



SCOPING GUIDE

3/14/13



Days-at-Sea Pilot Program for Recreational Red Snapper



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What is Scoping?

The Council takes a fishery issue to scoping to identify potential impacts and reasonable alternatives. It is the first and best opportunity for the public to make suggestions or to raise issues and concerns before the Council begins developing an amendment.

How does scoping affect fishery management?

Comments provided during the scoping process will be reported to the Council and incorporated in the development of management options. Once the options are developed, the public hearing process will begin and you will have the opportunity to comment on the management alternatives under consideration. Your input will be considered as the Council deliberates and chooses the most appropriate management measures.

Introduction

The recreational fishing sector in the Gulf of Mexico includes a private recreational component and a for-hire component. Both are subject to the same management measures (season length, daily bag limits, and size limits).

Despite annual increases in the recreational red snapper quota, the recreational red snapper fishing season has become progressively shorter since 1996. This has negatively impacted both components of the recreational fishery.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is considering options to address the negative impacts that current management measures have on the for-hire component of the recreational fishing sector. Disruptions in booking clients and planning trips have contributed to diminishing profitability for both charter boats and headboats. Additionally, a permit moratorium capping for-hire participation has resulted in a decrease in the number of federally permitted for-hire vessels, while the number of private recreational anglers is increasing.

A group of headboat operators have already submitted an exempted fishing permit (EFP) application to address headboat-specific problems. The Council has initiated the scoping of a days-at-sea pilot program to address the charter boat-specific problems.

The days-at-sea pilot program aims to evaluate the feasibility of the program for the charter for-hire component of the recreational sector. The objectives of the program are to increase flexibility in trip scheduling and economic profitability by assigning a predetermined number of effort units (days, trips) for each program participant to use when they choose.



Scope of Actions

I. Selection of Participants

There are approximately 1,299 charter boats with an active or renewable for-hire reef fish permit in the Gulf of Mexico. A representative sample of participants should be used to ensure that lessons learned from the proposed pilot program would be applicable to the entire population of charter for-hire vessels. Participation in a pilot program should be:

- Voluntary
- Geographically representative
- Represent the range of vessel characteristics (size and angler capacity)

The use of a control group, another group of vessels following the standard fishing regulations, would greatly improve the evaluation of the pilot program.

II. Program Duration

The proposed pilot program is expected to be limited in duration. A multi-year program could result in more reliable data because participants would have time to adapt and familiarize themselves with the program. Additionally, a multi-year program could allow for more participants because the control group and the days-at-sea group could switch roles in the second year.

- ❖ How long should the pilot program last?

III. Effort Measures

Effort could be measured using trips, days, or angler trips. In any case, a portion of the recreational quota will have to be assigned to the program and converted into the equivalent effort unit.

If **trips** are selected, a vessel would use a trip each time it goes red snapper fishing regardless of the number of fishermen on board. The calculation of quota distribution would have to account for the varying capacities of participating vessels.

If **calendar days** are used, then multiple trips could be taken in one day. Calculation of the quota distribution would have to account for the varying capacities of participating vessels and the possibility of multiple trips per day.

An **angler trip** is equivalent to one fishing trip per person. If angler trips are used, varying capacities of vessels and multiple trips in one day will be accounted for, but enforcement of angler trips is more challenging than the other options.



- ❖ Should days-at-sea be measured as calendar days, trips, or angler trips?

IV. Initial Apportionment

Implementation of a pilot program would require two apportionment decisions:

1. Amount of recreational quota allotted to the pilot program.
2. Division of allotted quota among program participants.

The amount of recreational quota allotted to the pilot program is expected to have a significant impact on the performance of the program.

- ❖ Should the average portion of the recreational red snapper quota harvested by charter operators and prorated by the percent of participating charter vessels be used to determine the amount of recreational quota to be set aside?
- ❖ What time series should be used to determine the average harvest?
- ❖ Should regional differences in red snapper landings be taken into account?

Implementation of the proposed pilot program would require division of the allotted quota among program participants.

- ❖ Should days-at-sea be distributed equally among participants?
- ❖ Should division be based on reported logbooks?

V. Seasonal Restrictions

The pilot program could allow for year-round access to red snapper, but this may pose enforcement and monitoring challenges, especially if the program overlaps with the regular red snapper season.

