



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Southeast Regional Office  
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F/SER24:FH

Mr. Kevin Anson, Chair  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council  
4107 West Spruce Street  
Suite 200  
Tampa, Florida 33607

Dear Mr. Anson,

This letter advises you that NOAA Fisheries has determined the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) lane snapper stock is now subject to overfishing.

The 2011 Generic Annual Catch Limit/Accountability Measures Amendment to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico (Reef Fish FMP) specified the overfishing status determination criteria for all Reef Fish FMP stocks, including the Gulf lane snapper stock. During an assessment year, the stock is subject to overfishing if the fishing mortality rate is greater than the maximum fishing mortality threshold. In non-assessment years, the stock is subject to overfishing if landings exceed the overfishing limit (OFL).

A 2021 Framework Action under the Reef Fish FMP specified the Gulf lane snapper OFL, which is 1,053,834 pounds (lbs) whole weight (ww). Lane snapper was not assessed in 2023, so landings data from 2022 were compared to the OFL. NOAA Fisheries determined Gulf lane snapper are now subject to overfishing because 2022 landings data indicate that total landings were 1,130,026 lbs ww.

NOAA Fisheries is aware that the Council took action to increase the catch limits for Gulf lane snapper in an abbreviated framework amendment at their January 2024 meeting. However, preliminary data indicate that 2023 landings exceeded the proposed OFL. Therefore, NOAA Fisheries expects that overfishing continued in 2023. In addition, the stock annual catch limit (ACL) has been exceeded in 3 of the last 4 years. Consistent with the direction at 50 C.F.R. § 600.310(g)(7), the Council should reevaluate the system of ACLs and accountability measures and make modifications, if necessary. NOAA Fisheries intends to closely monitor landings in 2024 and take a precautionary approach in determining whether an in-season closure is necessary.

NOAA Fisheries looks forward to working cooperatively with the Council to prevent overfishing of Gulf lane snapper in the future.

Sincerely,

Andrew J. Strelcheck  
Regional Administrator

