

For Immediate Release
August 20, 2010

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Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council August Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Pensacola, Florida August 16 – 20, 2010, to address a host of fishery issues, including a supplemental red snapper season and the overfished status of gag. During the weeklong meeting, the Council took the following actions:

Red Snapper

The Gulf Council agreed to reopen the recreational red snapper season beginning at 12:01 a.m. October 1, 2010, to be open Friday, Saturday and Sunday only, through 12:01 p.m. November 22, allowing for an addition 24 fishing days. The measure will be reviewed and, if approved, implemented by NOAA Fisheries. [NOAA Fisheries is currently seeking comment](#) on the proposed emergency action and will accept comments through August 31, 2010.

In June, the Gulf Council requested that NOAA Fisheries Service institute rulemaking to reopen the recreational red snapper season later this year if it was determined that the 2010 quota was not filled before the fishery closed on July 24, 2010. The rationale is that the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and subsequent federal fishing area closure resulted in reduced fishing effort, leaving the recreational red snapper quota unfilled. NOAA Fisheries has determined that approximately 2.3 millions pounds of the 3.4 million pound recreational quota remains.

In other red snapper news, the Council discussed possible regional management of red snapper and asked staff to continue working on a draft discussion paper that explores options for dividing the stock into sub-units.

The Council also discussed an increase in red snapper total allowable catch for 2011-2012. The Council directed staff to proceed with a regulatory amendment, selecting as its preferred alternative setting total allowable catch at 7.185 million pounds for 2011. That would mean commercial and recreational quotas of 3.664 million pounds and 3.521 million pounds, respectively.

Gag

The Council approved a request that NOAA Fisheries Service publish an interim rule that will prohibit the recreational harvest of gag beginning January 1, 2011, with a 100,000-pound commercial quota. The commercial quota was established to allow fishermen targeting other species to retain some bycatch of gag. A reopening is dependent upon a reassessment that will soon be underway and available for Council review during its February 2011 Council meeting in Gulfport, Mississippi. The Council will decide at that time whether it is necessary to

request an extension of the interim rule or a new revised interim rule that would allow for some recreational harvest of gag.

The interim rule also suspends the red grouper multi-use individual fishing quota shares, in order to prevent a possible overrun of the gag annual catch limit. Without the suspension, it is likely the commercial gag annual catch target and annual catch limit would be exceeded, triggering accountability measures on the commercial sector.

Gag is one of the four species under the management of the Gulf Council that is overfished, and the Council is developing an amendment to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan – Reef Fish Amendment 32 - to end overfishing and rebuild the stock within ten years. But because that amendment is not scheduled for implementation until mid-late 2011, an interim rule is necessary to minimize regulatory discards and reduce overfishing of gag.

Amendment 32 will establish accountability measures for both the recreational and commercial fisheries; make adjustments to multi-use individual fishing quota shares for the commercial sector; look at modifying bag limits, size limits, and closed seasons for gag and red grouper; address both commercial and recreational bycatch issues; consider recreational data collection and monitoring programs, and; consider time and/or area closures.

Public hearings will be scheduled early next year, with final action expected during the June or August 2011 Council meeting.

[Greater Amberjack](#)

The Council is considering a regulatory framework action that could result in a recreational season closure for greater amberjack in an effort to avoid in-season quota closures during peak fishing months and maximize social and economic benefits. Last year the recreational greater amberjack season closed October 24, after the 1.368 million pound quota was exceeded. The Council has tentatively chosen a recreational seasonal closure of June 1 through July 31, as its preferred alternative, and is expected to take final action on the amendment during its October meeting in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The Gulf Council, one of eight regional management Councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, prepares fishery management plans for marine fish stocks in the Gulf of Mexico.

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