

Process for Forming a Focus Group to Address Changes to IFQ Programs

At its August 2021 meeting, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) moved to form a small facilitated Focus Group of knowledgeable individuals, selected by a process approved by the Regional Administrator and Council and Reef Fish Committee Chairs.

The Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Focus Group will provide a detailed plan for the following:

1. Define the changes needed for an improved IFQ program for red snapper (RS) and grouper-tilefish (GT) to specifically address minimizing discards, fairness and equity, and new entrants issues.
2. Report their findings to the SSC and appropriate APs for review and advice to the Council.

The IFQ Focus Group will consist of up to 9 members who serve voluntarily and are participants in the IFQ program(s). There are 9 potential membership positions, with the general qualifications of each position provided below. Applicants may apply to as many positions for which they qualify. Applicants need apply for only one of the three shareholder positions (small, medium, large); staff will verify shareholdings and place applicants in the appropriate pool. Selection of membership is at the Council's discretion, and depending on the pool of applicants, may modify the position qualifications or not appoint one or more positions.

IFQ Focus Group: Potential Membership Positions

Dealer – Must have a Gulf and South Atlantic Dealer Permit and have received IFQ landings through their account.

Crew with no shares – Not required to have shares or a permit, but serves as captain or crew of a vessel that participates in the IFQ program.

Permit holder who leases allocation – Must have a commercial reef fish permit associated with the same account used to transfer and land allocation. Does not have shares.

Eastern Gulf longliner who leases red snapper allocation – Must have an Eastern Gulf Reef Fish Bottom Longline Endorsement and a Commercial Reef Fish Permit associated with the same account used to transfer and land red snapper allocation. Does not have red snapper shares.

Small shareholder – Holds a small amount of shares of red snapper and/or red grouper and a commercial reef fish permit. Among shareholder accounts that hold shares in these two categories, applicant is approximately among the bottom third of shareholders by shareholding volume for one or both share categories. Applicant's shareholdings are approximately within the bottom third across all share categories.

Medium shareholder – Holds an intermediate amount of shares of red snapper and/or red grouper and a commercial reef fish permit. Among shareholder accounts that hold shares in

these two categories, applicant is approximately among the middle third of shareholders by shareholding volume for one or both share categories.

Large shareholder – Holds a large amount of shares of red snapper and/or red grouper and a commercial reef fish permit. Among shareholder accounts that hold shares in these two categories, shareholdings place applicant approximately among the top third of shareholdings by volume in one or both share categories.

Public participant – Holds red snapper and/or red grouper shares, but does not have a commercial reef fish permit.

New entrant – Holds a commercial reef fish permit and purchased shares and/or allocation for the first time within the last 3 years.

Table 1. Comparison of IFQ Focus Group membership positions’ requirements for possession of shares, commercial reef fish permit, and history of landings.

Potential Membership Roles	Shares	Permit	Landings
Dealer	Y or N	Y or N	Y
Crew with no shares	N	N	N
Permit holder who leases (no shares)	N	Y	Y
Eastern Gulf longliner (no shares)	N	Y	Y
Small Shareholder	Y	Y	Y
Medium Shareholder	Y	Y	Y
Large Shareholder	Y	Y	Y
Public participant	Y	N	N
New entrant	N	Y or N	Y or N
9 Potential Positions	4Y; 4N; 1 Y/N	5Y; 2N; 2 Y/N	6Y; 2N; 1 Y/N

Before the January 2022 Council meeting, Council staff will administer an electronic application process and NMFS-SERO staff will help to validate the membership criteria (i.e, share and permit status, and history of landings). The Council will meet in closed session to review the applicants and populate the IFQ Focus Group. When selecting members, consideration will be given to ensure fair representation from throughout the Gulf of Mexico region.

After the IFQ Focus Group is populated, members would be convened in the spring of 2022. With the guidance of a facilitator, the IFQ Focus Group will make recommendations by consensus. Members will identify the pros and cons of the ideas they recommend, rather than detailing specific actions and alternatives for Council action. Members will also develop and provide rationale for their recommendations.