

Ad Hoc Recreational Red Snapper AP

Committee Charge: To evaluate and recommend innovative management strategies for the private and for-hire recreational red snapper fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico. Approaches to consider include, but are not limited to, random distribution systems such as lotteries, community-based approaches, incentive-based approaches such as IFQs, effort control measures such as license limitations, and, any other novel approaches deemed relevant by the AP;

The Council encourages the Ad Hoc Red Snapper Recreational AP to continue working on the following ideas

Alternative Management Ideas:

- a) Develop a program for regional management of recreational management of red snapper (regional seasons, bag limits, size limits, TAC etc.)
- b) Explore limited access privilege programs (LAPP) for the for- hire and private recreational sectors along with improved data and monitoring of harvest and bycatch including:
- c) Explore the use of a ~~catch card~~ and fish tag system to manage the recreational harvest.
- d) Explore mechanisms for red snapper quota shares to be leased or sold back and forth between commercial and recreational sectors and either banked or fished recreationally.
- e) Explore establishment a reef fish permitting system and red snapper endorsement for private recreational fishermen (or vessels)

Bycatch Reduction Ideas:

Committee Charge: To evaluate and recommend innovative approaches to minimizing bycatch and bycatch mortality in the private and for-hire recreational red snapper fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico. Approaches to consider include, but are not limited to, methods to improve the survival of released fish such as gear requirements or fisherman training, methods to avoid the capture of undersized or out-of-season fish such as seasonal area closures or fisherman training, and, methods to account for otherwise unavoidable regulatory discards such as bycatch banking/exchange programs or reclassification of regulatory discards to legal harvest; and,

- Explore the possibility of a first fish rule to reduce bycatch mortality.
- Limit the number of hooks dropped per line to two for the recreational red snapper for-hire sector

Refer the following ideas to the Council Data Committee

- Mandatory headboat and charter boat reporting systems (including electronic logbooks/web-based reporting) on all reef fish permitted vessels.
- Expanding the current observer system to for-hire vessels in order to validate logbook records.
- Explore a voluntary option for a video monitoring system for those for-hire vessels that wish to carry one
- Catch cards

Develop a Program for Regional Management of Recreational Management of Red Snapper

Brief Description:

Gulf of Mexico red snapper are managed as a unit stock throughout their range, and regulations are the same throughout the Gulf EEZ. Under this recommendation, the Gulf would be divided into two (or more) geographic regions, and each region would have its own set of recreational fishing regulations (size limits, bag limits, closed seasons). Regional regulations could be developed that would reflect regional differences in availability of red snapper, localized differences in growth rates, habitat or other environmental factors, and localized differences in socio-economic value of the stock. Since red snapper would still be considered as a unit stock, the combined effects of the regional regulations would still need to comply with the Gulf-wide rebuilding requirements.

To implement a regional approach, the recreational allocation of red snapper TAC could be subdivided into regional allocations based on the historical proportion of catch from each region. Annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) could be applied on a regional basis. Regulations would then be developed that keep each region's catch within its allocation.

The SEDAR 7 red snapper assessment provided an option to set two regional TACs with the Mississippi River as the dividing line. However, the Council focused on implementing needed revisions to the rebuilding plan and retained management by Gulfwide TAC and regulations.

Places where the idea is currently being implemented:

At the federal level, there are no recreational examples. However, the commercial Gulf group king mackerel quota is divided into an Eastern Zone and a Western Zone. The Eastern Zone is further divided into a Florida East sub-zone and Florida West sub-zone, with the Florida West sub-zone further divided by gear type. Under Highly Migratory Species (HMS), commercial bluefin tuna catches are regulated by area and gear type. Also, non-sandbar large coastal sharks(LCS) have regional quotas for the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic.

At the state level, Florida has three regions for snook with separate size limits and closed seasons, and three regions for seatrout with separate bag limits and closed seasons.

There are no region-specific permits for the above examples. A valid permit allows access to all regions.

Pros:

- Allows for regional differences in biology, habitat, and socio-economic conditions
- Can optimize regulations to account for regional differences in release mortality

Cons:

- More complex regulatory framework.
- Effort shifting between regions may reduce effectiveness of regionalized management.
- Geographic distribution of stock may change as the stock rebuilds, resulting in a regional allocation that does not reflect the redistribution.
- Monitoring catches on a regional level may be less precise than on a Gulf-wide level.

