



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 June 2012 Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Tampa, Florida, June 18 - 21, 2012, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including Amendments for Gray Triggerfish, the 2013 Recreational Gag Season, and Allocation. During the weeklong meeting, the Council took the following actions:

Gray Triggerfish - Reef Fish Amendment 37

The latest stock assessment update for gray triggerfish indicates that the stock is both overfished (population too low) and experiencing overfishing (rate of removal too high). Because of this, the Council is working on an amendment that looks at modifying the rebuilding plan for gray triggerfish. The amendment also considers making changes to gray triggerfish management measures so that the stock can rebuild as fishing continues.

Last week, the Council reviewed and revised an options paper that now considers:

- Modifying the rebuilding plan - the current preferred alternative is to rebuild the stock within 5 years, or by the end of 2016.
- Modifying the sector Annual Catch Limit (ACL) and Annual Catch Target (ACT) - the current preferred alternative establishes a commercial ACL = 64,100 pounds whole weight and ACT = 60,900 pounds whole weight and a recreational ACL = 241,200 pounds whole weight and ACT = 217,100 pounds whole weight.
- Establishing a commercial closed season.
- Establishing a commercial trip limit - the current preferred alternative is a 50 pounds whole weight trip limit.
- Establishing a recreational closed season - the current preferred alternative is a fixed closed season during peak harvest (May-June).
- Establishing a gray triggerfish-specific recreational bag limit - the current preferred alternative is a 4-fish bag limit within the 20 reef fish aggregate bag limit.
- Allowing NOAA Fisheries to close the fishery if the Annual Catch Target is reached - the current preferred alternative is to add an in-season closure authority based on the recreational Annual Catch Target, which is 217,100 pounds whole weight.

2013 Recreational Gag Season

The Council reviewed a draft framework action that considers a split recreational gag season for 2013. Some fishermen have asked for a split season to allow for two or three fishing seasons during the year. Changing the season could reduce the total number of fishing days but would allow for fishing at more desirable times of the year.

The framework also includes alternatives to modify or eliminate the annual February-March recreational shallow-water grouper closure. The closure was put in place primarily to protect gag spawning aggregations. The closure was eventually applied to all shallow-water grouper to protect other groupers that may be spawning and to prevent bycatch of gag by anglers targeting other groupers. The commercial shallow-water grouper closure was replaced with a seasonal closed area known as *The Edges* to protect gag spawning aggregations over part of their primary spawning grounds.

There is concern that allowing harvest of other shallow-water grouper while the gag season is closed could result in increased bycatch and bycatch mortality of gag; however, some fishermen have reported that when all shallow-water grouper are closed, they target other species that are often found in areas of high gag abundance. One suggestion made by Council members is to eliminate the February-March shallow-water grouper closure inshore of 20 fathoms, but leave it in place in waters deeper than 20 fathoms.

Regional Management of Red Snapper

After some discussion during the full Council session in June, the Council directed staff to develop a plan amendment with alternatives for regional management of recreational harvest of red snapper.

Allocation and Sector Separation

The Gulf Council reviewed an options paper that explores setting allocations for gag, red grouper, and black grouper. During discussions, the Council agreed to combine this amendment with an amendment that considers sector separation. The new document will also include allocation considerations for red snapper. In August, staff will present a scoping document and ask the Council to select scoping meeting locations.

Coastal Migratory Pelagic Amendments 19 and 20

The Council continued to work on Amendments 19 and 20 to the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Fishery Management Plan. Amendment 19 considers limiting the sale of recreational caught fish and making changes to the permit requirements for Coastal Migratory Pelagic fisheries. Amendment 20 considers modifying commercial zone boundaries, changing the commercial opening date for the western zone, and establishing a transit provision.

Generic Amendment for Dealer Permits and Electronic Reporting

The Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils are considering changing federal seafood dealer permit and reporting requirements. Improving the accuracy, consistency, and timeliness of data reported by seafood dealers will reduce the likelihood that Annual Catch Limits will be exceeded. Making improvements to dealer reported data would help decrease the amount of uncertainty built into management decisions that aim to balance the largest annual harvest with the future success of the fish stock.

The draft document considers: what dealer permits would be required, and for which species; how frequently and by what method would dealers be required to report; and, are there penalties for non-reporting or late reporting?

Fixed Petroleum Platforms and Artificial Reef's as Essential Fish Habitat

The Council reviewed an options paper that evaluates the appropriateness of designating fixed petroleum platforms and artificial reefs as essential fish habitat. Staff will continue working on the document, which includes alternatives that identify such structures as habitat areas of particular concern.

Shrimp

After a discussion regarding the funding of the Electronic Log Book program, the Council directed staff to prepare a white paper to look at cost alternatives for funding electronic logbooks in the shrimp fishery.

To comment on active amendments, visit gulfcouncil.org/fishery_management_plans/scoping-thru-implementation.php.

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.

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