

Mississippi Management for Recreational Red Snapper



Draft Amendment 50C to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

ACL	annuals catch limit
ACT	annual catch target
AM	accountability measure
CEP	Conservation Equivalency Plan
Council	Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
FMP	Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan
Gulf	Gulf of Mexico
Magnuson-Stevens Act	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
SMZ	special management zone
State Management Amendment	State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper Amendment

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations Used in this Document	ii
List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	iv
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Purpose and Need	4
Chapter 2. Management Alternatives	6
2.1 Action 1 – Authority Structure for State Management	6
2.2 Action 2 – Post-Season Accountability Measures (AMs)	14
Chapter 3. References	17
Appendix A. Delegation Provision	18
Appendix B. Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper Federal Regulations Relevant to State Management Amendments	19

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1.1. Example timeline for the review of CEPs by NMFS or the technical review committee for Alternative 3	12
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LIST OF FIGURES

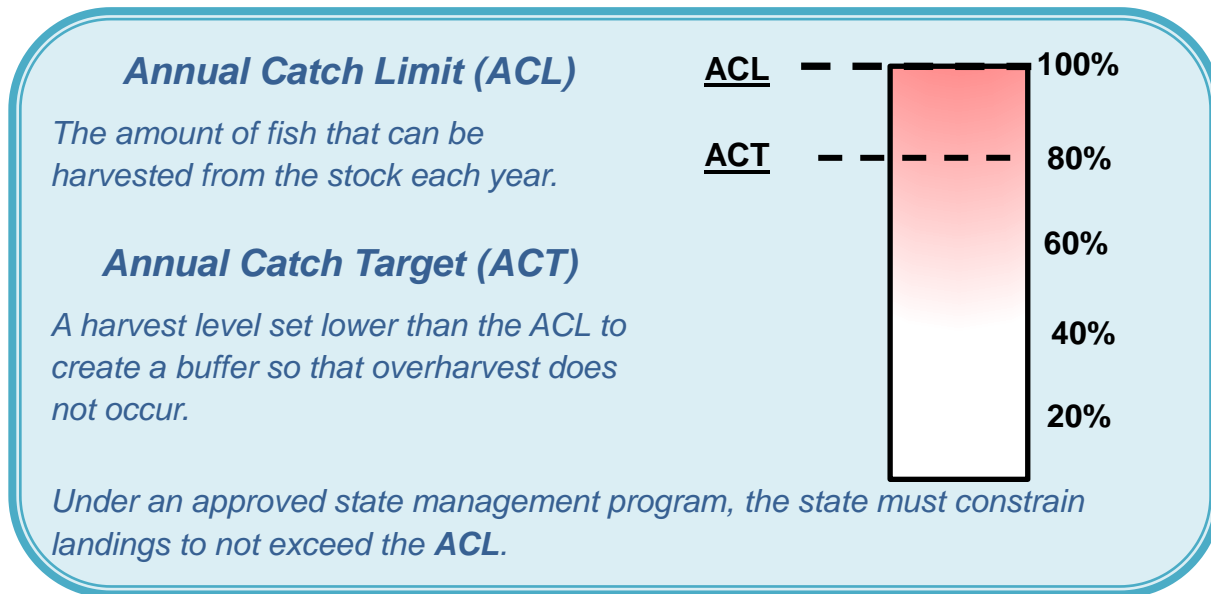
Figure 1.1.1. Map of state waters (shaded in color for each State) with established and proposed boundaries between states extending into federal waters. Federal waters adjacent to a state refer to the portion of federal waters bounded by the state’s waters and the boundary line(s) shown in the figure that separate federal waters off of each state. State waters off Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama reflect the boundaries prior to the 2016 extension to 9 nm.	4
Figure 2.1.1. Map of the hypothetical example described for Option 2g.	10

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

From 1996 – 2014, the recreational fishing season for red snapper in federal waters became progressively shorter. Despite regular increases in the recreational annual catch limit (ACL) since 2010 (Table 1.1.1), shorter federal seasons have continued as the quota is caught in a shorter amount of time and inconsistent state water seasons became longer. In 2015, the recreational sector was divided into a private angling component and a federal for-hire component. Separate fishing seasons are established for each component based on the component annual catch targets (ACT), which are reduced from the recreational sector's red snapper ACL by the established buffer (currently 20%).

Currently, the recreational harvest of red snapper in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) is constrained by a 2-fish bag limit, 16-inch total length minimum size limit, and a fishing season that begins on June 1 and closes when the ACT of each recreational component (i.e., private angling and federal for-hire) is projected to be caught.



Fishermen from different areas of the Gulf have requested more flexibility in recreational red snapper management so that regulations provide greater socioeconomic benefits to their particular area. Referred to in this amendment as *state management*, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) is exploring ways to provide greater flexibility in the management of recreational red snapper.

A state management program would enable Mississippi to establish various recreational regulations specific to the harvest of red snapper for its anglers or anglers fishing in federal waters adjacent to the state, in contrast to uniform recreational regulations applied in federal waters in the Gulf. In the State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper Amendment

(State Management Amendment), the Council would establish the 1) the components of the recreational sector that would be included under a state's management program; and 2) the apportionment of the recreational red snapper ACL among the Gulf states.

This Mississippi Management for Recreational Red Snapper Amendment contains actions to define the Mississippi state management program for the recreational harvest of red snapper. The first action considers two approaches for implementing state management: the *delegation* of limited authority to Mississippi to specify management measures or the use of a *conservation equivalency plan* (CEP), in which Mississippi would specify the fishing season (and other management measures, as selected) that would constrain harvest to Mississippi's portion of the recreational sector ACL (established in the State Management Amendment). Under either approach, Mississippi could select the measures that it determines are most appropriate for management of its portion of the stock. For example, Mississippi specific regulations could accommodate the local differences in tourist seasons or weather conditions from other parts of the Gulf. Mississippi would establish the specific regulations pertaining to the season structure and possibly, the bag limit and other management measures, using the process for the selected approach (delegation or CEP). The second action addresses post-season accountability measures (AMs) to determine the action to take in the event the Mississippi harvest of red snapper exceeds Mississippi's portion of the recreational sector ACL.

The Council's preferred alternative in the State Management Amendment is to allow each state to decide whether to manage its private angling component, only, or to manage both its private angling and federal for-hire component. Upon Council approval of this Mississippi Management for Recreational Red Snapper Amendment, Mississippi must notify the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) by letter within one month specifying whether it will manage the private angling component or both components.

Although a state management program would allow for the establishment of certain management measures most suited to the state, state management may not result in additional fishing days, particularly if Mississippi establishes its season when fishing effort is greatest. However, providing Mississippi with the flexibility to establish some management measures is expected to result in social and economic benefits, as it is assumed that Mississippi would provide fishing opportunities preferred by anglers landing red snapper in the state. Nevertheless, proposed state management measures must achieve the same conservation goals as the current federal management measures (i.e., constrain landings of participating fishermen to Mississippi's allocated portion of the recreational sector ACL).

