



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 February 2012 Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Mobile, Alabama January 30 - February 2, 2012, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including Reef Fish Amendment 35 for Greater Amberjack, a Regulatory Amendment to increase the Red Snapper Annual Catch Limit, and Joint Amendment 11 to the Spiny Lobster Fishery Management Plan. During the weeklong meeting, the Council took the following actions:

Greater Amberjack - Reef Fish Amendment 35

The Council delayed taking final action on this amendment until its April meeting in Corpus Christi, Texas. The Council has selected preferred alternatives that would: set the Annual Catch Limit at 1,780,000 pounds whole weight and establish an Annual Catch Target of 1,539,000 pounds whole weight; retain the 30" recreational minimum size limit and a June-July recreational closure, and; retain the March - May commercial closure and establish a 2000-pound commercial trip limit.

For more information, please watch the [online presentation](#) or review the [Amendment](#) and [Public Hearing Guide](#). You can submit your comments using this [online comment form](#).

Red Snapper Regulatory Amendment to Adjust Annual Catch Limit

The Council approved and took final action on a regulatory amendment that increases the red snapper stock Annual Catch Limit for 2012 and 2013 to 8.080 million pounds and 8.690 million pounds respectively. No Annual Catch Targets were set. Sector quotas will be set equal to the sector Annual Catch Limits.

Year	Stock ACL	Comm ACL (51% of ACL)	Rec ACL (49% of ACL)
2012	8.080 mp	4.121 mp	3.959 mp
2013	8.690 mp	4.432 mp	4.258 mp

The proposed 2013 increase will occur only if the 2012 stock Annual Catch Limit is not exceeded.

Also related to red snapper, the Council discussed an options paper for a regulatory amendment that would consider adjustments to the structure of the red snapper season by exploring weekend or weekday only red snapper fishing for both the regular snapper season and for any supplemental seasons that may occur. The Council selected the no action alternative as the preferred alternative for both actions, and tabled further development of the amendment.

Gray Triggerfish Update Assessment

The latest gray triggerfish update stock assessment continues to show that the stock is overfished (population is too low) and experiencing overfishing (rate of removal is too high). As a result, the Gulf Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee recommended that the gray triggerfish Acceptable Biological Catch be set at 305,300 pounds. As a rule, an Annual Catch Limit cannot be higher than the Acceptable Biological Catch, so the current stock Annual Catch Limit of 793,000 pounds whole weight must be adjusted. The Council initiated the development of an interim rule for consideration during the April Council meeting, that would reduce the gray triggerfish Annual Catch Limit to 305,300 pounds, reduce the Annual Catch Target, and give NOAA Fisheries authority to close the season when catch limits are reached. For comparison, gray triggerfish total catches were 496,000 pounds in 2008 and 482,000 pounds in 2009. In 2010, the year of the Deepwater Horizon incident, landings were 352,000 pounds.

As a follow-up to the interim rule, which lasts for only 180 days, the Council also initiated a framework action to make the interim rule measures permanent, address a possible bag limit reduction minimum size limit adjustments, and extend the timeframe for the rebuilding plan from six years to ten years, the maximum allowed.

Spiny Lobster - Joint Amendment 11

The Council took final action on Joint Amendment 11 to the Spiny Lobster Fishery Management Plan. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is expected to take final action in March. The amendment will then be sent to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation. This amendment addresses a recent Biological Opinion of the spiny lobster fishery that concludes that spiny lobster trap fishing activities put sea turtles, smalltooth sawfish, and staghorn and elkhorn corals at risk.

Preferred Alternatives for this amendment include a "No Action" alternative that results in no trap line marking requirements for spiny lobster traps, and an alternative that establishes new closed areas in the federal waters off the Florida Keys with identified staghorn and elkhorn coral colonies inside straight-line boundaries. In these closed areas, spiny lobster trapping would be prohibited.

Finally, after hearing requests from the spiny lobster commercial fishing industry, the Council moved to subdivide closed area 2 into two closed areas; area 15 into three closed areas; and area 30 into two closed areas. This action created 60 closed areas, but reduced the estimate of closed area from 6.7 square miles to 5.9 square miles.

Crew Size and Income Requirement- Reef Fish Amendment 34

The Council took final action on an amendment that eliminates the earned income requirement necessary for commercial reef fish vessel permit renewal, and it increases the number of crew allowed on dually permitted (commercial and charter) vessels from three to four. The amendment will be submitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation. For more information see the [proposed amendment](#).

Coastal Migratory Pelagic Amendments 19 and 20

Amendment 19 considers limiting the sale of recreationally caught fish and making changes to the permit requirements for the Coastal Migratory Pelagic fishery. Amendment 20 considers modifying commercial zone boundaries, changing the commercial opening date for the western zone, establishing a transit provision, and requiring vessel zone declarations. Scoping meetings for both amendments will be held this spring. Details will soon be posted on our web site at www.gulfcouncil.org.

Generic Amendment for Dealer Permits and Electronic Reporting

This amendment proposes changes to seafood dealer reporting requirements for fishery management plans of the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and two joint fishery management plans. Three actions are under consideration:

1. What dealer permits would be required, and for which species?
2. How frequently and by what method would dealers be required to report?
3. Are there penalties for non-reporting or late reporting?

Scoping meetings for this generic amendment will also be held in the spring. Details will soon be posted on our web site at www.gulfcouncil.org.

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