



Gulf Fishery News

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

February - March, 2011

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Council Recruiting Members for Standing and Special SSCs

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is soliciting applications for seats currently available on its Standing and Special Scientific and Statistical Committees. The Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSC) make up the Gulf Council's primary technical advisory body. The Committees are charged in the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act with developing, evaluating, and peer reviewing all technical aspects of council documents, and they are expected to provide

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Longtime Council Member Vernon Minton Remembered

By David Rainer

The week before the New Year, Alabama lost one of its leaders in the world of conservation. Vernon Minton, Director of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Marine Resources Division, passed away after a lengthy illness at the age of 61.

I remember him as a gentle giant who maintained a calm head while others about him were losing theirs. His knack for the art of compromise served him greatly during the battles between the commercial and recreational anglers. His promotion of the artificial reef program, both inshore and offshore, has resulted in excellent saltwater angling opportunities and an unparalleled red snapper fishery.

Conservation Commissioner Barnett Lawley witnessed first-hand Minton's efforts for the past eight years.

"Vern did an admirable job in managing the fisheries as our director and as a member of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council," Lawley said. "I think Vern was always very fair. As long as both sides were complaining, you knew he was making the right decision. I never saw a situation where you could say he was leaning this way or that way.

"Vern loved his job, loved his people. He was as dedicated as anybody to the State of Alabama in what he did. A lot of people are in this for their ego, but Vern was not one of those. He was a very knowledgeable, articulate man – someone that you were proud to have stand up and represent your state and your department."

Longtime colleague and fellow marine scientist Bob Shipp shared many Gulf Council meetings, as well as many trips into the Gulf on red snapper research outings. Shipp agreed that Minton's imposing 6-foot, 6-inch frame belied his demeanor.

"The thing that stood out most for me with Vernon was his concern for the people involved in the fisheries," said Shipp, head of the Marine Sciences Department at the University of South Alabama and chairman of the Gulf Council. "Even in areas where we disagreed, like the gill nets, a lot of what he did was because he felt so strongly for the people. He really had a huge heart. I'll never forget one day I was on I-10 heading east and a car was broken down on the side of the road. About 50 feet beyond them, Vernon had pulled over. They were total strangers, but he was walking back to help them. That's just the kind of person he was."



Vernon Minton passed away December 26, 2010

Minton *continued*

As members of the Gulf Council, Shipp said years of reductions in snapper seasons and bag limits were especially disconcerting to Minton, who knew from first-hand experience that the status of the red snapper stocks did not match the dire predictions of what he considered were flawed computer models.

“As far as conservation was concerned, Vernon was totally committed to the artificial reef program and the snapper stocks,” Shipp said. “It was really frustrating for him to see the failing of the science – how far behind the science was – and having to operate in that system. He had great respect for science, but the databases were so inadequate, which translated into shortened seasons and people being cut out of work. He had a difficult time accepting that.



Vernon Minton

“The work Vernon did on rearing red snapper was especially noteworthy. He worked with Auburn faculty and students and they made the breakthrough on the larval food for red snapper. Once they made that

breakthrough, the mariculture of red snapper was certainly possible.”

Chris Blankenship, Acting Director of Marine Resources, said Minton’s ability to bring people together for a common cause served as a valuable lesson.

“Vernon had a big impact on Marine Resources over the last 20-plus years,” Blankenship said. “He forged a lot of relationships with federal partners and with non-governmental organizations that have an interest in the fisheries.

“I think what people will remember is that he listened to all sides of a situation. He looked at the science and tried to do what was the overall best for the fishery. I learned a lot from Vern – a lot about fisheries management and a lot about dealing with the public.”

Steve Heath, who retired in 2009 as Chief Marine Biologist, worked with Minton for 31 years at Marine Resources and witnessed a significant shift in the way fisheries management was conducted.

“The flavor of marine resources and management changed over those 30 years,” Heath said.

“When we first started, the division and department mandated what was going to happen in terms of regulations – size limits, bag limits and seasons. There wasn’t a lot of involvement from the public. But over the 30 years, the fishermen, both commercial and recreational, became more involved in the process. People became much more aware of how regulations and laws were created and were able to have input and express their opinions.

“By the time Vern became director and I became Chief Biologist, we were very much involved in what I call co-management. We would sit down with the fishermen and discuss what we needed to do, based on our data. We would get their input from their experience. Then we would use the combination to reach the desired result.”