Under state management, red snapper would remain a federally managed species. The Council and NMFS would continue to oversee management of the stock. This includes continuing to comply with the mandate to ensure the red snapper recreational ACL is not exceeded and that conservation objectives are achieved. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee would continue to determine the acceptable biological catch for red snapper, while the Council and NMFS would determine the total recreational sector ACL and ACT, a portion of which would be allocated to Mississippi. All federal regulations for the harvest of red snapper would remain effective. The existing bag limit and season start date would be designated the default federal regulations and would be applicable to anglers landing red snapper in any state that does not

have an approved state management program. Upon Mississippi's state management program approval and implementation, the default federal regulations would be waived for Mississippi to establish the fishing season for red snapper landed in the state from both federal and state waters, and possibly to establish other management measures, if selected by the Council. NMFS would retain authority for the remaining management regulations including implementing ACL adjustments, regulating federal permits, and managing the commercial red snapper individual fishing quota program.

Section 407(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act mandates that separate quotas be established for commercial fishing and recreational fishing, which includes both the private angling and federal for-hire components. When the recreational sector ACL is reached, further harvest of red snapper is prohibited for the duration of the year. This means that even if a state under a state management program has remaining quota, NMFS must prohibit further harvest of red snapper from federal waters once the recreational sector ACL is determined to have been met.

Description of Boundaries between States

The boundaries in Figure 1.1.1 were agreed upon by the representatives from each state marine resource agency at the February 2013 Council meeting and would represent the boundaries between states for the purpose of any state having an active state management program. However, prior to the 2016 season, the U.S. Congress included language in the 2016 Department of Commerce Appropriations Act that extended red snapper management jurisdiction for Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana from 3 nm from shore out to 9 nm from shore. Under subsequent continuing resolutions, this jurisdictional extension remains in effect. Nevertheless, it is unclear if Congress will make this a permanent boundary.

All lines begin at the boundary between state waters and federal waters. Line A-B, defining federal waters off Texas, is already codified as a line from 29°32.1' N latitude, 93°47.7' W longitude to 26°11.4' N latitude, 92°53.0' W longitude, which is an extension of the boundary between Louisiana and Texas (50 CFR 622.2). Likewise, line G-H, defining federal waters off Florida, is codified as a line at 87°31.1' W longitude extending directly south from the Alabama/Florida boundary (50 CFR 622.2). The other two lines have not been codified, but were agreed upon by the Council. Line E-F is a line at 88°23.1' W longitude extending directly south from the boundary between Alabama and Mississippi.

Line C-D is a line at 89°10.0' W longitude extending directly south from the South Pass Light in the Mississippi River delta in Louisiana. Unlike the other lines, this line is not based on the boundary between Louisiana and Mississippi because doing so would be impracticable. Louisiana has jurisdiction over the Chandeleur Islands, which extend into waters south of Mississippi. A line based on the state waters boundary just north of the islands could result in inequitable impacts on Mississippi anglers as it would identify federal waters that are off both Mississippi and Louisiana as being exclusively off Louisiana. A line based on the state land boundary would be even further west and would reduce the extent of federal waters off Louisiana. Therefore, this line was considered a fair compromise by representatives of both states.

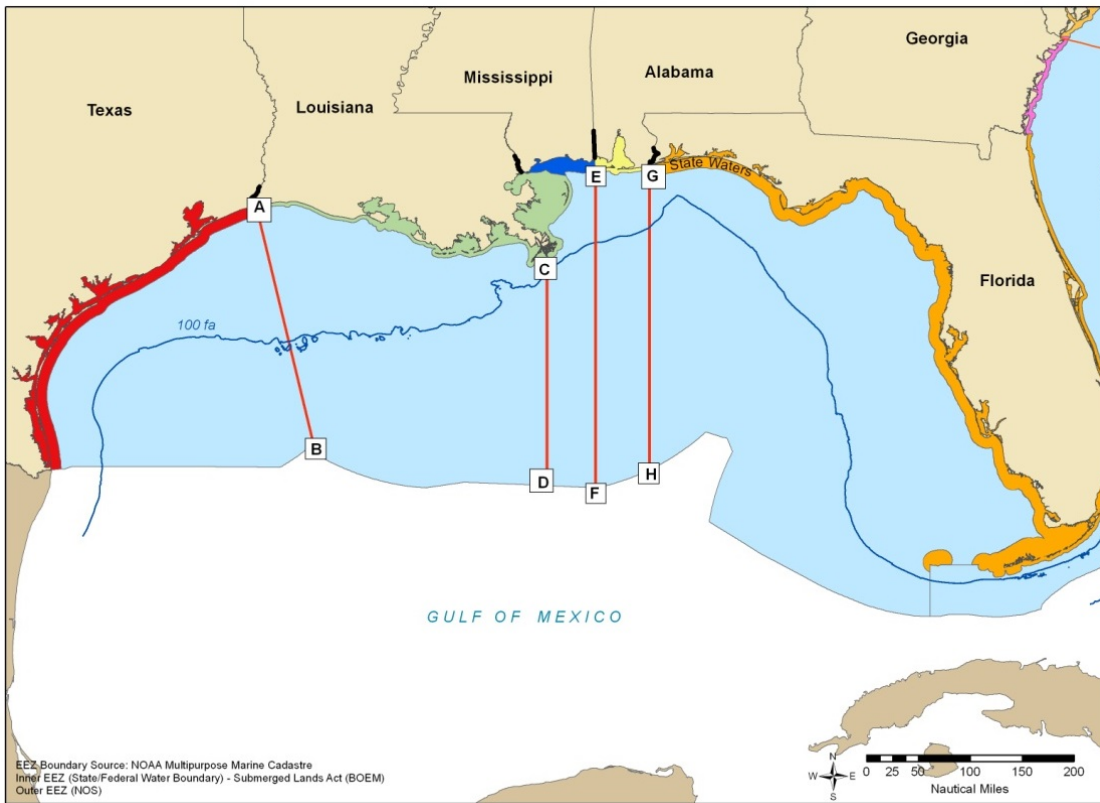


Figure 1.1.1. Map of state waters (shaded in color for each State) with established and proposed boundaries between states extending into federal waters. Federal waters adjacent to a state refer to the portion of federal waters bounded by the state's waters and the boundary line(s) shown in the figure that separate federal waters off of each state. State waters off Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama reflect the boundaries prior to the 2016 extension to 9 nm.

1.2 Purpose and Need

The **purpose** is to give the state of Mississippi the flexibility to establish certain management measures for the recreational harvest of red snapper by Mississippi anglers.

