



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 – February 2014

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Houston, Texas, February 3 – 6, 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.

Regional Management of Recreational Red Snapper

The Council continued its discussions regarding Reef Fish Amendment 39 - Regional Management of Recreational Red Snapper. Further work on Amendment 39 – Regional Management is postponed until progress is made on how to allocate the quota among the regions.

Regional management considers dividing the federal recreational red snapper quota among states or regions potentially giving them authority to set their own management measures. States/regions would have more flexibility in choosing season and bag limits, but this would not necessarily result in more fishing days.

Under a regional management system red snapper would remain a federally managed species subject to federal conservation goals, and the Council would continue to oversee management of the stock.

Red Snapper – Slot Limits

In the interest of extending the recreational red snapper fishing season the Council directed staff to develop a framework action for red snapper slot limits in the recreational fishery. The document will consider a range of size limits, as well as options for keeping one trophy fish.

Red Snapper Allocation – Amendment 28

The Council discussed Reef Fish Amendment 28 – Red Snapper Allocation and chose Alternative 5 as its preferred alternative. Alternative 5 maintains the commercial/recreational red snapper allocations at 51%/49% if the red snapper quota is less than or equal to 9.12 million pounds (mp). If the quota is greater than 9.12 mp, then 75% of the amount in excess of 9.12 mp would go to the recreational sector and 25% would go to the commercial sector. Based on the current total quota of 11 mp, this would result in 5.121 mp for the commercial sector and 5.879 mp for the recreational sector.

The Council also added a new alternative, Alternative 7, that would allocate 75% of red snapper quota amounts in excess of 10 mp to the recreational sector and 25% to the commercial sector.

Public hearings on Amendment 28 will be held around the Gulf coast in March. A separate webinar will also be scheduled for those who are unable to participate in person. Dates and locations will be announced. The Council is planning a one-day meeting in May, during which they will hold a final public hearing in the northern Gulf and take final action on Amendment 28.

The purpose of Amendment 28 is to allocate red snapper resources between the commercial and recreational sectors to increase the net benefits from red snapper fishing and improve the stability of the red snapper component of the reef fish fishery, particularly for the recreational sector.

For more information visit the [Council website](http://www.gulfcouncil.org).

Reef Fish Amendment 40 - Sector Separation

Staff presented a draft options paper for Amendment 40 - Sector Separation, which included an option for voluntary participation. Sector separation refers to the dividing of the recreational red snapper quota into distinct private angling and federal for-hire components. The private angling component would include private anglers and state permitted for-hire operators. The federal for-hire component would include federally permitted for-hire operators. Staff will continue working on the amendment.

For-Hire Electronic Reporting

The Council directed staff to begin developing a framework action to establish electronic reporting methods for charter for-hire vessels with federal reef fish and coastal migratory pelagics permits.

Amendment 30B Permit Conditions

The Council voted to rescind the provision adopted in 2009 under Reef Fish Amendment 30B that requires federally permitted reef fish charter vessels and headboats to comply with the more restrictive federal regulations when fishing in state waters. The framework action will be sent to the Secretary of Commerce for review.

Mackerel

The Council took final action on Amendment 20B to the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan. This amendment:

- Sets the commercial hook-and-line trip limit at 3,000 pounds with no reduction for the western zone
- Sets the commercial hook-and-line trip limit at 1,250 pounds with no reduction for the eastern zone, northern subzone and the eastern zone, southern subzone
- Changes the fishing year for Gulf group king mackerel for the western zone to 9/1 through 8/31, and 10/1 through 9/30 for the eastern zone, northern subzone
- Allows transit through areas closed to king mackerel fishing for vessels possessing king mackerel that were legally harvested in the EEZ off of areas open to king mackerel fishing
- Increases the Annual Catch Limit for Gulf migratory group cobia

The amendment must get final approval by the South Atlantic Council before being submitted to the Secretary of Commerce for review.

The Council postponed action on Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 24 – Reallocation of Gulf King Mackerel and South Atlantic Spanish Mackerel and Amendment 26 – Split Permits between the Gulf and South Atlantic for Spanish and King Mackerel, until after the king mackerel stock assessment (SEDAR 38) is completed and reviewed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee.

Finally, the Council reviewed a joint (South Atlantic/Gulf of Mexico) Framework Action for Spanish Mackerel Annual Catch Limits, choosing Alternative 2 as its preferred alternative for both Actions 1 and 2. The purpose of this amendment is to revise the ACLs for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel and Gulf migratory group Spanish mackerel based on the results of recently completed stock assessment (SEDAR 38). Click [here](#) to review the framework action.

About the 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 designed to manage fishery resources within the 200-mile limit of the Gulf of Mexico.