Heath said when Minton became director in 1990 he quickly became immersed in the controversy between recreational anglers and gill net fishermen.

“We were involved during a tremendous period of growth for marine resources in Alabama,” Heath said. “When he first became director it was a baptism of incredible fire. He walked right into the situation when recreational fishermen wanted to eliminate gill net fishing. He spent many long hours and days to come up with a compromise that would allow each side to share in the harvest. And he succeeded.

“He worked hard to ensure that the commercial sector got to share in the fishery. At the same time, he got redfish and speckled trout declared game fish during his tenure. He also did a tremendous amount to increase our artificial reef program, and he started the inshore reef program. He was instrumental in the establishment of the saltwater fishing license, which provided much needed funding for fisheries management. I think Vernon’s legacy was his ability to work with all the different user groups.”

Shipp believes the outstanding red snapper fishery off the Alabama Coast will represent Minton’s contribution to marine conservation.

“I think the artificial reef fishery for snapper and grouper will continue to be recognized as one of the outstanding fisheries in the United States,” Shipp said.

“The tiny coast of Alabama produces a third of the Gulf of Mexico’s red snapper. That resulted from Vernon’s effort to continue to put out artificial structures and do it in a way that was environmentally sound. I think that fishery will be his greatest legacy.”





Dr. Bob Shipp,
Council Chair

From the Deck of the Shipp

This past year has seen some of the most controversial and contentious issues the Council has been faced with. Those of us who regularly attend Council meetings, whether Council

members, advisory panel members or otherwise interested stakeholders are familiar with these issues, many of which are likely to be resolved during the next year. So I'd like to use this column to summarize which I believe the most important are. Some of these have been touched upon in more detail in earlier columns.

Data

We hear constantly of the need for better data. The MRIP (Marine Recreational Information Program) is two years behind schedule, and current models continue to use the MRFSS (Marine Recreational Fishing Statistical Survey) data. These data are fishery dependent (data derived from fishing, thus non random), the sources of which are inherently biased and require the Scientific and Statistical Committee to make subjective decisions on that bias. The better news is that funding has become available to generate more fishery independent data, which will lead to far more accurate and credible stock assessments. I recommend those critical of the data focus on getting more fishery independent data, instead of more precise fishery dependent data.

Catch Shares

What a whoop and cry we heard when Dr. Jane Lubchenco, the head of NOAA, ushered in catch shares, considered by many to be a revolutionary concept of fisheries management, and anathema by others. But since the original idea was put forth, there have been numerous tweaks and edits, as well as downright distortions, as to what catch shares are and what they mean. To me a catch share is a portion of the harvest of a fishery that is dedicated to a certain group of fishers. Basically, it's not a whole lot different than a quota, except how it's managed. In the Gulf of Mexico, we had catch shares with the red snapper IFQ long before Dr. Lubchenco was sworn in. But the real problem began when fishermen determined that catch shares were intended for the recreational fishery, by use of tags, lottery, or whatever. Apparently this is not the case. NOAA has indicated that catch shares are probably not appropriate for recreational fisheries. Innovative measures to better manage the fisheries remain to be seen, where currently the indefensible practice of producing dead discards is rampant.

Allocation

Closely related to the catch shares is the issue of allocation. Over the past decades, National Standard 1, dealing with the health of our fish stocks, has trumped all others. But now that we are getting a handle on stock health, the socioeconomic issues are receiving more attention. In our Gulf with its many mixed fisheries, allocations between commercial and recreational sectors have remained basically unchanged despite the massive changes in the economics of fisheries over the past 30 years. The statute clearly requires that allocations be determined, in large part, by socioeconomic considerations. This is going to be a challenge, particularly because when allocations are changed, or even adjusted, there are losers and winners. The emphasis on catch shares advocated by the current administration will very likely drive the allocation issue toward the front burner, because quota allocation is inherent in the catch share issue.

Sector Separation

Sector separation is an idea forwarded by some in the for-hire industry, whereby the recreational quota would be split between charter and private recreational anglers. The intent is to guarantee the for-hire sector a set amount into the future, even if the private recreational anglers increased in numbers. Sector separation was the topic of the recent workshop held in Tampa, which resulted in very little consensus. However, the workshop did clarify some of the issues involved in sector separation, especially the erroneous perception that separation would result in some in the industry having individual quotas. One of the dividends of the workshop was the exploration of alternatives, such as the "days at sea" option outlined in my previous column.

Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures

The revised Magnuson Act requires annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) for all species under management. This requirement has imposed a major work load on both the Councils and the Fishery Service, and has resulted in new safeguards to prevent overfishing. These new requirements have encouraged more precautionary approaches, with an increased likelihood that quotas will not be reached. I don't have a problem with this except that the fishery is penalized for overruns, and goes unrewarded when the quota is not met.

I suspect there will arise additional issues in the upcoming year, but I think those described above will dominate Council actions for the foreseeable future.



April Council Meeting Reminder

The Council will be meeting the week of April 11-14, 2011, at the Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach, Alabama. Please make your reservation under the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council room block to receive the special discounted room rate.

Submission of written comments and materials to be included as part of the briefing book materials for this meeting MUST BE RECEIVED by 5:00 p.m. EDT April 5, 2011.

If you miss the deadline and bring your own copies to the meeting, please bring at least 30 copies for the Council. If you wish your materials to be made available to the public, please bring additional copies.

A draft will be posted on the Gulf Council web site at www.gulfcouncil.org



Gulf Council Seeks Applicants to Serve on Fishery Advisory Panels

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is soliciting applications for seats currently available on its advisory panels and committees. Working at the grass roots level, advisory panel members provide information and guidance in the development and implementation of federal fishery management plans. Advisory panels are composed of individuals who are engaged in the harvest of, or are knowledgeable and interested in the conservation and management of the fisheries under management. Members include recreational and commercial fishermen, seafood dealers and processors, conservationists, scientists, and concerned citizens.

Advisory panel members are appointed by the Council and serve for two years. As those appointments expire, members currently serving can reapply for their positions. These seats also become open to new applicants. For a list of panels visit http://www.gulfcouncil.org/panels_committees/advisory_panels.php.

Panels generally meet once or twice each year. Advisory Panel members are not compensated; however, travel expenses are reimbursed. Anyone interested in serving should submit a letter and resume to:

Phyllis Miranda
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 N. Lois Avenue
Suite 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

Materials may also be faxed to: 813-348-1711; or e-mailed to phyllis.miranda@gulfcouncil.org. Resumes and letters should be received no later than close of business April 5, 2011. Appointments will be made during the Council's April meeting in Orange Beach, Alabama.



Send us Your Fishing Photos

We want to see your favorite fishing and fishery-related photos! Whether they are from a spear fishing adventure, a charter trip, or a commercial effort, we'd like to see your photos and possibly use them on our web site or in our newsletter.

Send us your photos and help us build a photo library! To submit your photos, please send an e-mail with "Photo Library" in the subject line to gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org. Be sure to include your name, address, phone number, along with a description and proper photo credit, then simply attach the image and send. Photo descriptions may be edited for grammar, clarity, and/or length. Photos must be in jpeg format and should not exceed 1.5 MB (no more than 200 ppi).

NOTE: By submitting photos, you understand that if we decide to use your photo, it can be used on our web site, in our newsletter or other publications. We will display a brief description of the photo and your name, unless requested otherwise.



Photo submitted by Dave Wolf



Why the Disconnect on Red Snapper?



Eric Schwaab
Assistant Administrator
for Fisheries, NOAA

Q: Why is there such a disconnect between what anglers are seeing on the water and what the scientists say? In the Gulf of Mexico there are more red snapper than anyone can remember, but we had the shortest season ever last year before the oil spill. How can the science be that far off?

- *Matt Bailey, Houston*

A: These are important questions, with answers that some readers might find surprising. The fact is, little disconnect exists between what recreational fishermen are seeing on the water and what the science tells us about the health of the Gulf red snapper population.

We are all interested in ending overfishing and rebuilding Gulf red snapper populations. A rebuilt population typically means more fish, robust size and age structures, and the ability to support higher catches. Like growing your bank account, increasing the stock size yields higher dividends without cutting into your principle. Ultimately, the sacrifice involved with rebuilding stocks will put us in a position to catch more fish.

The challenge occurs during the rebuilding process - as we invest more in the bank - which is where we now stand with Gulf red snapper. During rebuilding there are more fish in the water, even before the rebuilding goal is reached. The presence of more fish often leads to higher catch rates, as has happened with Gulf red snapper, and this can short-circuit the rebuilding process. The challenge is to limit higher catches during rebuilding, and then manage that bigger bank account without eating into our capital once the stock is rebuilt.