The **need** is to reconsider the management of the recreational harvest of red snapper within the context of the states of the Gulf: to prevent overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield from the harvest of red snapper by the recreational sector¹; take into account and allow for variations among, and contingencies in the fisheries, fishery resources, and catches²; and provide for the sustained participation of the fishing communities of the Gulf and to the extent practicable, minimize adverse economic impacts on such communities.³

¹ National Standard 1 https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=71b8c6026001cb90e4b0925328dce685&mc=true&node=se50.12.600_1310&rgn=div8

² National Standard 6: https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=&SID=6b0acea089174af8594db02314f26914&mc=true&r=SECTION&n=se50.12.600_1335

³ National Standard 8: https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=&SID=6b0acea089174af8594db02314f26914&mc=true&r=SECTION&n=se50.12.600_1345

CHAPTER 2. MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Action 1 – Authority Structure for State Management

Alternative 1: No Action – Retain current federal regulations for management of recreational red snapper in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf).

Preferred Alternative 2: Establish a management program that delegates management authority in federal waters to Mississippi. If Mississippi's red snapper harvest plan is determined to be inconsistent with the requirements of delegation, the recreational harvest of red snapper in the federal waters adjacent to Mississippi would be subject to the default federal regulations for red snapper. Mississippi must establish the red snapper season structure for the harvest of its assigned portion of the recreational sector annual catch limit (ACL). In addition, delegated authority for managing the recreational harvest of red snapper may include establishing or modifying the:

Option 2a: bag limit

Option 2b: prohibition on for-hire vessel captains and crew from retaining a bag limit.

Option 2c: minimum size limit within the range of 14 to 18 inches total length (TL)

Option 2d: maximum size limit

Option 2e: requirements for live release devices (e.g., descending devices)

Option 2f: requirements for harvest gear

Option 2g: use of area or depth-specific regulations.

Alternative 3: Establish a management program in which Mississippi submits a plan describing the conservation equivalency measures Mississippi will adopt for the management of its portion of the recreational sector ACL in federal waters. The plan must specify the red snapper season structure and bag limit for the state's harvest of its assigned portion of the recreational sector ACL. To be a conservation equivalency plan (CEP), the plan must be reasonably expected to limit the red snapper harvest to Mississippi's assigned portion of the recreational sector ACL. If Mississippi's plan is determined by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to not satisfy the conservation equivalency requirements, then the recreational harvest of red snapper in the federal waters adjacent to Mississippi would be subject to the default federal regulations for red snapper.

Option 3a: The plan will be submitted directly to NMFS for review.

Option 3b: The plan will first be submitted to a technical review committee. The technical review committee reviews and may make recommendations on the plan, which is either returned to Mississippi for revision or forwarded to NMFS for final review.

Discussion:

Default federal regulations refer to the Gulf-wide regulations governing the recreational harvest of red snapper in the Code of Federal Regulations (50 CFR Part 622). To implement state management by delegation or CEPs, the current regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (50 CFR Part 622) would need to be waived or suspended for those anglers and vessels subject to a state's consistent delegation or an approved CEP. Default federal regulations for the recreational harvest of red snapper would be applied to the federal waters adjacent to the state

waters of Mississippi in the event Mississippi's delegation is determined to be inconsistent or its CEP is not approved. A different process would be followed for delegation than for a CEP, in that delegation would remain in effect unless NMFS determines the delegation is inconsistent with the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan (FMP; see Appendix A), while CEPs would require a periodic determination that the plan is the conservation equivalent of the default federal regulations.

In the event that the default federal regulations are implemented for Mississippi, NMFS would publish a notice with the Office of the Federal Register announcing such an action. Among other regulations that apply to reef fish fishing in general, the current federal regulations for the recreational harvest of red snapper include a 2-fish bag limit, minimum size limit of 16 inches total length, and a June 1 season opening; the season closes when the recreational annual catch target (ACT; currently set 20% below the ACL) is projected to be met. These regulations have been established and revised over time through past actions, which considered a variety of alternatives that were analyzed as part of the decision-making process.

Currently, each Gulf state decides when to open and close its state waters to fishing, while NMFS opens and closes federal waters to fishing consistent with the regulations implementing the Reef Fish FMP. The states also decide on any other management measures (such as bag limit and minimum size limit) that are applicable in state waters while the Council decides which management measures are applicable in federal waters. Many, but not all, of these management measures are consistent between the states as well as with the federal requirements. By adopting state management under delegation (**Preferred Alternative 2**) or conservation equivalency (**Alternative 3**), Mississippi would establish management measures, as appropriate, to constrain landings to its portion of the recreational sector ACL for the recreational harvest of red snapper, by each component or combined, and would prohibit further landings and possession of red snapper after its portion of the quota has been caught. Enforcement of the fishing season would primarily be carried out dockside. Anglers participating in Mississippi's state management program may fish in Mississippi state waters and federal waters adjacent to Mississippi. When Mississippi closes its season, further landings or possession of red snapper would be prohibited, from both state and federal waters.

Under both alternatives, the respective permit and/or license requirements for anglers and recreational vessels will remain in place. Anglers fishing from privately owned vessels must comply with the required permit or licensing requirements to possess and land red snapper in Mississippi. Passengers on for-hire vessels would not be allowed to fish for or possess red snapper in federal waters unless the vessel has been issued a federal charter vessel/headboat permit for reef fish.

In the event a state bordering Mississippi has an approved state management program and a fishing season that differs from Mississippi's, federal waters adjacent to Mississippi could remain open when Mississippi's fishing season is closed and the bordering state's season is open. This would allow anglers from the bordering state to harvest red snapper in federal waters adjacent to Mississippi that will be landed in the bordering state and would count against the bordering state's quota. In turn, should Mississippi's fishing season be open while the bordering state's season is closed, anglers participating in Mississippi's state management program would

be able to harvest red snapper from federal waters adjacent to the bordering state and land the fish in Mississippi; such fish would count against Mississippi's quota. To be consistent with National Standard 4 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), any closures in federal waters would apply to all recreational vessels, regardless of state in which the vessel is registered. This could complicate enforcement near state borders.

Alternative 1 (No Action) would retain current management measures for the recreational harvest of red snapper in federal waters of the Gulf. Currently, these measures include a 2-fish per angler per day bag limit and a June 1 fishing season start date. **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** propose different approaches to state management of red snapper by Mississippi. Under all alternatives, red snapper would remain under federal management jurisdiction, subject to Gulf-wide closure if NMFS determines that the total recreational sector ACL is met. Essentially, while Mississippi would be given some management authority to determine some of the regulations that apply to the harvest of red snapper, none of these alternatives provide the complete authority to manage red snapper advocated for by some supporters of state management. The management measures implemented by Mississippi must adhere to the goals of the rebuilding plan and be consistent with federal and other applicable laws.

Delegation (**Preferred Alternative 2**)

Under **Preferred Alternative 2**, state management is defined as the delegation of limited management authority to a state, which would then establish appropriate management measures to constrain recreational landings to the state's assigned portion of the recreational sector ACL. The Magnuson-Stevens Act allows for the delegation of management to a state to regulate fishing vessels beyond their state waters, provided its regulations are consistent with the FMP. The delegation of management authority (**Preferred Alternative 2**) requires a three-quarters majority vote of the voting members of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) members. See Appendix A for additional information on the requirements of delegation including the Secretary of Commerce's procedure for addressing a state's regulations that are deemed inconsistent with the FMP.

