



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 – January, 2015

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Point Clear, Alabama, January 26 – 29, 2015, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including regional management for recreational red snapper and red snapper allocation. Here are some of the actions taken by the Council last week.

Red Snapper Update

The Council heard an update on the Red Snapper Stock Assessment, including information on the 2014 provisional red snapper catch estimates. The Council also received the overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations from its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC).

The Council asked staff to prepare a framework action to increase the red snapper annual catch limit (ACL) based on revised ABCs using the 2014 provisional red snapper catch estimates. Because the SSC has not yet seen the provisional catch estimates or revised ABCs, they must review those estimates and determine whether to approve the revised ABCs. The SSC will meet via webinar February 19, 2015 from 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm eastern time.

The Council will then hold a special meeting via Webinar, March 3, 2015, from 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm eastern time, to review the SSC ABC recommendations and take final action on a framework action to increase the ACL accordingly.

Red Snapper Allocation – Amendment 28

The Council reviewed a revised draft of Amendment 28, which considers reallocating a portion of the commercial quota to the recreational sector. After amending the purpose and need statement, the Council added two alternatives to Action 1.

- **Alternative 8** – The increase in allowable harvest (due to changes in recreational data) from the update assessment will be allocated to the recreational sector. The percentage increase for the recreational sector should be that amount attributable to recalibration of MRIP catch estimates.
- **Alternative 9** – The increase in allowable harvest (due to changes in recreational data) from the update assessment will be allocated to the recreational sector. The percentage increase for the recreational sector should be that amount attributable to recalibration of MRIP catch estimates and the change in size selectivity.

The Council will review Amendment 28 again during its March/April meeting and could take final action as early as June.

Regional Management for Recreational Red Snapper – Amendment 39

The Council continued discussions on Amendment 39, which looks at dividing the recreational red snapper quota among regions to allow for the creation of different management measures that better suit each area. Staff from the Mid-Atlantic Council provided an overview of summer flounder management, which the Council is interested in exploring as a model for red snapper regional management. Staff will continue to revise the document for Council consideration.

Recreational Charter and Headboat Red Snapper Management Measures

The Council took no action on a proposed framework that considers changing the management measures for the for-hire component of the recreational sector. Instead, the Council agreed to reconvene the Ad

Hoc Red Snapper Charter For-hire Advisory Panel to continue its discussions and initiated the development of an amendment that will consider management measures to improve flexibility and accountability in the charter for-hire component. The Council also will create a new Ad Hoc Reef Fish Headboat Advisory Panel and initiated another amendment that considers management options to improve accountability and flexibility in the headboat component.

Gag

Last year, a stock assessment concluded that the gag stock was neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The SSC initially recommended only a small increase in ABC out of concern that a large red tide event that occurred over the summer may have had a negative impact on the stock. In January, the SSC received a presentation from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute that modeled the impact of the red tide event. The model concluded that mortality of gag in 2014 due to red tide was no worse than in normal years. Consequently, the SSC revised its ABC recommendations to include 5.21 million pounds in 2015, an increase of 67% over the current ABC. Based on the revised ABC recommendations, the Council asked staff to begin a framework amendment to increase the gag ACL and Annual Catch Target (ACT) and to look at season options.

Greater Amberjack

The Council continued working on a draft framework action for greater amberjack to adjust the ACL and to consider adjusting commercial/recreational management measures, such as size limits and trip limits, to ensure that the stock is rebuilt and the mandates of the Magnuson-Stevens Act are met.

This past summer, it was determined that greater amberjack remains overfished, is experiencing overfishing, and did not meet the 10-year rebuilding plan that ended in 2012. The National Standard 1 guidelines state that when a stock remains overfished at the end of its rebuilding plan, subsequent harvests should not exceed either the yield at a fishing mortality corresponding to the rebuilding plan, or at yield when fishing at 75% of the fishing mortality rate corresponding to maximum sustainable yield, whichever is less. The Council expects to take final action on the framework during its March/April meeting in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics (Mackerel)

After receiving a report on the King Mackerel Gillnet Workshop held in South Florida in January, the Council agreed to begin working on a framework action to evaluate alternative gillnet trip limits, accountability measures, and the elimination of latent permits.

The Council also voted to scope and get public input on the following CMP Amendments:

- Amendment 26, which addresses Gulf and Atlantic king mackerel annual catch limits, allocations, stock boundaries, and sale provisions, and;
- Amendment 28, which addresses splitting the Gulf and Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel commercial fishing permits.

Scoping workshops will be announced in the coming weeks.

Data Collection

The Data Collection Committee met to discuss recommendations made by the Technical Subcommittee for Electronic Charter Boat Reporting and to hear a presentation on the NOAA Fisheries Electronic Monitoring/Electronic Reporting Implementation Plan. As a result, the Committee asked staff to begin developing a plan amendment to require electronic logbooks for the charter for-hire vessels in the Gulf and South Atlantic, as well as the use of Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS).