



# Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

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

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## Gulf Council Update – April, 2015

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Biloxi, Mississippi, March 30 – April 2, 2015, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including regional management for recreational red snapper and red snapper allocation. Here are some of the actions taken by the Council last week.

### Red Snapper Season Projections

The Council received an update from NOAA Fisheries Service on the red snapper season projections for 2015. The final 2015 recreational red snapper season dates will be announced in May prior to the start of the season. The season length is dependent on the approval and implementation by the Secretary of Commerce of Reef Fish Amendment 40 – Sector Separation and the state water red snapper seasons.

Below are projections based on various assumptions of catch rates, average red snapper weights, and if Sector Separation (the division of the recreational sector into a private angling component and a federal for-hire component) is implemented.

#### **Sector Separation**

##### **Non-compatible state seasons:**

| Run | Season Length |         |
|-----|---------------|---------|
|     | For-Hire      | Private |
| A   | 45            | 11      |
| B   | 45            | 7       |
| C   | 46            | 9       |
| D   | 40            | 11      |

#### **No Sector Separation**

##### **Non-compatible state seasons:**

| Run | Season Length |
|-----|---------------|
| A   | 17            |
| B   | 12            |
| C   | 14            |
| D   | 17            |

#### **Sector Separation**

##### **Compatible state seasons:**

| Run | Season Length |         |
|-----|---------------|---------|
|     | For-Hire      | Private |
| A   | 45            | 16      |
| B   | 45            | 9       |
| C   | 46            | 12      |
| D   | 40            | 16      |

#### **No Sector Separation**

##### **Compatible state seasons:**

| Run | Season Length |
|-----|---------------|
| A   | 21            |
| B   | 15            |
| C   | 18            |
| D   | 21            |

### Red Snapper Allocation – Amendment 28

The Council reviewed a draft of Amendment 28 which considers reallocating the red snapper quota between the sectors. The Council chose Action 1 – Alternative 8 as its preferred alternative - The increase in allowable harvest from the update assessment will be allocated to the recreational sector. The percentage increase for the recreational sector should be that amount attributable to recalibration of MRIP catch estimates. This will result in 51.5% of the quota going to the recreational sector and 48.5% to the commercial sector.

The Council is expected to take final action on Amendment 28 in August, 2015.

Since the allocation amendment will be implemented in early 2016, after the commercial IFQ allocation is released, the Council requested that staff begin developing a framework action that would allow the NMFS to hold back a portion of the commercial quota in anticipation of the implementation of Amendment 28.

### **Red Snapper IFQ Modifications – Amendment 36**

The Council reviewed scoping workshop summaries and other public input on Amendment 36. A draft options paper will be presented to the Council during its August meeting.

### **Regional Management for Recreational Red Snapper – Amendment 39**

The Council also reviewed additions to Amendment 39 which considers dividing the recreational red snapper quota among regions to allow for the creation of different management measures that better suit each area.

Additions include a new Action 5 which includes alternatives to allow regions to establish closed areas in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and Action 6 – Alternative 8 which would apportion the recreational quota among the regions so that each region's allocation provides an equivalent amount of fishing days.

In Action 3, Alternative 5 was chosen as the preferred alternative - establish five regions representing each Gulf state which may voluntarily form larger multistate regions with adjacent states. The Council also moved an action regarding for-hire federal permit restrictions to the considered but rejected section of the amendment.

### **Gag**

Last year, a stock assessment concluded that the gag stock was no longer overfished or experiencing overfishing. However, members of the Council's Reef Fish Advisory Panel and fishermen testifying before the Council have expressed concern that gag do not appear to be as abundant as the assessment suggests.

During its March/April meeting, the Council reviewed options to adjust the gag annual catch limit (ACL) and season. Action 1 contains alternatives to increase the recreational ACL and annual catch target (ACT) through 2017 and to adjust the commercial ACL and eliminate the commercial ACT. Action 2 contains alternatives to eliminate the fixed December 3-31 recreational gag closed season, adjust the starting date of the recreational gag season, or consider adopting a split season. The Council will review the document and take final action during its June Council meeting in Key West, Florida.

### **Greater Amberjack**

Last year, a stock assessment concluded that greater amberjack remains overfished, continues to experience overfishing, and did not meet the 10-year rebuilding plan that ended in 2012. The Council reviewed and took final action on a framework action for greater amberjack that adjusts the ACL and commercial/recreational management measures to ensure that the stock is rebuilt.

The Council set the 2015 Annual Catch Targets at 1,092,372 for the recreational sector and 394,740 for the commercial sector. The minimum size limit will be increased to 34 inches fork length, and the commercial trip limit will be 1,500 pounds gutted weight (1,560 pounds whole weight).

The framework action will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.

### **Coastal Migratory Pelagics (Mackerel)**

The Council reviewed framework action to modify trip limits, accountability measures, electronic reporting requirements, and gillnet endorsements for commercial king mackerel landed by gillnet in the Gulf of Mexico.

Run-around gillnets are allowed for harvesting king mackerel in the Gulf only in the Gulf Southern Zone. Currently, there are 21 vessels with valid or renewable gillnet endorsements to the commercial king mackerel fishing permit; four of these vessels have had no landings since 2001.

Representatives from the coastal migratory pelagics (CMP) fishery have requested raising the trip limit for the gillnet component of the fishery to increase efficiency, stability, accountability, and reduce potential regulatory discards. The current trip limit is 25,000 pounds per vessel per day in the commercial king mackerel gillnet component of the fishery.

The Council chose preferred alternatives that would increase the trip limit to 35,000 pounds and modify the requirement for daily electronic reporting by commercial king mackerel gillnet dealers.

The Council is expected to take final action in June, 2015.

### **Joint South Florida Management**

The Council reviewed a proposed amendment that looks at modifications to Gulf reef fish and the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The Gulf and South Atlantic Councils are considering joint management actions for a number of species in an effort to match fisheries regulations, when possible, throughout the south Florida region.

Yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and black grouper found in this region do not occur in comparable abundance elsewhere in Gulf or South Atlantic waters. This regional concentration of socially and economically important species creates an opportunity for the Councils to standardize regulations. This amendment explores management alternatives to simplify existing fishing regulations.

### **Shrimp**

The Council approved the annual Texas shrimp closure for 2015. The closure is part of a cooperative seasonal closure with the State of Texas and runs concurrent with its mid-season closure. The shrimp fishery is closed annually off Texas to allow brown shrimp to reach a larger and more valuable size prior to harvest, and to prevent waste of brown shrimp that might otherwise be discarded due to their small size.

The Council also reviewed Shrimp Amendment 15, which looks at Status Determination Criteria for Penaeid Shrimp and Adjustments to the Shrimp Framework Procedure. The Council added a new action (Action 1.1) that addresses the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and added an MSY based overfishing threshold in Action 1.2. The Council will be presented with a final document at the June Council meeting.

Finally, the Council reviewed a scoping document for Shrimp Amendment 17, which addresses the expiration of the shrimp permit moratorium. An options paper will be presented to the Council in June.