Under delegation (**Preferred Alternative 2**), Mississippi would have management authority to establish the red snapper fishing season, as well as other management measures if selected as preferred (**Options 2a-2g**). In setting the fishing season, the state would have the flexibility to select the season start date and could establish a fixed closed season, split seasons (e.g., spring and fall season), and alternate season structures (e.g., weekends, only). A state could also establish regional seasons, such as separate fishing seasons for the Florida Panhandle and west Florida. Provided the state constrains its landings of each component to that component's portion of the ACL, a state could establish different seasons for each component, if the state is managing both the private angling and federal for-hire components. In addition, the state could reopen its fishing season if quota remains after the initial season closes.

Options 2a-2g provide management measures that may be delegated in addition to the fishing season. For some of the options, specific regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (Appendix B) would need to be waived or suspended for anglers landing in the participating state. State management, as it has been previously considered by the Council included

management measures that would rely primarily on dockside enforcement, such as bag limits and fishing seasons. When in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), enforcement would be of the most generous state regulation of a state with an open season (e.g., highest bag limit). Other management measures, such as gear requirements or area-specific regulations, would require monitoring and enforcement of recreational fishing in the EEZ. Thus, if any of these types of measures are delegated to the state, lines demarcating the EEZ off each state (Figure 1.1.1) would be needed to identify the boundaries in which all of the applicable state's regulations apply. Finally, selecting some options as preferred would require a state to establish that regulation at the state level, while the selection of other options as preferred would be optional for a state to establish as part of its state management program. For example, to remain consistent with the requirements of delegation, the fishing season (**Preferred Alternative 2**), bag limit (**Option 2a**), and minimum size limit (**Option 2c**) would need to be specified in the state's regulations if those options are selected as preferred. Selecting other options as preferred (**Options 2b** and **2d-2g**) would be optional for a state to establish under delegated authority.

Option 2a would delegate authority to Mississippi to establish the recreational bag limit and **Option 2b** would allow Mississippi to modify the prohibition on the captain and crew of a for-hire vessel from retaining a bag limit. As with setting the fishing season, these options would allow bag limits to be set regionally or by component, if applicable.

Options 2c and **2d** would delegate the red snapper size limit to Mississippi. Establishing both a minimum (**Option 2c**) and maximum size limit (**Option 2d**) would create a slot limit for the recreational harvest of red snapper. The current minimum size limit for red snapper is 16 inches TL in the Gulf for recreational anglers and for all state waters except Texas. In state waters off Texas the recreational red snapper minimum size limit is 15 inches TL. Modifying the minimum size limit among states may pose issues in terms of conducting stock assessments. Previously, the Council expressed its intent to establish limitations on the minimum size limits that may be adopted by the states due to biological concerns associated with high-grading and discard mortality. The red snapper stock is still under a rebuilding plan and stock assessments must take into account minimum size limits for each sector and gear type. Thus, the minimum size limit that may be delegated to the states is restricted to the range of 14 inches TL to 18 inches TL. All of the minimum size limits within the range are estimated to be greater than the size of reproductively mature fish. All red snapper (100%) are estimated to be reproductively mature at age-2 (SEDAR 31 2013) at approximately 358 mm or 14 inches TL using the age-length equation in Szedlmayer and Shipp (1994). For this reason, minimum size limits smaller than 14 inches TL are not considered. The largest minimum size limit within the range that could be delegated is 18 inches TL, which has the largest spawning potential for the stock.

Options 2e and **2f** would allow Mississippi to establish requirements for the use of live release devices (e.g., descending devices and dehooking devices) and harvest gear, respectively. Both options would delegate authority that applies to the recreational harvest of red snapper, only. Federal regulations and guidance for live release devices and harvest gear are not specific to red snapper, but apply to reef fish or to finfish more generally. For example, the requirement to use non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing with natural baits applies to the fishing of all reef fish. Because authority would be delegated only for the management of red snapper, delegating

authority for these devices and gear could make enforcement more complicated if a state enacts a regulation that applies to red snapper, but not to other reef fish.

Option 2g proposes to allow a state to establish area or depth-specific regulations. Additional information pertaining to the scope and purpose (e.g., constrain rate of harvest) is needed to complete an analysis of this option and define the delegation. For example, a state may wish to constrain the amount of red snapper harvested from an area or beyond a certain depth, where red snapper are generally larger and more abundant, to allow a longer fishing season. Prohibiting harvest in one or more specified areas, or allowing harvest only in specified areas of the federal waters adjacent to a state would raise enforcement concerns and could allow unintentional opportunities or restrictions on anglers from bordering states. Further, to be consistent with National Standard 4 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, any closures would apply to all recreational vessels, regardless of state in which the vessel is registered. To provide a hypothetical example, if Alabama closed offshore waters adjacent to its state waters but allowed inshore waters to remain open, while Florida and Mississippi have both their inshore waters and adjacent federal waters open (Figure 2.1.1), then vessels from Alabama could harvest red snapper from offshore waters off Florida and Mississippi, and land in Alabama, provided they do not transit through the closed portion of offshore waters adjacent to Alabama's state waters. Although Alabama intended to extend its fishing season by constraining where harvest may occur in its own region (only in its inshore waters), the additional harvest from offshore waters adjacent to neighboring Mississippi or Florida could result in Alabama's state ACL being caught faster. Conversely, vessels from Mississippi and Florida, where the red snapper season is open in both inshore and offshore waters, would be prohibited from possessing red snapper from Alabama's offshore waters, even though those fish would only count against the ACL of the state where landed, i.e., Mississippi or Florida. Thus, this hypothetical use of the area closure alternative unintentionally allowed for greater landings by Alabama anglers and unintentionally restricted fishing opportunities for anglers fishing from Mississippi and Florida.

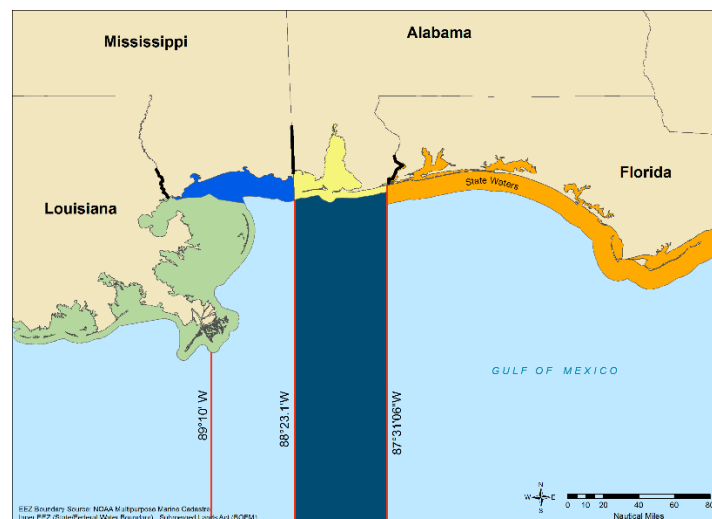


Figure 2.1.1. Map of the hypothetical example described for Option 2g. The dark shaded area represents federal waters adjacent to Alabama's state waters (see Figure 1.1.1).

