



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 of Mexico Fishery Management Council April Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Orange Beach, Alabama the week of April 11, 2011 to address a host of fishery issues, including the overfished status of gag, a generic amendment to address Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures, and grouper allocation. During the weeklong meeting, the Council took the following actions:

Red Snapper

The Council requested that the Southeast Fisheries Science Center rerun the red snapper projections using the 2009-2010 landings data to generate an alternative acceptable biological catch for 2011. The intent of this action is to increase the acceptable biological catch for 2011 so the Council can consider adding the red snapper not harvested in 2010 to the 2011 total allowable catch.

No official report was available regarding the duration of the 2011 recreational red snapper season in the Gulf. NOAA Fisheries regional administrator expects that the final numbers will be reported sometime before the end of April 2011 and informally speculated that the 2011 recreational red snapper season would last between 45 and 55 days.

Grouper Allocation

For several species, the Council establishes commercial and recreational allocations by assigning each sector a percentage of the total allowable catch. The Council previously set temporary allocations for gag and red grouper in 2009 through Reef Fish Amendment 30B. The allocation for red grouper is 76% commercial and 24% recreational; gag is 39% commercial and 61% recreational; and allocation options for black grouper are included in the Generic ACL/AM amendment. The Council plans to discuss and review these interim allocations during a future meeting.

Reef Fish Amendment 32

Reef Fish Amendment 32 deals with the rebuilding of the gag stock and the management of red grouper. The amendment looks at management options that include changes in bag limits, size limits, seasonal closures, commercial quota adjustments, adjustments to multi-use commercial IFQ shares, time and area closures, and accountability measures for gag and red grouper. During its April meeting, the Council reviewed the draft amendment and selected preferred alternatives for each action. Amendment 32 is scheduled for public hearings in early May. For more information on public hearing dates and locations please visit http://www.gulfcouncil.org/council_meetings/public_hearings_scoping_meetings.php.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics (Mackerel) Amendment 18

Mackerel Amendment 18 public hearings originally scheduled for May will be postponed until sometime shortly after the June Council meeting. Amendment 18 addresses annual catch limits, annual catch targets, and accountability measures for cobia, king mackerel, and Spanish mackerel in the Gulf of Mexico.

Sector Separation- Review of Scenarios

In this instance, sector separation refers to the division of the recreational sector allocation into separate for-hire and private angler allocations. The Gulf Council previously considered sector separation in its Generic Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures Amendment; however, it decided to place the issue into a standalone amendment.

At the Council's request, NOAA Fisheries presented a projection model that provides the Council and the public with an opportunity to evaluate the relative benefits and tradeoffs of sector separation under a variety of scenarios. The model compares red snapper fishing season lengths with and without sector separation, and it allows for multiple variables and inputs. Twelve example scenarios were presented to the Council comparing different allocations; different average red snapper weights; different percentages

of state for-hire landings; and different trends in fishing participation. For each example presented, the model generates how the number of fishing days will change and how much the total allowable catch will change for each group. Overall, the results of the model indicated that the for-hire sector benefits from sector separation when their allocation is greater than 46% and the private sector benefits from sector separation when their allocation is greater than 54%.

Gag Interim Rule- Final Action

The Council has requested that the Secretary of Commerce publish an interim rule for gag that will set the 2011 recreational gag season to begin at 12:00 am September 16th, closing at 11:59 pm November 15th. The commercial quota will be set for 2011 at a total of 430,000 pounds (including the previously released 100,000 pounds).

A 2009 stock assessment determined that gag is both overfished and undergoing overfishing. The Council is mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Act to end overfishing and develop a plan that will rebuild the stock within 10 years. An interim rule was put into place at the beginning of 2011 that set the gag recreational bag limit to zero and limited the gag commercial harvest to 100,000 pounds. This rule was put into place to temporarily end overfishing while management options for the future harvest and rebuilding of gag were developed and implemented through Reef Fish Amendment 32.

Greater Amberjack

In October of 2010, the Council approved a regulatory amendment to close the recreational greater amberjack season for the months of June and July, and a proposed rule was published in the Federal Register. Following a review of the written comments received by NOAA Fisheries and public testimony received during the Council meeting, the Council took no action, thereby reaffirming its decision to implement a June and July closure. The intent of the closure is to avoid an in-season quota closure during peak economic fishing months.

The Council also received the results of the 2010 greater amberjack stock assessment update and the Scientific and Statistical Committee report. The Scientific and Statistical Committee concluded that the update assessment represented the best available scientific information, but felt the projections were not reliable and had too much uncertainty. Based on the control rule, the Scientific and Statistical Committee did not provide specific recommendations about the status of the stock; however, based on the information contained within the assessment, the acceptable biological catch needs to be reduced from the current level. Further, the Scientific and Statistical Committee recommended an overfishing limit of 2.38 million pounds and an acceptable biological catch of 1.78 million pounds. The Council requested that staff begin developing an amendment to adjust the total allowable catch.

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