



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

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

2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100

Tampa, FL 33607

Phone: 813.348.1630 • Toll free: 888.833.1844 • Fax: 813.348.1711

www.gulfcouncil.org

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Contact: Charlene Ponce

813-348-1630

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council April 2014 Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, April 7 - 10, 2014, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including several related to the management of red snapper. Here are some of the actions taken by the Council last week.

2014 Recreational Red Snapper Season

After receiving a briefing on a recent court decision in response to a legal challenge on management of the recreational component of the red snapper fishery, the Council took actions to prevent the recreational sector from exceeding its quota in 2014 and beyond.

For the short-term, the Council asked the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to implement an emergency rule to establish a 20% buffer on the 5.39 million pound recreational quota. The 20% buffer, which provides a low probability (15%) that the quota will be exceeded, combined with the 2013 landings estimates, results in a recreational annual catch target (ACT) of 4.312 million pounds, and an 11-day red snapper recreational season for 2014. The bag limit will remain 2-fish per person.

The 11-day season takes into consideration the incompatible state seasons and bag limits adopted by Texas, Louisiana, and Florida; however, it does not take into account a recent decision by Louisiana to have a year-round red snapper season in state waters. NOAA Fisheries will conduct further analysis to determine if the 11-day season is adequate.

The Council also voted to withdraw a framework action submitted in February that would rescind the Amendment 30B permit provision, which requires vessels with federal charter vessel/headboat permits to abide by federal regulations if more restrictive when fishing in state waters.

To address the issue long-term, the Council asked staff to include accountability measure actions and alternatives for the recreational allocation, such as buffers and overage adjustments, in the Red Snapper Allocation Amendment (Reef Fish Amendment 28).

Allocation of Red Snapper - Reef Fish Amendment 28

The Council reviewed the legal and policy issues related to the allocation of red snapper. They also heard a summary of public comments received during recent public hearings for the proposed allocation amendment, as well as comments submitted online and by email.

After some deliberation, the Council asked staff to add an action to the amendment that addresses accountability measures, including buffers and payback provisions. The Council will review the new document during its June Council meeting in Key West, Florida. Final action is expected during the August meeting in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Red Snapper Charter-For-Hire IFQ-Type Program

The Council agreed to have staff begin developing a scoping document that considers a red snapper IFQ-type program for the for-hire industry. An Ad Hoc Red Snapper Charter-for-Hire IFQ Advisory Panel will also be formed to look at the issue, provide the Council with feedback, and assist with program design. That panel will be appointed during the June Council meeting in Key West, Florida. Anyone interested in serving on the panel should send an email requesting consideration along with a resume to: AP-SSC.Applicant@gulfcouncil.org. Information can also be mailed to: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100, Tampa, FL 33607. Materials must be received by June 16, 2014.

Reef Fish Amendment 40 - Sector Separation

The Council reviewed the management alternatives included in the draft options paper for Reef Fish Amendment 40 - Sector Separation. The Council requested that staff include an option for consideration that participants in the for-hire component of a voluntary sector separation program be identified by an endorsement to the federal for-hire reef fish permit. Staff will continue to work to develop the document into a public hearing draft.

Alabama Charter Fishing Association Cooperative Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP)

The Council approved a motion to recommend that NMFS approve the Alabama Charter-For-Hire Cooperative's Exempted Fishing Permit Application. If approved by NMFS, the EFP would allow select Alabama-based for-hire vessels to participate in a pilot study that examines the feasibility of an alternative allocation-based management strategy. Currently, the number of participating vessels is undetermined, but the EFP application identifies approximately 90 Alabama-based for-hire vessels that would qualify for the EFP.

For-hire vessels in the study would be allowed to fish for red snapper based on the portion of the quota issued to them. The cooperative would be responsible for distributing the quota to individual vessels and for reporting landings electronically to NMFS. All red snapper harvested would count against this quota. After the total quota is expended by the cooperative, participating vessels could not harvest red snapper for the remainder of the fishing year. The cooperative would not be exempt from Section 407(d) of the Magnuson Act, which requires that NMFS close the recreational fishery if the recreational quota has been met or is projected to be met. After such a closure, no vessel participating in the program could continue to harvest red snapper, even if allocation were still available.

NMFS will review the application and hold a public comment period before making a final determination.

Red Drum

The Council asked staff to begin working on a plan amendment to manage recreational red drum out to 9 nautical miles using the current management strategy of managing for a 30% or greater escapement rate. The document should include options for delegating management to the states, as well as other Council management strategies.

Shrimp

The Council approved the annual Texas shrimp closure for 2014. The closure is part of a 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 by discarding undersized shrimp caught during a period in their life cycle when they are growing rapidly.

The Council reviewed a draft options paper for Amendment 16 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan, which looks at adjusting the Annual Catch Limit and Accountability Measures for Royal Red Shrimp. The Council also chose to move Action 1 - Alternative 3 to the

considered but rejected section of the document and chose the following as preferred alternatives:

Action 1: Alternative 4 - Remove both the 334,000 lbs of tails ACL and the 392,000 lbs of tails quota. Change the ACL to 337,000 lbs of tails.

Action 2: Alternative 2 - Retain the AM set through the Generic ALC/AM Amendment. Remove the in-season closure set through the revised 1981 FMP.

Also related to shrimp - the Council requested staff begin working on a document that addresses the shrimp permit moratorium.

Mackerel

The Council took final action on Amendment 20B to the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Fishery Management Plan. This amendment addresses boundaries, season opening dates, and transit provisions for the commercial mackerel fishery.

The Council also took final action on Framework Amendment 1, which increases the Spanish mackerel annual catch limit.

Both amendments must still be approved by the Secretary of Commerce before being implemented.

About Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

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

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There is also a thermometer for each issue that lets you know where the Council is in the process for that particular amendment, whether it's the scoping phase, final action, or implementation.