Should a state intend to use depth closures as part of its state management program, such closures may require additional review and analysis to ensure environmental compliance, potentially through an environmental assessment. To implement a closed area NMFS will likely need to do additional rule making. **Option 2g** would not allow states to establish marine protected areas within federal waters nor restrict commercial vessels from harvesting red snapper from these areas.

Alternative 3 would adopt a process by which Mississippi submits a CEP describing its intended management measures for the recreational harvest of red snapper. While **Alternative 3** would grant less management authority directly to Mississippi than **Preferred Alternative 2**, both alternatives provide flexibility to Mississippi to modify the season structure for the harvest of its designated portion of the red snapper recreational ACL. Nevertheless, whether delegation (**Preferred Alternative 2**) or conservation equivalency (**Alternative 3**) is selected, Mississippi's management measures must be consistent with the FMP, including the red snapper rebuilding plan and the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Consistency with the FMP requires, among other things, preventing overfishing, rebuilding declining reef fish stocks, monitoring the reef fish fishery, conserving and increasing reef fish habitats, and minimizing conflicts between user groups.

Alternative 3 provides two options for the review process of CEPs. Under **Option 3a**, Mississippi would submit its plan directly to NMFS for review while under **Option 3b**, Mississippi would first submit its CEP to a technical review committee, which will consist of one member from each state designated by the state fisheries director. The technical review committee would provide the initial review of the CEPs and may make recommendations on the plan, which is either returned to Mississippi for revision or forwarded to NMFS for final review and approval. Because of the additional time needed for the technical review committee to meet and review the CEPs, **Option 3b** would potentially entail a longer process for consistency determination than under **Option 3a**. On the other hand, the process under **Option 3b** provides for greater participation and input by state-level managers and stakeholders, increasing the involvement of local-level entities in the state management process. The proposed process under **Option 3b** is more similar to the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's management of summer flounder than is **Option 3a**.

In addition to Mississippi, the Council is evaluating red snapper state management for the remaining Gulf states in separate amendments. In the event all or some of the states have approved state management programs, the sum of all participating states' ACLs (as selected in the State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper Amendment) would be subtracted from the recreational sector ACL, or component ACLs, as appropriate. Non-participating states would continue to be managed under the default federal regulations with the remaining balance of the recreational ACL. NMFS would reduce the ACLs by the established buffer, and establish federal season lengths for each component in federal waters adjacent to all states without an active state management program, based on these ACTs.

Requirements of Conservation Equivalency (Alternative 3)

Under **Alternative 3**, Mississippi would have the opportunity to submit a CEP to establish state management measures, including season start and end dates, season structure, and bag limit, for

the recreational harvest of red snapper on a yearly basis. These plans would be reviewed by NMFS to insure the proposed management measures are a conservation equivalent to the federal regulations. Table 2.1.1 provides an example timeline for the submittal and approval of the CEPs under **Alternative 3**. This process would be altered for the first year of the program if this action is implemented mid-year. Under **Option 3b**, the CEP would be submitted to the technical review committee and a separate timeline may be established by the committee. However, the established timeline may also be applied for this option. The finalized plans with the technical review committee recommendation for approval would need to be submitted to NMFS by November 1 to allow time to publish a notice in the federal register by January 1 identifying Mississippi with an approved CEP. Without an approved CEP, Mississippi would be subject to the default federal regulations. If the proposed management measures extend beyond the range analyzed in this amendment, then NMFS may recommend preparing the appropriate documentation for the applicable laws to support the decision (e.g., National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA] analysis). NMFS would collaborate with Mississippi in developing the appropriate documentation with the understanding that the development of the document could delay NMFS' ability to approve the CEP and may need further Council action for implementation.

Table 2.1.1. Example timeline for the review of CEPs by NMFS or the technical review committee for **Alternative 3**.

Timeline	Description
July 1	The state provides a brief written description of its preliminary CEP for the following year (e.g., the regulations they hope to implement the following year if supported by the current year landings and effort data) to NMFS and the Council. At this time, NMFS may flag any high-level concerns or alternative process requirements (e.g., additional NEPA documentation required if the proposed regulations are outside the scope of analysis this amendment and documentation for other applicable laws).
September 1	The state submits the CEP to NMFS or the Technical Review Committee.
October 1	NMFS or the Technical Review Committee responds to the state with the preliminary determination for whether the plan is a conservation equivalent to the federal default regulations. At this time, NMFS or the Technical Review Committee may approve the plan or request a revised CEP.
October 5	The state provides a revised CEP to NMFS or the Technical Review Committee for approval, if necessary.
November 1	If applicable, the Technical Review Committee provides the recommended state CEP to NMFS for final approval and processing. If the CEP was not approved or the state did not submit a CEP, then the state would be subject to the federal default regulations.
January 1 (or sooner)	NMFS publishes a notice in the federal register identifying the state as having an approved CEP.

Each CEP shall include the following:

- Point of contact for the CEP.
- Point of contact with the authority to close the fishery.
- Proposed CEP including season structure and bag limit.

- Specify if the CEP is intended to be applicable for 1 or 2 years. Prior to approving the second year of the plan, it would be evaluated based on data from the first year. The plan may require revisions based on the NMFS review. A 2-year CEP could only be approved if there are 2 or more years before the program sunsets (see Action 2).
- Analysis demonstrating the ability of the CEP to constrain recreational harvest of red snapper to the allocated quota with a description of the methodology.
- Summarize the previous year's performance (e.g., was the harvest constrained at or below the state's quota?).
- Explain how the CEP will be enforced.
- If applicable, provide a description of the in-season monitoring program and plan to prohibit further harvest of red snapper if the state's portion of the recreational sector ACL is reached.
- If necessary, provide additional analysis and documentation supporting the proposed CEP, which may include NEPA, Magnuson-Stevens Act, or other applicable laws. This would only apply for CEP management strategies beyond the range analyzed in this amendment.
- Any other supporting documentation for the CEP, such as scientific research.

2.2 Action 2 – Post-Season Accountability Measures (AMs)

Alternative 1: No Action – Retain the current post-season AMs for managing overages of the respective recreational sector ACL in federal waters of the Gulf. If red snapper is overfished (based on the most recent Status of U.S. Fisheries Report to Congress) and the combined recreational landings exceed the recreational sector ACL, reduce the recreational sector ACL and reduce the total recreational quota, and applicable recreational component quota in the following year by the full amount of the overage, unless the best scientific information available determines that a greater, lesser, or no overage adjustment is necessary. The applicable component ACT (through 2022) will be adjusted to reflect the previously established percent buffer.

