



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 August Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Austin, Texas, August 15 – 19, 2011, to address numerous fishery issues, including Reef Fish Amendment 32 and a generic amendment to set annual catch limits and accountability measures. During the weeklong meeting, the Council took the following actions:

Final Action

Gag and Red Grouper- Reef Fish Amendment 32

The Council took final action on Reef Fish Amendment 32 and will send the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation. This amendment to the reef fish management plan deals with the rebuilding of the gag stock and the management of red grouper.

Measures in this amendment include:

1. Establish a rebuilding plan with will rebuild the gag stock in 10 years or less.
2. Set the longest 2012 gag season possible: July 1 - October 31, 2 fish bag limit, 4 fish aggregate bag limit.
3. Increase the red grouper recreational bag limit to 4 fish per person.
4. Reduce the commercial 2012 gag quota by 14% to compensate for dead discards.
5. Adjust the commercial grouper multi-use individual fishing quota shares.
6. Reduce the commercial gag minimum size limit to 22 inches total length.
7. For the recreational fishery add an overage adjustment when gag or red grouper are considered overfished, and if recreational landings are projected to exceed the annual catch limit close the season early.

A 2009 update stock assessment determined that the Gulf of Mexico gag stock was overfished and undergoing overfishing. The Council initiated Amendment 32 to address the overfishing of gag and develop a stock rebuilding plan in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Act requires that overfishing be ended within 2 years of the determination and that overfished stocks be rebuilt to sustainable levels in no longer than 10 years.

Final Action Red Grouper Regulatory Amendment – Total Allowable Catch

The Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council took final action on a regulatory amendment for red grouper. Based on the results of a rerun of the red grouper projections using the actual 2009 and 2010 landings data and a recommendation by the Scientific and Statistical Committee to set the red grouper Acceptable Biological Catch at 7.93 million pounds, the Council has initiated a this regulatory amendment. The amendment will increase the red grouper Total Allowable Catch for 2011 through 2015 as follows:

Year	Preferred Alternative 3	Comm. quota (76% of TAC)	Rec. allocation (24% of TAC)
2011	6.88 MP	5.23 MP GW	1.65 MP GW
2012	7.07 MP	5.37 MP GW	1.70 MP GW
2013	7.27 MP	5.53 MP GW	1.74 MP GW
2014	7.41 MP	5.63 MP GW	1.78 MP GW
2015	7.52 MP	5.72 MP GW	1.80 MP GW

Annual increases are contingent upon total allowable catch not being exceeded in the previous year. The amendment also consider increases the red grouper recreational bag limit from two to four.

Generic Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures Amendment

The Council took final action on a Generic Amendment to address Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures, which are now required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act to end and prevent overfishing. The amendment includes eight actions:

1. Remove octocorals and Nassau grouper from the Gulf Council fishery management plans. The State of Florida will take over management of octocorals and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council will take over responsibility for Nassau grouper.
2. Remove the following from the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan: sand perch, dwarf sand perch, and all other species with average annual landings that are 15,000 pounds or less (unless they would be easily misidentified as a different species or their landings indicate a change in stock status).
3. For the purpose of setting Annual Catch Limits: group species based on NOAA Fisheries sock groups and tilefish groupings. The Annual Catch Limits will be based on a sum of the catch limits of all the species in the group (indicator species will not be used).
4. Adopt the acceptable biological catch control rule that accounts for scientific uncertainty using a tiered system.
5. Establish an initial estimate of the Annual Catch Limits and Catch Targets based on the spreadsheet method and allow the socioeconomic panel to review estimates before final determinations are made.
6. Adopt the base Generic Framework Procedure.
7. Set Annual Catch Limits for stocks and stock groupings equal to the Acceptable Biological Catch and set the Annual Catch Target (as a form or in season accountability measure) at the value indicated by the annual catch limit control rule.
8. Set the Annual Catch Limit for commercial royal red shrimp at 334,000 pounds of tails.
9. Use the Florida Keys (Monroe County) boundary to divide the black grouper, mutton snapper, and yellow tail snapper stocks between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils.
10. Divide the black grouper annual catch limit between sectors: 27% Recreational and 73% Commercial.
11. Implement in-season accountability measures for vermilion snapper. For other reef fish and for royal red shrimp implement in-season accountability measures only if the annual catch limit is exceeded in the previous year.

Mackerel- Amendment 18

The Council approved Amendment 18 to the Coastal Migratory Pelagic (Mackerel) Fishery Management Plan. The Amendment sets Annual Catch Limits, Annual Catch Targets, and Accountability Measures for Gulf-group king mackerel, Gulf-group Spanish mackerel, and Gulf group cobia. It also removes cero, little tunny, dolphin, and bluefish from the fishery management plan; revises the framework procedure; and separates cobia into Atlantic and Gulf migratory groups.

The Council is required by the Reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act to establish annual catch limits and accountability measures to end and prevent overfishing.

Final Action Red Grouper Regulatory Amendment – Total Allowable Catch

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Annual increases are contingent upon total allowable catch not being exceeded in the previous year. The amendment also consider increases the red grouper recreational bag limit from two fish to four fish.