



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Managing Fishery Resources in the U.S. Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico

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Gulf Council Update – June, 2015

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Key West, Florida June 8 – 12, 2015, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including regional management for recreational red snapper and red snapper allocation. Here are some of the actions taken by the Council last week.

Regional Management of Recreational Red Snapper – Reef Fish Amendment 39

The Council continued discussions on Amendment 39, which looks at dividing the recreational red snapper quota among regions to allow for the creation of different management measures that better suit each area, and will conduct another round of public hearings throughout the Gulf coast later this year. In the meantime, staff will continue work on the document for Council review in August.

Red Snapper Allocation – Reef Fish Amendment 28

The Council reviewed a revised draft of Amendment 28, which considers reallocating a portion of the commercial quota to the recreational sector. The Council's preferred alternative remains Alternative 8 which would allocate any increase the allowable harvest to the recreational sector. The resulting allocation for 2016 – 2017 would be 48.5% commercial and 51.5% recreational.

The Council is expected to take final action on Amendment 28 during its August meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana. Public comments will be taken during the meeting and can also be submitted through the Council web site.

Red Snapper IFQ Program Modifications – Reef Fish Amendment 36

The Council moved forward with Red Snapper IFQ Modifications and will review an options paper during its October meeting.

Charter For-Hire Management of Red Snapper - Reef Fish Amendment 41

After hearing the report of the Ad Hoc Red Snapper Charter For-Hire Advisory Panel meeting, the Council asked staff to begin developing an options paper for Amendment 41, which will explore the design and implementation of flexible measures for the management of red snapper by the charter for-hire fleet. The Options Paper will be presented to the Council during its August meeting.

Headboat Reef Fish Management - Reef Fish Amendment 42

The Council heard report of the Ad Hoc Reef Fish Headboat Advisory Panel meeting. An options paper that explores the design and implementation of flexible measures for the management of reef fish for the headboat fleet will be provided to the Council during its August meeting.

Gag Recreational Seasons

During its June meeting the Council reviewed a framework action that considers adjusting the annual catch limits (ACL), annual catch targets (ACT), and recreational season for gag. Due to both scientific and anecdotal information that the gag stock may have declined in recent years, the Council decided to move Action 1, which deals with potential changes to the ACL and ACT, to the considered but rejected section of the document, and to retain the existing ACL of 3.12 million pounds.

For Action 2 – Modifications to the Gag Fishing Season – the Council is looking at a range of alternatives, including removing the January through June gag seasonal closure. The Council's current preferred alternative would remove the December 3-31 fixed closed season. So the recreational gag season would remain open through the end of the year or until it is estimated that the ACT will be reached sooner. This alternative, if approved, would take effect in the 2016 season.

The Council also asked staff to develop alternatives for review during the August Council meeting that considers increasing the minimum size limit of gag and black grouper to 24 inches.

Hogfish

The Council reviewed the recommendations by its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) regarding hogfish and initiated a plan amendment to define a west Florida Shelf hogfish stock and set status determination criteria and annual catch limits. Staff will also work with the SSC to provide the Council with a constant catch acceptable biological catch for hogfish.

The latest hogfish assessment shows that there are three distinct hogfish stocks. The west Florida shelf stock is managed solely by the Gulf Council and is neither overfished or experiencing overfishing. The stock in the Florida Keys and along the east coast of Florida is overfished and experiencing overfishing, and the status of stock off the coast of Georgia and the Carolinas is experiencing overfishing and nearly overfished. The Gulf Council passed a motion for the South Atlantic Council to manage the Florida Key's stock using Shark Point (25° , $23'N$) as the boundary.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics (Mackerel)

The Council took final action on a King Mackerel Gillnet Framework Action that increases the commercial trip limit to 45,000 pounds. The action also: establishes a payback provision if the Florida West Coast Southern Subzone gillnet annual catch limit is exceeded; and allows commercial king mackerel gillnet permits to be renewed only if landings for a single year during 2006-2015 were greater than one pound. Permits that do not qualify will be non-renewable and non-transferable.

The Council heard a summary of the public input received during scoping on Amendment 26: Modifications to Allocations, Stock Boundaries, and Sale provisions of King Mackerel and Amendment 28: Separating Permits for Gulf and Atlantic Migratory Groups of King Mackerel. The Council will continue to work on the Amendment 26 and will review a revised document later this year. Staff will also continue to develop Amendment 28, including the addition of an action to separate king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia from the Joint Gulf and South Atlantic Coastal Migratory Pelagic Fishery Management Plan into separate Fishery Management Plans for each Council's jurisdiction.

Shrimp

The Council took final action on Shrimp Amendment 15, which looks at adjusting the status determination criteria, such as the overfishing threshold, for brown, white, and pink shrimp. It also considers changing the shrimp fishery management plan's framework procedure.

The Council also reviewed an Options Paper for Amendment 17 that addresses the expiration of the shrimp permit moratorium. The Council chose a preferred alternative that would extend the moratorium on the issuance of federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permits for 10 years.

Data Collection

The Gulf and South Atlantic Councils met jointly to discuss an Options Paper for Charter Vessel Electronic Reporting. The Gulf Council chose alternatives that would require both federally permitted charter vessels and headboats to submit fishing records to the Science and Research Director (SRD) for each trip via electronic reporting prior to arriving at the dock.

South Florida Management

The Gulf Council & South Atlantic Council met in a joint meeting to continue working on a fisheries management plan to streamline regulations in South Florida, particularly off the Florida Keys. They reviewed an options paper that considers modifying the management structure and some management measures for yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, black grouper and shallow-water grouper, to make fishing regulations less complicated and more uniform for commercial and recreational fishermen in the area.

The Gulf Council worked on fine-tuning the document and chose some preferred alternatives. The staff of both Councils will continue developing the document for further consideration during its October meeting.

About the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional Fishery Management Councils established by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council prepares fishery management plans, which are designed to manage fishery resources within the 200-mile limit of the Gulf of Mexico.