Preferred Alternative 2: If red snapper is overfished (based on the most recent Status of U.S. Fisheries Report to Congress) and the combined Mississippi recreational landings exceed the Mississippi recreational ACL, then in the following year reduce the total recreational quota and Mississippi's ACL by the amount of the ACL overage in the prior fishing year, unless the best scientific information available determines that a greater, lesser, or no overage adjustment is necessary. If appropriate, the Mississippi recreational ACT (or component ACTs) will be adjusted to reflect the previously established percent buffer.

Preferred Option 2a: If Mississippi has both a private-angling ACL and a federal for-hire ACL, the reduction will be applied only to the component(s) that exceeded the applicable ACL.

Option 2b: If Mississippi has both a private-angling ACL and a federal for-hire ACL, the reduction will be applied equally to both components.

Discussion:

Section 407(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that the Council ensure the FMP (and its implementing regulations) have conservation and management measures that establish a separate quota (which is the ACL) for recreational fishing (private and for-hire vessels) and prohibit the possession of red snapper caught for the remainder of the fishing year once the quota is reached. The National Standard 1 guidelines identify two types of AMs: in-season and post-season. These AMs are not mutually exclusive and should be used together where appropriate. In 2014, the Council adopted an in-season AM to create an ACT that is used to set the season and is set at 20% below the ACL. To correct or mitigate any overages during a specific fishing year (50 CFR 600.310(g)), the Council also adopted a post-season AM which applies if red snapper is overfished and would reduce the recreational sector ACL in the year following an overage by the full amount of the overage (**Alternative 1**) unless the best scientific information available determines that a greater, lesser, or no overage adjustment is necessary.

Alternative 1 (No Action), would continue to apply the existing post-season AM Gulf-wide. In the event red snapper landings exceed the Gulf-wide recreational ACL while red snapper is classified as overfished, the amount of the overage would be deducted from the recreational ACL. This would occur whether or not Mississippi was successful in constraining landings to

below its ACL, but would result in a decrease to Mississippi's ACL, because Mississippi's ACL would be based on a percentage of the Gulf-wide ACL. Although the possibility of triggering an overage adjustment would encourage Mississippi to constrain harvest to its ACL, the Gulf-wide approach may be perceived as inequitable. For example, if the recreational ACL is greatly exceeded, then the necessary overage adjustment (applied to the recreational ACL before Mississippi's ACL is deducted) may reduce fishing opportunities under Mississippi's ACL the following year, even if Mississippi had not exceeded its portion of the recreational ACL. If this occurs, it may reduce the flexibility provided under state management. Alternately, if Mississippi's landings cause the entire recreational sector ACL to be exceeded, while landings by other components remain within their respective portions of the ACL, anglers in the other components would lose fishing opportunities despite remaining within their respective portions of the ACL.

Preferred Alternative 2 would apply the post-season AM to Mississippi, only in the event that the Gulf-wide recreational sector ACL was exceeded and while red snapper is classified as overfished. With the apportionment of the recreational sector ACL such that individual states may establish state management programs,⁴ **Preferred Alternative 2** would prevent an overage of the Gulf-wide ACL from affecting Mississippi in the event its state ACL is not exceeded. However, if both the Mississippi and the Gulf-wide ACLs were exceeded, the portion of the overage for which Mississippi was responsible would be deducted from Mississippi's ACL for the next year. The overage adjustments would need to be taken into account when Mississippi develops its management plan (delegation or CEP), including the length of the fishing season for the following year. **Preferred Alternative 2** would encourage Mississippi to constrain landings to its ACL to ensure that the overage adjustment is not applied to the recreational season for the following year. Regardless of a state exceeding its ACL, an overage adjustment would only be applied if the Gulf-wide recreational sector ACL was exceeded.

Preferred Option 2a and **Option 2b** under **Preferred Alternative 2** would apply only if the Council decides to include the federally permitted for-hire vessels in state management, through the State Management Amendment. Either option would apply the post-season AM to the Mississippi component (for-hire and/or private angling) that exceeds its component ACL in the prior fishing year. In the event the Gulf-wide recreational sector ACL is exceeded, **Preferred Option 2a** would apply the overage adjustment only to the Mississippi component that exceeded its ACL. That component ACL would be reduced in the following year by the full amount of the overage, unless the best scientific information available determines that a greater, lesser, or no overage adjustment is necessary. This option would prevent the overage adjustment from affecting Mississippi's other component that does not exceed its ACL. **Option 2b** would apply the overage adjustment evenly to both of Mississippi's component ACLs, regardless if only one of the components exceeded its component ACL. Although the possibility of triggering an overage adjustment would encourage the components to constrain harvest to the respective ACLs, applying the overage equally to both components may be perceived as inequitable, should one component remain within its portion of the ACL, yet have its portion of the ACL reduced in the following year due to overages by the other component.

⁴ See the State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper Amendment.

Under **Alternative 1** and **Preferred Alternative 2, Preferred Option 2a** and **Option 2b**, if the combined recreational landings do not exceed the Gulf-wide recreational sector ACL in that year, neither the recreational sector ACL nor any state or component ACLs would be reduced to account for a state or component ACL overage.

CHAPTER 3. REFERENCES

GMFMC. 2014. Final amendment 40 to the reef fish fishery management plan for the reef fish resources of the Gulf of Mexico – recreational red snapper sector separation. Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, Tampa, Florida. 274 p.

<http://www.gulfcouncil.org/docs/amendments/RF%2040%20-%20Final%2012-17-2014.pdf>

GMFMC. 2016. Final amendment 45 to the fishery management plan for the reef fish resources of the Gulf of Mexico: Revision of the red snapper recreational sector separation sunset provision. Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Tampa, FL. 161p.

<http://archive.gulfcouncil.org/docs/amendments/RF%2045%20Final.pdf>

Szedlmayer, S.T. and R.L. Shipp 1994. Movement and growth of red snapper, *Lutjanus campechanus*, from an artificial reef area in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico. Bulletin of Marine Science 55:887-896.

APPENDIX A. DELEGATION PROVISION

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act 16 U.S.C. §1856(a)(3), (b)

(3) A State may regulate a fishing vessel outside the boundaries of the State in the following circumstances:

(A) The fishing vessel is registered under the law of that State, and (i) there is no fishery management plan or other applicable Federal fishing regulations for the fishery in which the vessel is operating; or (ii) the State's laws and regulations are consistent with the fishery management plan and applicable Federal fishing regulations for the fishery in which the vessel is operating.