The red snapper rebuilding plan requires fishery managers to end overfishing between 2009 and 2010, and to rebuild the stock to a sustainable level by 2032. In 2007, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council made a difficult but necessary decision to reduce red snapper fishing mortality rates. Because of that decision, the 2009 red snapper stock assessment shows that overfishing ended in 2009, and that the population is increasing. More important, observations by fishermen and limited fishery-independent surveys confirm these projections. In other words, both fishermen and scientists are seeing more fish.

Obviously, managing fisheries is more complicated than managing a bank account. But by working together and effectively applying robust science, we can maintain fishing opportunities today, and achieve more-productive and sustainable fisheries for the future.



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Closures

Recreational Closures:

Red Snapper

The supplemental recreational red snapper season closed 12:01 a.m., November 22, 2010. The fishery will reopen June 1, 2011.

Gag

NOAA Fisheries Service announced a temporary rule to set the recreational harvest of gag to zero, beginning January 1, 2011. The temporary rule expires May 31, 2011.

Commercial Closures:

King Mackerel

The king mackerel commercial run-around gillnet component of the coastal migratory pelagic fishery in the southern Florida west coast subzone is closed from February 2, 2011, through January 17, 2012.

Beginning October 26, 2010, the Gulf group king mackerel commercial trip limit is reduced to 500 pounds in the northern Florida west coast subzone. The 500-pound daily trip limit will remain in effect until the quota is reached or June 30, 2011, whichever occurs first.

The western Gulf of Mexico zone is closed to commercial king mackerel from February 11, 2011, through June 30, 2011. With this action, commercial king mackerel fishing is prohibited in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico from the U.S./Mexico border to the Alabama/Florida boundary.

The commercial sector harvesting Gulf-group king mackerel in the Florida east coast subzone is closed from February 26, 2011, through March 31, 2011. With this action, the Gulf-group king mackerel commercial sector is closed in federal waters from the Flagler/Volusia County line to the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line until April 1, 2011.

The king mackerel commercial run-around gillnet component of the coastal migratory pelagic fishery in the southern Florida west coast subzone is closed from February 2, 2011, through 6 a.m. January 17, 2012. With this action, king mackerel commercial gillnet fishing is prohibited in the Gulf of Mexico off Collier and Monroe Counties, from a line directly west of the Lee/Collier county line on the west coast of Florida south and east to a line directly east of the Monroe/Miami-Dade county line on the east coast of Florida.

The daily vessel trip limit is reduced to 500 pounds beginning 12:01 a.m., local time, March 8, 2011, for commercial hook-and-line vessels fishing for Gulf group king mackerel in the southern Florida west coast subzone.

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

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Deputy Director

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Council Maintain Texas Shrimp Closure

By a unanimous vote, the Gulf Council approved a motion during its February meeting to continue the Texas shrimp closure for 2011, to the 200-mile limit of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The closure is part of cooperative seasonal closure with the State of Texas and runs concurrent with its mid-season closure.

The management objectives of the Texas closure are to increase the yield of brown shrimp and eliminate the waste of the resource caused by discarding undersized shrimp caught during a period in their life cycle when they are growing rapidly.

The closure results in larger shrimp in the fishery and, subsequently, a higher market value. This enables fishermen to harvest premium marketable-sized shrimp, thereby increasing revenues to the shrimp industry. Since 1981, when the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan (FMP) was implemented, there has been some form of closure off the coast of Texas. In 1989 the 200-mile closure went into effect and has remained in effect since.

The Council also moved to solicit input from the shrimp industry regarding a closure similar to the Texas closure throughout the other Gulf states.

Texas Shrimp Closure:

Closed from the coast line to 200 miles off Texas.

Closure for 2011, approximately May 15 - July 15, actual duration depends on sampling done by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Protects migrating juvenile shrimp which results in larger shrimp.

Larger shrimp result in increased revenues to the shrimp industry.



NRDA Restoration Scoping Meetings Announced

NOAA and the other federal and state agencies will hold a series of meetings across the Gulf coast to get public input on what types of restoration should be undertaken to compensate for impacts to natural resources that were exposed to oil from the Deepwater BP oil spill.

Meeting Schedule

Doors open at 6:30, meetings begin at 7:30 at the following locations:

- **Pensacola, FL** - March 16: Bayview Community Center, 2001 Lloyd Street
- **Panama City, FL** - March 17: Bay County Government Center, 840 W 11th Street.
- **Biloxi, MS** - March 21: Donal Snyder Community Center, 2520 Pass Road.
- **Belle Chasse, LA** - March 22: Belle Chasse Public Library, 8442 Highway 23.
- **Mobile, AL** - March 23: The Battle House, 26 North Royal St.
- **Port Arthur, TX** - March 30: Port Arthur Civic Center, 3401 Cultural Center Drive.
- **Galveston, TX** - March 31: Texas A&M - Ocean & Coastal Studies Building.
- **Washington, DC** - April 6: USDOC Herbert Hoover Building Auditorium, 1401 Constitution Ave., NW.