- ❖ Should the program include seasonal restrictions on when allotted “days” may be used?
- ❖ Should the days-at-sea overlap with regular recreational red snapper season?

VI. Transferability Provisions

The effort units used in the pilot program could either be transferable or non-transferable. If units are transferable, then units could be used by program participants that value them the most. However, non-participating charter operators would not enjoy the same opportunity. Non-transferable units would eliminate this concern, but would limit the opportunity to evaluate the performance of a market for the effort units.

- ❖ Should days-at-sea be transferable or non-transferable?

VII. Enforcement

In order to ensure vessel compliance in using allotted days-at-sea, the pilot program would include features typically used for enforcement in commercial Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) programs.

Participating vessels would be required to:

1. Make trip declarations (hail-out and hail-in).
2. Land at approved landing sites only.
3. Be equipped with a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS).

Consequences for program violations will need to be determined.



VIII. Effort and Catch Validation

A pilot days-at-sea program would require an electronic data reporting system and in-person sampling to validate reporting. Effort and catch validation would require:

1. Completion of electronic reporting before landing.
2. Site selection with sampling weighted based on number of participating vessels at a site.
3. Sampling of every returning vessel on selected sites.
4. Direct comparison of reported harvest and actual observed harvest.
5. Collection of effort data.

IX. Program Evaluation

Data will have to be collected from all participants, including the control group, to measure program performance. Trouble areas should be identified and modifications should be suggested. Ideally, the Council could use the program evaluation to determine whether to implement a Gulf-wide program, extend, or terminate the pilot program.

Issues

Allocation decisions will need to be made in order to move forward with a days-at-sea pilot program.

The Council will need to define its intent relative to sector separation in order to move forward with a days-at-sea pilot program.

The voluntary nature of the pilot program will limit the ability to draw conclusions that can be applied to the entire charter for-hire fleet.

Additional Questions

- ❖ Are you in favor of a days-at-sea program?
- ❖ Would you volunteer to participate in a pilot program?
- ❖ What is the minimum number of days at sea you would accept to participate in the program? (Assume a 27-day recreational red snapper season.)
- ❖ Are there any specific issues that stop you from supporting the pilot program?
- ❖ What positive or negative outcomes do you expect from the program?
- ❖ Are there alternative management measures that you would prefer to a days-at-sea pilot program?



The Council is collecting input on this amendment both online and through a series of meetings across the Gulf coast. Each of the following meetings will begin at 6 p.m. local time and conclude no later than 9:00 p.m.

March 25, 2013

Gulfport, Mississippi

Courtyard Marriott
1600 E. Beach Blvd.
Gulfport, MS 39501
(228) 864-4310

April 1, 2013

Galveston Island, Texas

Hilton Galveston Island
5400 Seawall Blvd.
Galveston Island, TX 77551
(409) 744-5000

March 26, 2013

Orange Beach, Alabama

Fairfield Inn & Suites
3111 Loop Road
Orange Beach, AL 36561
(251) 543-4444

April 2, 2013

St. Petersburg, Florida

Hilton St. Petersburg Carillon Park
950 Lake Carillon Drive
St. Petersburg, FL 33716
(727) 540-0050

March 27, 2013

Destin, Florida

Destin Community Center
101 Stahlman Ave.
Destin, FL 32541
(850) 654-5184

Corpus Christi, Texas

Hilton Garden Inn
6717 S. Padre Island Drive
Corpus Christi, TX 78412
(361) 991-8200

Naples, Florida

Courtyard Marriott
3250 US 41 N.
Naples, FL 34103
(239) 434-8700

April 3, 2013

Kenner, Louisiana

Crowne Plaza New Orleans Airport
2829 Williams Blvd.
Kenner, LA 70062
(504) 467-5611

If you are unable to attend a public hearing, your input is still important. A virtual presentation is also available. To view the online presentation or to comment on the proposed changes, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/bh54x8q>, or click on the thermometer icon on our home page at www.gulfcouncil.org.





NOTES





Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

2203 N. Lois Avenue
Suite 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

Tel: 888-833-1844

Fax: 813-348-1711

Email: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

Web site: www.gulfcouncil.org

