



# PUBLIC HEARING GUIDE

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## Modifications to Charter Vessel and Headboat Reporting Requirements



Cover photos courtesy of: Scott Hickman, Chris Phillips, Mary Ochello-Jackson, Mark Miller

# Table of Contents

What is a Public Hearing?	2
How does a public hearing affect fisheries management?	2
How else can I get involved?	3
Definitions	4
Introduction to Charter Vessel and Headboat Reporting	5
Amendment Status	5
Summary of Actions	
Action 1 - Modify Frequency and Method of Data Reporting for Charter Vessels	6
Action 2 - Modify Frequency and Method of Data Reporting for Headboats	6
Action 3 - Modify Reporting Requirements Requiring Vessel or Catch Location Reporting	7
Action 4 - Hardware/Software Requirements for Reporting Fishing Records and Location	8
Send us Your Comments	9

## What is a Public Hearing?

A public hearing gives you an opportunity to comment on a fishery management plan or amendment that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) is developing. Public hearings are conducted after the Council has begun selecting preferred alternatives for proposed actions, but before taking final action. Suggestions, issues, and concerns expressed during the public hearings will be presented to the Council for review and consideration before final action is taken.

The Council requests your feedback on the preferred alternatives in the Amendment that are outlined in this guide. The Council will hold an electronic public hearing on Wednesday September 28, 2016 starting at 6:00 PM EST and you can participate by registering at this link:

<http://tinyurl.com/Reporting-Webinar>

## How does a public hearing affect fisheries management?

It is helpful to the Council if you focus your comments on the pros and cons of specific alternatives in each action. If you are unable to participate in the public hearing, you are encouraged to submit your comments online. For online comment forms, and full amendment documents, visit our website at [www.gulfcouncil.org](http://www.gulfcouncil.org) and click the thermometer icon at the center of the homepage.

Comments provided during the public hearing process are reported to the Council prior to final action. Your input is considered as the Council deliberates and chooses the most appropriate management measures to address the issue(s) at hand.



## How else can I get involved?

There are many ways you can help the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council identify fishery management needs and develop reasonable management alternatives, each dependent on how actively involved you want to become.

The first step to becoming involved is to educate yourself about the management process by visiting our website at [www.gulfcouncil.org](http://www.gulfcouncil.org), signing up to receive our communications, and contacting Council members and staff to discuss management concerns. You can attend meetings, serve on panels and committees that advise the Council on fishery issues, and even apply to become a Council member.



## Definitions

**Charter Vessel** - A vessel with a federal charter/headboat reef fish permit or a federal charter/headboat coastal migratory pelagic permit that does not participate in the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey.

**Headboat** - A vessel with a federal charter/headboat reef fish permit or a federal charter/headboat coastal migratory pelagic permit that does participate in the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey.



## Introduction to Charter Vessel and Headboat Reporting

The for-hire component of the recreational sector harvests a substantial portion of the recreational annual catch limit for several federally managed fish species in the Gulf of Mexico. Accurate fisheries information about catch, effort, and discards is necessary to ensure we are harvesting the amount of fish that achieves the greatest balance of economic, social, and biological benefits. Additionally, improving data reporting could reduce the likelihood that annual catch limits are exceeded and accountability measures are triggered.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is considering changing the method, frequency, and required data reported by for-hire operators with charter/headboat Reef Fish or charter/headboat Coastal Migratory Pelagic permits. This will improve charter vessel and headboat fishery data used for management, monitoring, and compliance of federally permitted for-hire vessels in the Gulf of Mexico.

## Amendment Status

The Council has been developing an Amendment that would implement electronic reporting of fisheries data for federally permitted for-hire vessels in the Gulf of Mexico. A letter was sent to federal for-hire permit holders and a public hearing via webinar was held in December 2015 to inform permit holders of this action and collect input before the Council took final action.

Based on stakeholder input and other factors, the Council determined that the Amendment required additional clarification regarding the trip notification and hardware/software systems that would be used in this program. The Council continued the development of this document to clarify the intent and operation of the program.