Doors open at 5:30, meetings begin at 6:30 at the following locations:

- **Houma, LA** - March 24: Holiday Inn, 1800 Martin Luther King Blvd.
- **Grand Isle, LA** - March 28: Grand Isle Community Center, 3811 Highway 1.
- **Morgan City, LA** - March 29: Bayou Vista Community Center, 1333 Belleview St.

Have You Seen Me?

Popular in both public and private aquariums, Lionfish are native to the tropical Indo-Pacific region. Since 2000, however, lionfish have been observed in coral, rocky and artificial reefs along the southeast coast of the U.S., from Florida to North Carolina and also throughout the Bahamas, Bermuda and Cuba.

In more recent years, lionfish have also been caught by bottom fishing anglers. Scientists expect the dispersal of lionfish to continue throughout the Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico and the Florida Keys. As a result, there is an increasing concern among fishery scientists that lionfish, having no natural enemies, may adversely affect natural fish populations. In addition, this fish has venomous spines and may pose a danger to divers and anglers alike.

If you catch a lionfish be extremely careful, do not come in contact with the dorsal, anal or pelvic spines. If fish must be handled, thick PVC gloves or a gaff is recommended.

Anyone stung by the venomous spines is advised to immerse the wound in hot water for 30 – 90 minutes and seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Please do not throw lionfish back in the water! NOAA is interested in all lionfish specimens and reports. Put lionfish on ice and report any lionfish catches to NOAA by e-mailing reportlionfish@noaa.gov, or by calling (252) 728-8714. You may also contact the United States Coast Guard at USGS.877-STOP-ANS.

For more information please visit: coastalscience.noaa.gov/education/lionfish.html or lionfish.eisf.org



Scoping Schedule for Crew Size Limit/Income Requirement Amendment

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has scheduled a series of scoping meetings on a proposed amendment to address crew size limits for dually permitted vessels, as well as earned income requirements for commercial reef fish permit holders. Dually permitted vessels are vessels with both a charter for-hire permit and a commercial reef fish permit. The proposal also looks at suspending the earned income qualification requirement for the renewal of commercial reef fish permits, and it will evaluate modifications to these requirements as well as an option to eliminate the requirements altogether.

Scoping is the process of identifying issues, potential impacts, and reasonable alternatives associated with the issue at hand. It provides the first and best opportunity for the public to make suggestions or to raise issues and concerns before the Council begins developing an amendment.

The meetings will be held March 22, 2011 through April 5, 2011 at eight locations throughout the Gulf of Mexico. All meetings will begin at 6 p.m. local time, and will conclude no later than 9 p.m.

March 22, 2011
Hilton St. Petersburg Parkway
950 Lake Carillon Drive
St. Petersburg, Florida
727-540-0050

March 23, 2011
Harvey Government Center
1200 Truman Avenue
Key West, FL
305-295-5000

March 28, 2011
Hilton Garden Inn
4535 Williams Boulevard
Kenner, LA
504-712-0504

March 29, 2011
Hilton Garden Inn
14108 Airport Road
Gulfport, MS
228-863-4996

March 30, 2011
Renaissance Riverview Plaza
64 S. Water Street
Mobile, AL
251-438-4000

March 31, 2011
Royal American Beach Getaways
9400 S. Thomas Drive
Panama City, FL
850-230-4681

April 4, 2011
Holiday Inn Emerald Beach
1002 S. Shoreline Boulevard
Corpus Christi, Texas
361-883-5731

April 5, 2011
Hilton
5400 Seawall Boulevard
Galveston, TX
409-744-1757



Proposed Rule to Increase Red Snapper Quotas in the Gulf of Mexico

NOAA Fisheries Service is seeking public comment on a proposed rule that would adjust the commercial and recreational red snapper quotas in the Gulf of Mexico from 3.542 and 3.403 million pounds to 3.66 and 3.525 million pounds in 2011, respectively.

A recent red snapper assessment update projected overfishing (rate of removal is too high) ended in 2009. Therefore, the total allowable catch can be increased from the existing 6.945 million pounds to 7.185 million pounds. This action was evaluated in a regulatory amendment to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico.

