter industry is going to go out of business with major cuts to greater amberjack catch limits.
- Commercial vessels are harvesting all the greater amberjack before the recreational season opens.
- A fish tag system should be used to constrain recreational harvest.

- Misidentification in the jacks' complex is an issue and likely drives mortality of juvenile greater amberjacks.
- There should be a seasonal and locational management plan in place for greater amberjack.
- There should no longer be commercial harvest of greater amberjack.
- Amberjack should be closed during the spawn.

Other comments

- Separate recreational sector allocations should be created for gag, red grouper, and triggerfish.
- Area restrictions should be used to eliminate commercial fleet overfishing on public reefs within 20 miles of shore.
- Fines should be increased for recreational poachers who keep undersized or out of season fish.
- Illegal harvest is an issue and there needs to be more enforcement.
- The data being used are untrustworthy.
- Fisheries regulations should be made by fishermen.