(B) The fishery management plan for the fishery in which the fishing vessel is operating delegates management of the fishery to a State and the State's laws and regulations are consistent with such fishery management plan. If at any time the Secretary determines that a State law or regulation applicable to a fishing vessel under this circumstance is not consistent with the fishery management plan, the Secretary shall promptly notify the State and the appropriate Council of such determination and provide an opportunity for the State to correct any inconsistencies identified in the notification. If, after notice and opportunity for corrective action, the State does not correct the inconsistencies identified by the Secretary, the authority granted to the State under this subparagraph shall not apply until the Secretary and the appropriate Council find that the State has corrected the inconsistencies. For a fishery for which there was a fishery management plan in place on August 1, 1996 that did not delegate management of the fishery to a State as of that date, the authority provided by this subparagraph applies only if the Council approves the delegation of management of the fishery to the State by a three-quarters majority vote of the voting members of the Council.

(C) [Pertains to Alaska, only.]

(b) EXCEPTION.—

(1) If the Secretary finds, after notice and an opportunity for a hearing in accordance with section 554 of title 5, United States Code, that—

(A) the fishing in a fishery, which is covered by a fishery management plan implemented under this Act, is engaged in predominately within the exclusive economic zone and beyond such zone; and

(B) any State has taken any action, or omitted to take any action, the results of which will substantially and adversely affect the carrying out of such fishery management plan; the Secretary shall promptly notify such State and the appropriate Council of such finding and of his intention to regulate the applicable fishery within the boundaries of such State (other than its internal waters), pursuant to such fishery management plan and the regulations promulgated to implement such plan.

(2) If the Secretary, pursuant to this subsection, assumes responsibility for the regulation of any fishery, the State involved may at any time thereafter apply to the Secretary for reinstatement of its authority over such fishery. If the Secretary finds that the reasons for which he assumed such regulation no longer prevail, he shall promptly terminate such regulation.

(3) If the State involved requests that a hearing be held pursuant to paragraph (1), the Secretary shall conduct such hearing prior to taking any action under paragraph (1).

APPENDIX B. GULF OF MEXICO RED SNAPPER FEDERAL REGULATIONS RELEVANT TO STATE MANAGEMENT AMENDMENTS

Current as described in the eCFR, September 6, 2017. This is a summary only and is not a list of all regulations applicable to Gulf reef fish overall, but focuses on regulations that affect the recreational harvest of red snapper.

§622.8 Quotas—general.

(c) *Reopening.* When a species, sector or component has been closed based on a projection of the quota specified in this part, or the ACL specified in the applicable annual catch limits and accountability measures sections of subparts B through V of this part being reached and subsequent data indicate that the quota or ACL was not reached, the Assistant Administrator may file a notification to that effect with the Office of the Federal Register. Such notification may reopen the species, sector or component to provide an opportunity for the quota or ACL to be harvested.

§622.9 Prohibited gear and methods—general.

This section contains prohibitions on use of gear and methods that are of general applicability, as specified. Additional prohibitions on use of gear and methods applicable to specific species or species groups are contained in subparts B through V of this part.

(a) *Explosives.* An explosive (except an explosive in a powerhead) may not be used to fish in the Caribbean, Gulf, or South Atlantic EEZ. A vessel fishing in the EEZ for a species governed in this part, or a vessel for which a permit has been issued under this part, may not have on board any dynamite or similar explosive substance.

(b) *Chemicals and plants.* A toxic chemical may not be used or possessed in a coral area, and a chemical, plant, or plant-derived toxin may not be used to harvest a Caribbean coral reef resource in the Caribbean EEZ.

(c) *Fish traps.* A fish trap may not be used or possessed in the Gulf or South Atlantic EEZ. A fish trap deployed in the Gulf or South Atlantic EEZ may be disposed of in any appropriate manner by the Assistant Administrator or an authorized officer.

(d) *Weak link.* A bottom trawl that does not have a weak link in the tickler chain may not be used to fish in the Gulf EEZ. For the purposes of this paragraph, a weak link is defined as a length or section of the tickler chain that has a breaking strength less than the chain itself and is easily seen as such when visually inspected.

(e) *Use of Gulf reef fish as bait prohibited.* Gulf reef fish may not be used as bait in any fishery, except that, when purchased from a fish processor, the filleted carcasses and offal of Gulf reef fish may be used as bait in trap fisheries for blue crab, stone crab, deep-water crab, and spiny lobster.

§622.11 Bag and possession limits—general applicability.

(a) *Applicability.* (1) The bag and possession limits apply for species/species groups in or from the EEZ. Unless specified otherwise, bag limits apply to a person on a daily basis, regardless of the number of trips in a day. Unless specified otherwise, a person is limited to a

single bag limit for a trip lasting longer than one calendar day. Unless specified otherwise, possession limits apply to a person on a trip after the first 24 hours of that trip. The bag and possession limits apply to a person who fishes in the EEZ in any manner, except a person aboard a vessel in the EEZ that has on board the commercial vessel permit required under this part for the appropriate species/species group. The possession of a commercial vessel permit notwithstanding, the bag and possession limits apply when the vessel is operating as a charter vessel or headboat. A person who fishes in the EEZ may not combine a bag limit specified in subparts B through V of this part with a bag or possession limit applicable to state waters. A species/species group subject to a bag limit specified in subparts B through V of this part taken in the EEZ by a person subject to the bag limits may not be transferred at sea, regardless of where such transfer takes place, and such fish may not be transferred in the EEZ. The operator of a vessel that fishes in the EEZ is responsible for ensuring that the bag and possession limits specified in subparts B through V of this part are not exceeded.

§ 622.20 Permits and endorsements.

(b)(3) If Federal regulations for Gulf reef fish in subparts A or B of this part are more restrictive than state regulations, a person aboard a charter vessel or headboat for which a charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish has been issued must comply with such Federal regulations regardless of where the fish are harvested.

§622.30 Required fishing gear.

For a person on board a vessel to fish for Gulf reef fish in the Gulf EEZ, the vessel must possess on board and such person must use the gear as specified in paragraphs (a) and (b) of this section.

(a) *Non-stainless steel circle hooks.* Non-stainless steel circle hooks are required when fishing with natural baits, except that other non-stainless steel hook types may be used when commercial fishing for yellowtail snapper with natural baits in an area south of a line extending due west from 25°09' N. lat. off the west coast of Monroe County, Florida, to the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic inter-council boundary, specified in §600.105(c).

(b) *Dehooking device.* At least one dehooking device is required and must be used to remove hooks embedded in Gulf reef fish with minimum damage. The hook removal device must be constructed to allow the hook to be secured and the barb shielded without re-engaging during the removal process. The dehooking end must be blunt, and all edges rounded. The device must be of a size appropriate to secure the range of hook sizes and styles used in the Gulf reef fish fishery.

§622.33 Prohibited species.

(d) *Gulf reef fish exhibiting trap rash.* Possession of Gulf reef fish in or from the Gulf EEZ that exhibit trap rash is prima facie evidence of illegal trap use and is prohibited. For the purpose of this paragraph, trap rash is defined as physical damage to fish that characteristically results from contact with wire fish traps. Such damage includes, but is not limited to, broken fin spines, fin rays, or teeth; visually obvious loss of scales; and cuts or abrasions on the body of the fish, particularly on the head, snout, or mouth.