“While the Deepwater Horizon oil spill caused a decline in fishing effort in the Gulf, the results of this most recent stock assessment update show that the rebuilding plan is working and the stock is improving,” said Dr. Steve Bortone, Gulf Council Executive Director.

The proposed rule published in the Federal Register February 22, 2011, with the comment period ending March 24, 2011. If the amendment is approved, the final rule may contain NOAA Fisheries Services’ estimated projection for the number of days in the 2011 recreational fishing season.

Science Panel Membership Recruitment *(continued from page 1)*

a broad suite of technical recommendations related to all facets of the Council’s management program, including addressing biological, social, economic, and environmental aspects. The SSCs also play a role in stock assessment development and review; in the Southeast region this responsibility is handled through the Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process.

The Standing SSC typically meets three or four times per year with meeting length averaging three days. Pre-meeting preparation and post-meeting wrap up should be expected to require an additional time commitment equal to the meeting period, and an additional day is required for travel.

Scientific & Statistical Committees are made up of economists, biologists, sociologists and natural resource attorneys who are knowledgeable about the technical aspects of fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. Terms are for two years, at which time members can reapply.

The Council is also recruiting for its Finfish Stock Assessment Panel, Shrimp Stock Assessment Panel, and Socioeconomic Panel.

Stock Assessment Panels are pools of biologists who are trained in the specialized field of population dynamics, and who assess the available biological data and advise the Council on the status of stocks and level of acceptable

Written comments must be received no later than March 24, 2011, to be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service. Electronic copies of the proposed rule or the regulatory amendment may be obtained from the e-Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council’s Web site - www.gulfcouncil.org, or from NOAA Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, Sustainable Fisheries Division, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701-5505.

Comments may be submitted by:

- Electronic Submissions: Federal e-Rulemaking Portal; <http://www.regulations.gov>. Enter the following docket number into the “Search” box; NOAA-NMFS-2011-0018. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NOAA Fisheries Service will accept anonymous comments. Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.
- Mail: Richard Malinowski, NOAA Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, Sustainable Fisheries Division, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701.



biological catch. When stock assessments are conducted, scientists are selected from the stock assessment panels to participate in the assessment or assessment review meetings.

The Socioeconomic Panel is comprised of economists and sociologists who are trained to evaluate the economic and social costs associated with various management measures.

Anyone interested in serving should submit a letter and resume to:

Phyllis Miranda
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 N. Lois Avenue
Suite 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

Materials may also be faxed to: 813-348-1711; or e-mailed to phyllis.miranda@gulfcouncil.org. Resumes and letters should be received no later than close of business April 5, 2011. Committee members will be selected during the next meeting of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, scheduled for April 11 – 14, 2011, in Orange Beach, Alabama. More information about the Scientific and Statistical Committees can be found by visiting www.gulfcouncil.org/news_resources/ssc_membership_information.php.



Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Financing - Fisheries Finance Program

New provisions of the existing Federal Fisheries Finance Program allow for some Gulf fishermen to apply for loans to purchase IFQ shares under certain conditions; however, the Council must submit a formal request to participate in the program, as well as define the following terms:

- Entry-level fishermen, and
- Fishermen who fish from a small vessel

The Council agreed to send letters to the Secretary of Commerce requesting participation in the Fishery Finance Program, which could provide financing to qualified fishermen to purchase red snapper and grouper/tilefish shares. The Council also chose the following definitions and additional guidelines to accompany its request.

- Red snapper quota share - a permit granting the owner dedicated access to harvest a specific percentage of commercial red snapper quota.
- Grouper/tilefish quota share - a permit granting the owner dedicated access to harvest a specific percentage of the corresponding grouper/tilefish commercial quota.
- Red Snapper entry-level fisherman - a federal commercial reef fish permit holder who has not purchased, previously held, or currently holds red snapper quota shares in excess of the percentage of shares that produces 4,000 pounds gutted weight of quota allocation.
- Grouper/Tilefish entry-level fisherman - a federal commercial reef fish permit holder who has not purchased, previous held, or currently holds grouper/

tilefish shares in excess of the percentage of shares that produces 8,000 pounds gutted weight of quota allocation.

- Red snapper small vessel fishermen - federal commercial reef fish permit holders who fish from a vessel whose length as defined in the reef fish permit is less than or equal to 45 feet and who have not purchased, previously held, or currently hold red snapper shares in excess of percentage of shares that produces 4,000 pounds gutted weight of red snapper quota allocation.
- Grouper/tilefish small vessel fishermen - federal commercial reef fish permit holders who fish from a vessel whose length as defined in the reef fish permit is less than or equal to 45 feet and who have not purchased, previously held, or currently hold grouper/tilefish shares in excess of percentage of shares that produces 8,000 pounds gutted weight of red snapper quota allocation.

The Council also specified that; federal commercial reef fish permit holders may refinance existing debts associated with previous quota share purchases, providing the above qualifications criteria are met at the time of the loan application; financing be limited to a maximum red snapper quota share equivalent to 4,000 pounds gutted weight and a maximum aggregated grouper/tilefish quota share equivalent to 8,000 pounds gutted weight; and applicants be limited to those who hold quota shares representing no more than 12,000 pounds combined in both IFQ programs.



Goliath Grouper Update

The Council received a summary of a new stock assessment on goliath grouper. The assessment showed that the goliath grouper stock has clearly improved since the moratorium was implemented in 1990. However, questions still remain about the stock. For example, there is a lack of information about the basic biology of the goliath grouper, such as how long they can live. Estimates range anywhere from 37 years to 80 years. Another unknown is whether goliath grouper change sex like gag and some other grouper species. Also, the assessment, which was conducted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, focused on the south Florida portion of the stock. While that area is the center of abundance, goliath grouper are found throughout the Gulf of Mexico and in the Caribbean, and information about the status of the stock in areas not covered by the assessment is lacking.

Because of the biological uncertainties and the limited geographic scope of the assessment, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee was unable to set a level of acceptable biological catch. Instead, they recommended that the moratorium be continued through 2015, and that during this period, a coordinated scientific sampling plan be produced to address the data needs.

The Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission will review the assessment during its February meeting and may consider some sort of limited harvest of Goliath in state waters.

Gag and Reef Fish Amendment 32

The Council asked staff to prepare an interim rule for consideration during the April Council meeting that sets the 2011 recreational season for gag from September 16 through November 15. This request was made after the Council reviewed the results of a re-run of the 2009 gag update assessment. The re-run adjusted the size distribution of undersized released fish in the recreational fishery and used newly available observer data to estimate discards in the commercial fishery. The result was a slight improvement in the total allowable catch for 2011, from 1.01 to 1.28 million pounds. That means 781,000 pounds (61%) for the recreational sector and 499,000 pounds (39%) for the commercial sector.

The 781,000 pound recreational allocation allows enough catch for a two-month fall season, provided Florida adopts a consistent closed season by June 1. Without Florida consistency, it is projected the entire recreational allocation will be caught in state waters, leaving no allocation available for federal waters. The September 16 through November 15 recreational season is contingent upon Florida consistency.

For the commercial sector, a major unknown factor is the levels of dead discards due to the small amount of gag individual fishing quota (IFQ) available, and whether commercial fishermen can successfully avoid catching gag while fishing for red grouper. Because the grouper IFQ system has only been in place for one year, the commercial sector has not established a track record to demonstrate how successfully fishermen can avoid catching fish for which they do not have IFQ shares. As

a result, the Council set the 2011 commercial quota at a precautionary level of 430,000 pounds. This includes the 100,000 pounds previously released via interim rule at the beginning of the year.

The Council also continued work on Draft Reef Fish Amendment 32 to establish a rebuilding plan for gag, which has been declared by NOAA Fisheries to be overfished and undergoing overfishing. Amendment 32 will be implemented in 2012 and, provided that the 2011 catches from recreational and commercial fishing do not exceed the levels needed to rebuild, should allow for an increase in the 2012 total allowable catch of gag.

To help assure that the rebuilding plan stays on track, the Council directed staff to include alternatives for recreational quota closure authority for the NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator, and overage adjustments if a sector does exceed its allocation. This is similar to the quota closure authority and overage adjustments of the greater amberjack fishery, which is also under a rebuilding plan.

The Council also streamlined the amendment by removing several alternatives that were intended to address bycatch, and by moving a section on data collection and monitoring programs out of Amendment 32 and into a more appropriate amendment. In addition, alternatives to increase the recreational bag limit of red grouper will be added to the amendment. Public hearings on Amendment 32 will be scheduled around the Gulf coast this spring or summer.



