



# 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 – October, 2015

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Galveston, Texas, October 5 – 8, 2015, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including the gag season and gag and black grouper minimum size limits, regional management for recreational red snapper, and the shrimp permit moratorium.

### Gag and Black Grouper Framework Action

The Council took final action on a framework action that considers changing the gag season and recreational minimum size limit, and the black grouper recreational minimum size limit. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the minimum recreational size limit for gag and black grouper will increase to 24 inches total length, the opening date of the recreational gag season will change to June 1 to coincide with the opening of the red snapper season, the December 3-31 fixed closed season for gag will be removed. The goal is to have the recreational gag season to remain open through the end of the year, or until the recreational annual catch limit is projected to be reached.

Also related to gag, the Council asked staff to begin a framework action that looks to increase the commercial minimum size limit for gag to 24 inches total length, in order to be consistent with the proposed recreational minimum size limit. The commercial size limit for black grouper is already 24 inches total length.

### Regional Management of Recreational Red Snapper – Reef Fish Amendment 39

The Council continued discussions on Amendment 39 which divides the recreational red snapper quota among regions to allow for the creation of different management measures that better suit each area. The Council has selected to sunset this action if implemented after 5 years after implementation.

The Council will conduct another round of public hearings throughout the Gulf coast October 19 – November 2. For a complete schedule visit [http://gulfcouncil.org/council\\_meetings/public\\_hearings\\_scoping\\_meetings.php](http://gulfcouncil.org/council_meetings/public_hearings_scoping_meetings.php). Final action is expected during the January, 2016 Council meeting.

### Coastal Migratory Pelagics (Mackerel)

The Council reviewed two draft amendments that consider making changes to king and Spanish mackerel management.

Amendment 26 proposes modifications to allocations, stock boundaries, and sale provisions of king mackerel. During the October meeting, the Council selected preferred alternatives that would establish a single year-round boundary for separating the Gulf and Atlantic migratory groups of king mackerel at the Miami-Dade/Monroe county line, increase the bag limit to four fish per person per day, and set the Gulf migratory group king mackerel annual catch limit equal to the acceptable biological catch recommended by the Gulf Scientific and Statistical Committee for 2015-2019.

Year	ABC (mp ww)
2015	9.62
2016	9.21
2017	8.88
2018	8.71
2019	8.55

The Council also added an alternative under Action 9 that would transfer 15% of the stock annual catch limit to the commercial sector. The document will go out for public hearings early next year, and a Coastal Migratory Pelagics Advisory Panel will meet November 30, 2015.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 28, which considers separating permits for Gulf and Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel, was also discussed, but the Council decided to discontinue work on the amendment.

### Shrimp

The Council reviewed a public hearing draft of Amendment 17A that addresses the October 2016 expiration of the shrimp permit moratorium and maintaining the royal red shrimp endorsement. Public hearings on the amendment will be scheduled in early January. Dates and locations will be posted on the Council website in the coming weeks.

Shrimp Amendment 17B was also discussed. This amendment considers shrimp permit issues such as setting a minimum threshold number of Gulf shrimp vessel permits and whether to create a Gulf shrimp vessel permit reserve pool, specification of optimum yield, and issues about transiting in federal waters. The Council will convene a working group to estimate the aggregate maximum sustainable yield and optimum yield for all shrimp species.

### **Data Collection**

The Council reviewed a public hearing draft of a joint amendment between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils which considers modifying the frequency and method of reporting for charter and headboats fishing for reef fish and coastal migratory pelagics in the Gulf of Mexico, and snapper, grouper, dolphin, wahoo, and coastal migratory pelagics in the South Atlantic. The Council voted to split the Joint Amendment into two separate amendments - a South Atlantic amendment and a Gulf of Mexico amendment.

Council staff will solicit input from affected parties through a direct mail out of an amendment guide and hold a webinar to collect public comments. The Council will review public comments and consider taking final action during its January, 2016 meeting.

### **Hogfish**

The West Florida hogfish stock, which is in the Gulf Council's jurisdiction, is not overfished or experiencing overfishing. The stock associated with the Florida keys, which falls in both Gulf and South Atlantic Management areas, is both overfished and experiencing overfishing. The Council reviewed an options paper that considers defining a boundary for the management unit for hogfish between the two Councils and assigning a catch limit to the Gulf Council managed stock. During this meeting, the Council added an action that considers increasing the minimum size limit for hogfish for both the commercial and recreational sectors.

### **Mutton Snapper**

The Council reviewed a framework action that considers setting an annual catch limit, bag limit, and commercial trip limit for mutton snapper. Staff will continue to develop the document and gather public input.

### **South Florida Management**

The Gulf Council, South Atlantic Council, and State of Florida have been working on a fisheries management plan to streamline regulations in South Florida, particularly off the Florida Keys. The Council reviewed an options paper that considers modifying the management structure and some management measures for yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, black grouper, and shallow-water grouper, to make fishing regulations less complicated for commercial and recreational fishermen in the area. During the meeting the Council voted to begin a separate amendment that would address management issues with yellowtail snapper. The amendment would address consolidating the acceptable biological catch/annual catch limit and yellowtail snapper accountability measures, as well as the commercial fishing year start date and recreation/commercial allocations in both Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic jurisdictions.

### **Other Reef Fish**

During the October meeting, the Council voted to explore working with a consortium of scientists to assist with stock assessments as a way to enhance the SEDAR process.

The Council also requested:

- Analysis of a 1 fish bag limit for gray triggerfish;
- Analysis of both a 15" and 16" fork length size limit on gray triggerfish;
- A status update on Reef Fish Amendments 33 (reef fish IFQ) and 36 (red snapper IFQ modifications);
- Begin a framework action to consider reducing the 20% buffer between the red snapper recreational ACL and ACT.
- Add an alternative to the Yellowtail Snapper Framework Action to remove the circle hook requirement when fishing for yellowtail snapper south of Cape Sable.

For more information about any of the amendments discussed during the Council meeting, visit [www.gulfcouncil.org/scoping-thru-implementation.php](http://www.gulfcouncil.org/scoping-thru-implementation.php), and scroll down to the amendment of interest to find the draft document, video, guide, and other information.