## Summary of Actions

### Action 1: Modify Frequency and Mechanism of Data Reporting for Charter Vessels

This Action applies to federally permitted for-hire vessels that do not participate in the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey. Typically, charter vessels have a capacity for six or fewer passengers and carry anglers that have paid to charter the entire vessel. Charter vessel harvest is monitored using the Marine Recreational Information Program. This program measures harvest using the combination of a dockside intercept survey and a monthly phone survey of 10% of the federally permitted charter vessels in the Gulf.

**Alternative 1:** No action.

**Alternative 2:** Require federally permitted charter vessels to submit fishing records weekly via electronic reporting by the Tuesday following each fishing week.

**Alternative 3:** Require federally permitted charter vessels to submit fishing records daily via electronic reporting by noon the following day.

**Preferred Alternative 4:** Require federally permitted charter vessels to submit fishing records for each trip via electronic reporting before arriving at the dock.

### Action 2: Modify the Frequency and Mechanism of Data Reporting for Headboats

This Action only applies to federally permitted for-hire vessels that participate in the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey. Typically, headboats have an angler capacity of 15 or more and are characterized by a fee structure where anglers pay individually. Their harvest is monitored using the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey which requires operators to submit completed fishing records for every trip via electronic logbooks on a weekly basis. Reports must be postmarked no later than 7 days after the end of each week.

**Alternative 1:** No action.

**Alternative 2:** Require headboats to submit fishing records weekly via electronic reporting by the Tuesday following each fishing week.

**Alternative 3:** Require headboats to submit fishing records daily via electronic reporting by noon the following day.

**Preferred Alternative 4:** Require headboats to submit fishing records for each trip via electronic reporting prior to arriving at the dock.

### **Action 3: Trip Notification and Reporting Requirements**

There are currently no trip notification requirements for charter vessels or headboats. However, if a vessel with a federal for-hire permit also has a federal commercial permit, the vessel operator is required to submit a trip notification and declare whether the trip will be commercial, recreational, or for-hire in nature as part of the requirements of the commercial permit.

**Alternative 1:** No action.

#### ***Hail Out***

**Preferred Alternative 2:** Require vessels to declare (hail out) each trip prior to leaving the dock. Expected return time and landing location information will also need to be reported.

**Preferred Option a:** Charter vessels

**Preferred Option b:** Headboats

#### ***Hail In***

**Preferred Alternative 3:** Require vessels to hail in and submit fishing records via electronic reporting for each trip prior to arriving at the dock/port.

**Preferred Option a:** Charter vessels

**Preferred Option b:** Headboats

## Action 4: Hardware/Software Requirements for Reporting Fishing Records and Location

There are currently no hardware or software reporting requirements for federally permitted for-hire vessels. Charter vessels report catch and effort through the MRIP survey and do not have vessel specific reporting requirements. Headboats submit their electronic reports using an internet website and/or a mobile application reporting platform that does not require at-sea reporting or the use of a specific device.

**Alternative 1:** No action.

**Alternative 2:** Require vessel operators to submit fishing records using NMFS approved hardware/software with minimum archived global positioning system capabilities (GPS) that provide vessel position.

**Option a:** Charter vessels

**Option b:** Headboats

**Alternative 3:** Require vessel operators to submit fishing records using NMFS approved hardware/software with minimum real-time GPS capabilities that provides vessel position.

**Option a:** Charter vessels

**Option b:** Headboats

**Preferred Alternative 4:** Require vessel operators to submit fishing records using NMFS approved vessel monitoring system hardware/software that provides vessel position.

**Preferred Option a:** Charter vessels

**Preferred Option b:** Headboats

*Note: Preferred Alternative 4 would require use of a NMFS approved VMS that is permanently affixed to the vessel.*

## Send us your Comments

The Council would like your input on this proposed amendment. If you would like to see the full text document and analysis of each action, visit <http://tinyurl.com/for-hire-reporting>.

Submit your comments online by visiting <http://tinyurl.com/for-hire-reporting-comment>, or click on the thermometer icon on our homepage, [www.gulfcouncil.org](http://www.gulfcouncil.org).



Additionally, we are hosting a public hearing online via webinar beginning at 6 p.m. EST, Wednesday, September 28, 2016. To register, visit <http://tinyurl.com/Reporting-Webinar>





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