Sector Separation Removed from Generic Amendment

The Council selected preferred alternatives for the generic Annual Catch Limits/Accountability Measures amendment, and removed sector separation from the generic ACL/AM amendment. The ACL/AM amendment is scheduled to be finished in June, and removing sector separation from its current amendment and initiating a new amendment will allow for more thorough consideration of the issue by both the Council and the public.

The Council also selected preferred alternatives that remove yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper from the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan. They removed the level of dead discards from the ACL/ACT control rule as a source of management uncertainty.

A complete list of motions will be made available on the Council web site. Public hearings will be scheduled around the Gulf coast in the spring, with meeting dates and locations to be announced in the coming weeks.

The Rising Tide of Citizens in Gulf Fishery Management

The national “rule book” governing fisheries management, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, declares a policy “to assure that the national fishery conservation and management program utilizes, and is based upon, the best scientific information available: involves, and is responsive to the needs of, interested and affected States and citizens...”

A book could be written on the issues revolving around the realities of fisheries science and the use of “best available scientific information.” But, the preferred focus of this article is a component of the national policy that is often overshadowed by concerns about science.

Fisheries management is designed to take into account the needs of citizens. It isn't all biology, ecology, statistics, and economics. Cultural factors come into play as well. Fishing regulations affect the people of the Gulf as much as they affect the fish swimming in its waters. While science is the cornerstone of fisheries regulations, sociological data can help managers choose regulatory actions that best suit communities Gulf-wide.

The management process already solicits the needs and interests of the citizens in a number of different ways. The Council is structured so that the voting members represent the variety of participants, interests, and stakeholders that exist in the Gulf fishery. Citizens sit on advisory panels that review options and offer advice to the Council. Moreover, scoping meetings and public hearings are conducted to solicit opinions and advice on a variety of management topics. Nonetheless, the Council is placing a greater emphasis on the importance of the human side of management.

The Gulf Council Welcomes Two New Staff Members

The Gulf Council welcomes two new employees. Ryan Rindone, the new SEDAR Coordinator, comes from North Carolina, where he earned an MS in Marine Science from North Carolina State University and has a background in fisheries and marine ecology.



Ryan Rindone

Ryan will be coordinating stock assessments for federally managed species in the Gulf of Mexico, as well as efforts to identify data sets relevant to the potential effects of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on federally managed species.

Ryan is engaged to Megan Varsamis, and the two are set to be married this spring.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council recognizes that fisheries management is as much a human endeavor as it is a biological one. The Council is moving towards a greater inclusion of citizenry in the management of our fisheries, as is evidenced in part by the creation of two new positions on the Council staff.

The Council has hired an anthropologist, Dr. Ava Lasseter, whose responsibilities include the development of a social impact assessment that is part of each fishery management plan. Ava's research interests focus on cooperative management within fisheries. She sees a better integration of fishermen's knowledge, experiences, and participation as an essential component to successful resource management. Ava can be contacted at ava.lasseter@gulfcouncil.org.

The Council has also hired a fisheries outreach specialist, Emily Muehlstein, whose position aims to facilitate effective participation in the fisheries management process. She is happy to discuss fisheries management issues and work with you throughout the management process so that you can contribute to the laws that regulate the resource. Emily can be contacted at emily.muehlstein@gulfcouncil.org.

Over time, as the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council builds in more mechanisms designed to support participatory management, your help and involvement in federal fisheries management should become easier and more effective. Visit the Gulf Council web site at www.gulfcouncil.org, and get involved in regulating your resource.



Kathy Pereira is the new Travel Coordinator for the Gulf Council. She has over 20 years of hospitality experience and has held various positions, including catering and convention services manager, as well as senior sales manager.



Kathy Pereira

She also worked as an independent meeting planner, assisting clients with locating hotels, negotiating rates, concessions, and all contractual agreements.

Kathy is a native Floridian and is very involved in the community.



The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Protecting our marine resources

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The Gulf Council would like to hear from you! Please contact us regarding fishery questions, comments, or concerns you would like to see covered in the ***Gulf Fishery News***. Anyone interested in submitting information, such as articles, editorials, or photographs pertaining to fishing or fisheries management is encouraged to do so. Submissions may be mailed to Charlene Ponce, Public Information Officer, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100, Tampa, FL 33607. Materials can also be sent via fax to 813-348-1711, or by e-mail to charlene.ponce@gulfcouncil.org.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is responsible for the development and modification of fishery management plans (FMPs) that are designed to manage fishery resources in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Gulf of Mexico from state boundaries to the 200-mile limit.

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