



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 October 2012 Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Gulfport, Mississippi, October 29 - November 1, 2012, to discuss a number of fishery issues. Below are summaries of the actions the Council took during the weeklong meeting. Sign up [here](#) to receive updates on these and other fishery management issues, including meeting notices, new rules, and pending issues.

Gray Triggerfish - Reef Fish Amendment 37

The Council took final action on Reef Fish Amendment 37 for Gray Triggerfish. This amendment is designed to end overfishing of gray triggerfish and to rebuild the stock by 2017.

The amendment:

- Modifies the rebuilding plan
- Establishes annual catch limits and annual catch targets
- Establishes both a commercial and recreational fixed closed season during peak spawning (June 1 through July 31)
- Establishes a commercial trip limit of 12 gray triggerfish
- Establishes a 2-fish per person bag limit within the 20-reef fish aggregate bag limit
- Allows NOAA Fisheries to close the recreational fishery if the annual catch target is reached
- Adds an overage adjustment to the accountability measure if the annual catch limit is exceeded and the stock is overfished

The amendment will be sent to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.

2013 Recreational Gag Season and Shallow-Water Grouper Closed Season

After reviewing public hearing comments and the actions and alternatives contained in this amendment, the Council chose to keep the July 1 gag season opening, but allow the season to remain open until the annual catch target has been met. The 2-fish bag limit also remains in effect, giving an estimated season of 133-155 days, compared to the 123 days in 2012.

The Council also decided to eliminate the current February 1 through March 31 shallow-water grouper closed season shoreward of the 20 fathom break. Recreational harvest of red grouper, black grouper, scamp, yellowfin grouper, and yellowmouth grouper will be permitted all year unless you are fishing beyond 20 fathoms. Beyond 20 fathoms, the February 1 through March 31 recreational closed season remains in effect.

Before the amendment becomes law, the Secretary of Commerce must approve and implement the management changes. Sign up [here](#) to receive updates on new rules, pending issues, and other updates.

Regional Management of Red Snapper

The Council reviewed a scoping document for Reef Fish Amendment 39 - Regional Management for Recreational Red Snapper and approved it for scoping meetings. The document examines:

- Defining regional boundaries
- Allocation among regions
- Program administration
- Accountability measures

Meetings will be held around the Gulf coast to get public input on some of the issues and concerns related to regional management. Meeting dates and locations will be announced soon. Sign up [here](#) to receive Council meeting notices, updates, and other information.

2012 Recreational Red Snapper Overages

The Council will convene its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) November 8, 2012, to review the quota overages that occurred during the 2012 recreational red snapper season. The acceptable biological catch (ABC) for red snapper is scheduled to increase from 8.080 million pounds to 8.690 million pounds in 2013. Based on the results of the analysis, the SSC will determine whether the 2013 ABC can be increased as scheduled, or whether it should be set to a different level. A change in the ABC, other than the scheduled increase, will trigger the development of a regulatory amendment to make management changes to address the new ABC. As part of the regulatory amendment, the Council asked staff to include an option in the anticipated regulatory amendment that considers a one-fish recreational red snapper bag limit as a way to extend the season length.

More information will be available after the SSC meets. To watch the SSC meeting live, click [here](#) to register.

Vermilion Snapper

The Council reviewed a draft framework action to set the vermilion snapper annual catch limit and, optionally, the annual catch target. The draft documents look at increasing the harvest limits and changing the recreational bag limit.

The Council chose as its preferred alternative an alternative that leaves the annual catch limit and annual catch target in place:

Year	ABC	Stock ACL	Stock ACT
2013'	4.41 mp	3.42 mp	2.94 mp
2014	4.34 mp	3.42 mp	2.94 mp
2015	4.33 mp	3.42 mp	2.94 mp
2016+	4.33 mp	3.42 mp	2.94 mp

The preferred alternative for bag limits sets the recreational bag limit to 10-fish per person within the 20-reef fish aggregate bag limit.

Regulations currently require that Gulf reef fish fishermen possess and use venting tools on all reef fish that are released. For fish that have a distended or ruptured swim bladder, venting can help the fish return to depth and improve the likelihood of survival. However, for fish caught in shallow water and with no sign of barotrauma, the use of a venting tool can do more harm than good. In addition, alternative devices called fish descenders can be used to return a fish to depth in addition to, or instead of, venting. As a result, the Council voted to add an action to the vermilion snapper regulatory amendment to modify or eliminate the venting tool requirement, and chose as a preferred alternative to eliminate the requirement to possess and use a venting tool.

The Council will take final action on the framework action during its February 2013 meeting. Comments can be submitted online by visiting our website and clicking on the thermometer, or by clicking [here](#).

Sector Allocation - Reef Fish Amendment 28

The Gulf Council agreed to bring back the sector allocation document for discussion as well as split the document back into two separate amendments: one addressing allocation issues and another addressing sector separation. The Council would like to address allocation issues before considering potential sector separation.

For-Hire Charter Vessel Electronic Reporting

In August, the Gulf Council directed staff to work with the Southeast Fishery Science Center to develop an amendment to improve the timeliness and accuracy of fisheries data in the for-hire sector. The amendment considers requiring electronic reporting for charter for-hire vessels.

After reviewing a draft document, the Council decided to form a subcommittee to develop a document that complements reporting requirements in the South Atlantic. The Council also split the document into two separate documents

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

The Council appointed members to its Ad Hoc Artificial Substrate Advisory Panel.

Allain	Bret	LA	R
Ballard	James	MS	GSMFC
Cuevas	Kerwin	MS	MDMR
Dale	David	FL	NMFS
Delaney	Glenn	Wash., D.C.	O
Dodrill	Jon	FL	FWC
Falgout	Ted	LA	OIL
Gala	William	CA	OIL
Hunger	Drew	TX	OIL
Huye	George	LA	R/CB/EN
Janowski	Lori Schmitz	FL	O
Kaller	Arie	LA	O (BOEM)
Lindberg	Bill	FL	UF
McKnight	Damon	LA	CB
Newton	Craig	AL	ADCNR
Peter	Douglas	LA	LDWF
Phillips	Todd	TX	EN
Shively	Dale	TX	TPWD
Sinclair	James	LA	S/BSEE
Stunz	Greg	TX	TX A&M
Tackett	Bruce	Wash., D.C.	OIL
Williamson	Troy	TX	R

The panel will assist the Council with potentially designating fixed petroleum platforms and artificial reefs as essential fish habitat. The charge of the Ad Hoc Advisory Panel is to consider:

1. The myriad of similar artificial substrates in the aquatic environment that provide structure and habitat functions for fishery resources.
2. Emerging scientific research and economic activities related to artificial habitats and fisheries.
3. Ocean dumping and debris disposal that otherwise mimics the establishment of "artificial reefs".
4. Perspectives from industry representatives relative to the potential impacts of considering artificial substrates as Essential Fish Habitat in the Gulf of Mexico.

To comment on active amendments, please visit gulfcouncil.org/fishery_management_plans/scoping-thruimplementation.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.

About Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

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