§ 622.34 Seasonal and area closures designed to protect Gulf reef fish.

(a) *Closure provisions applicable to the Madison and Swanson sites and Steamboat Lumps, and the Edges— ...*

(b) *Seasonal closure of the recreational sector for red snapper.* The recreational sector for red snapper in or from the Gulf EEZ is closed from January 1 through May 31, each year. During the closure, the bag and possession limit for red snapper in or from the Gulf EEZ is zero.

§622.35 Gear restricted areas.

(d) *Alabama SMZ.* The Alabama SMZ consists of artificial reefs and surrounding areas. In the Alabama SMZ, fishing by a vessel that is operating as a charter vessel or headboat, a vessel that does not have a commercial permit for Gulf reef fish, as required under §622.20(a)(1), or a vessel with such a permit fishing for Gulf reef fish is limited to hook-and-line gear with three or fewer hooks per line and spearfishing gear. A person aboard a vessel that uses on any trip gear other than hook-and-line gear with three or fewer hooks per line and spearfishing gear in the Alabama SMZ is limited on that trip to the bag limits for Gulf reef fish specified in §622.38(b) and, for Gulf reef fish for which no bag limit is specified in §622.38(b), the vessel is limited to 5 percent, by weight, of all fish on board or landed. The Alabama SMZ is bounded by rhumb lines connecting, in order, the following points ...

(a) *Reef fish stressed area.* The stressed area is that part of the Gulf EEZ shoreward of rhumb lines connecting, in order, the points listed in Table 2 in Appendix B of this part.

(1) A powerhead may not be used in the stressed area to take Gulf reef fish. Possession of a powerhead and a mutilated Gulf reef fish in the stressed area or after having fished in the stressed area constitutes *prima facie* evidence that such reef fish was taken with a powerhead in the stressed area.

§ 622.37 Size limits.

(a) *Snapper--*(1) *Red snapper*--16 inches (40.6 cm), TL, for a fish taken by a person subject to the bag limit specified in § 622.38 (b)(3) and 13 inches (33.0 cm), TL, for a fish taken by a person not subject to the bag limit.

§ 622.38 Bag and possession limits.

(b)(3) *Red snapper--*2. However, no red snapper may be retained by the captain or crew of a vessel operating as a charter vessel or headboat. The bag limit for such captain and crew is zero.

§ 622.39 Quotas.

(a)(2)(i) *Recreational quota for red snapper.* (A) *Total recreational quota (Federal charter vessel/headboat and private angling component quotas combined).* For fishing year 2017 and subsequent fishing years—6.733 million lb (3.054 million kg), round weight.

(B) *Federal charter vessel/headboat component quota.* The Federal charter vessel/headboat component quota applies to vessels that have been issued a valid Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish any time during the fishing year. This component quota is effective for only the 2015 through 2022 fishing years. For the 2023 and subsequent fishing years, the applicable total recreational quota, specified in paragraph (a)(2)(i)(A) of this section,

will apply to the recreational sector. For fishing years 2017 through 2022—2.848 million lb (1.292 million kg), round weight.

(C) *Private angling component quota.* The private angling component quota applies to vessels that fish under the bag limit and have not been issued a Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish any time during the fishing year. This component quota is effective for only the 2015 through 2022 fishing years. For the 2023 and subsequent fishing years, the applicable total recreational quota, specified in paragraph (a)(2)(i)(A) of this section, will apply to the recreational sector. For fishing years 2017 through 2022—3.885 million lb (1.762 million kg), round weight.

(2) If the recreational fishery for the indicated species is closed, all harvest or possession in or from the Gulf EEZ of the indicated species is prohibited.

(c) *Restrictions applicable after a recreational quota closure or recreational component quota closure.* The bag limit for the applicable species for the recreational sector or recreational sector component in or from the Gulf EEZ is zero. When the Federal charter vessel/headboat component is closed or the entire recreational sector is closed, this bag and possession limit applies in the Gulf on board a vessel for which a valid Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish has been issued, without regard to where such species were harvested, *i.e.*, in state or Federal waters.

§ 622.41 Annual catch limits (ACLs), annual catch targets (ACTs), and accountability measures (AMs).

(q) *Red snapper (2) Recreational sector.* (i) The recreational ACL is equal to the total recreational quota specified in §622.39(a)(2)(i)(A). The AA will determine the length of the red snapper recreational fishing season, or recreational fishing seasons for the Federal charter vessel/headboat and private angling components, based on when recreational landings are projected to reach the recreational ACT, or respective recreational component ACT specified in paragraph (q)(2)(iii) of this section, and announce the closure date(s) in the FEDERAL REGISTER. These seasons will serve as in-season accountability measures. On and after the effective date of the recreational closure or recreational component closure notifications, the bag and possession limit for red snapper or for the respective component is zero. When the recreational sector or Federal charter vessel/headboat component is closed, this bag and possession limit applies in the Gulf on board a vessel for which a valid Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish has been issued, without regard to where such species were harvested, *i.e.*, in state or Federal waters.

(ii) In addition to the measures specified in paragraph (q)(2)(i) of this section, if red snapper recreational landings, as estimated by the SRD, exceed the total recreational quota specified in §622.39(a)(2)(i)(A), and red snapper are overfished, based on the most recent Status of U.S. Fisheries Report to Congress, the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to reduce the total recreational quota by the amount of the quota overage in the prior fishing year, and reduce the applicable recreational component quota(s) specified in §622.39(a)(2)(i)(B) and (C) and the applicable recreational component ACT(s) specified in paragraph (q)(2)(iii) of this section (based on the buffer between the total recreational ACT and the total recreational quota specified in the FMP), unless NMFS determines based upon the best scientific information available that a greater, lesser, or no overage adjustment is necessary.

(iii) *Recreational ACT for red snapper*—(A) *Total recreational ACT (Federal charter vessel/headboat and private angling component ACTs combined)*. The total recreational ACT is 5.386 million lb (2.443 million kg), round weight.

(B) *Federal charter vessel/headboat component ACT*. The Federal charter vessel/headboat component ACT applies to vessels that have been issued a valid Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish any time during the fishing year. This component ACT is effective for only the 2015 through 2022 fishing years. For the 2023 and subsequent fishing years, the applicable total recreational ACT, specified in paragraph (q)(2)(iii)(A) of this section, will apply to the recreational sector. The component ACT is 2.278 million lb (1.033 million kg), round weight, for fishing years 2017 through 2022.

(C) *Private angling component ACT*. The private angling component ACT applies to vessels that fish under the bag limit and have not been issued a Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish any time during the fishing year. This component ACT is effective for only the 2015 through 2022 fishing years. For the 2023 and subsequent fishing years, the applicable total recreational ACT, specified in paragraph (q)(2)(iii)(A) of this section, will apply to the recreational sector. The component ACT is 3.108 million lb (1.410 million kg), round weight, for fishing years 2017 through 2022.