Explore limited access privilege programs (LAPP) for the for-hire and private recreational sectors along with improved data and monitoring and bycatch

The MSRA defines a limited access privilege as “a federal permit issued as part of a limited access system under section 303A to harvest a quantity of fish expressed by a unit or units representing a portion of the total allowable catch of the fishery that may be received or held for exclusive use by a person...” The Act further defines a limited access system as “a system that limits participation in a fishery to those satisfying certain eligibility criteria or requirements contained in a fishery management plan or associated regulation.” Thus, the establishment of a limited access system requires, at a minimum, the determination of eligibility criteria and the definition of the type of access privileges the program would grant. Some of the programs discussed in sections below could (depending on design features) qualify as LAPPs. e.g., certain tag programs. Access privileges may be expressed in a variety of way including pounds of fish (as in an IFQ see discussion under trading of IFQ shares), number of fish and number of fishing days. These privileges could be either tradable or non-transferable. Access privileges may account for several elements such as regional specificities in different parts of the Gulf and differing characteristics of the for-hire and private recreational sectors.

Places where the idea is currently being implemented or considered

Some of the programs discussed in sections above could, depending on design features, qualify as LAPPs, e.g., tag programs that restrict participation and cap the number of tags issued per season.

Pro

Foster efficient resource allocation
Promote conservation
Individual responsibility

Con

Require extensive initial outreach and education

Differing characteristics of sub-sectors (for-hire and private recreational) increase challenge of designing a program for the entire recreational sector

Explore the use of a fish tag system to manage recreational harvest

Brief Description

Harvest tag programs constitute one of the right-based approaches that are used in the management of several natural resources, including fisheries resources. Under a fish harvest tag program, the allowable recreational harvest or recreational quota could be converted into a given number of units (usually number of fish); with each tag granting the privilege to harvest one unit (fish).

Tags could either be distributed free of charge or sold to eligible participants. Eligibility requirements, which usually include the purchase of a license, could be expanded in order to limit the number of participants.

A program could allow trading of tags among eligible participants or issue non transferable harvest tags. If tags are sold, revenues generated may be used to offset (a portion or all of the program's administrative costs.

Places where the idea is currently being implemented or considered

Harvest tags have been used in several natural resource management programs, mostly in hunting. In fisheries management, tag programs are used in various countries to manage several species. International examples include the Pink snapper management in Western Australia, the Irish salmon and the cod fishery in Newfoundland. Examples in the United States include the paddlefish fishery in South Dakota and the Florida tarpon tag program. The tarpon tag program sets an annual cap on the number of tags. Tags are available for sale. Reporting requirements as well as the non-transferability of the tags once purchased are among the key features of the program.

Pros

- Potential extension of the recreational season
- Cap on Aggregate Catch
- Flexible management
- Resulting Incentive structure could foster conservation
- Potential data collection improvement
- Financial contribution to program administration

Cons

- Could increase monitoring and enforcement costs
- Distribution of tags could be difficult
- Accounting for the specificities of the for-hire and private recreational sub-sectors could be challenging.

Explore mechanisms for red snapper quota shares to be leased or sold back and forth between commercial and recreational sectors and either banked or fished recreationally

Brief Description

The commercial red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico is currently managed under an Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ). The recreational red snapper fishery is managed using a series of measures including fishing seasons, daily bag limits and quota closures. In theory, the unhindered flow of resources between sectors (or between sub-sectors within a given sector) could place the resource into the hands of those that value it the most and hence, put the resource to its highest valued use.

The lease of annual allocation or sale of red snapper shares to the recreational sector may require adjustments to the existing regulatory framework (for example, to allow recreational fishermen to harvest the acquired quota) and an evaluation and assignment of property rights to the recreational sector or to a subset of the sector, e.g., the for-hire component. Issues related to which individuals/entities would pay or who would be entitled to harvest the added resource would have to be addressed. Recreational IFQs, in the traditional sense, i.e., as implemented in several commercial fisheries, do not appear to be feasible for several reasons, including the multitude of recreational anglers and the absence of a clearly defined number of participants, and the near impossibility to monitor such a program. However, modified versions could be considered for the for-hire sector. If purchased quota shares are to be added to the recreational quota, substantial amount would have to be purchased to make a dent in the recreational season length.

Places where the idea is currently being implemented or considered

In Alaska, allowing the for-hire sector to purchase commercial IFQ shares has been considered. Purchased shares would be converted into a number of fish, which are called "guided angler fish," that charter boats could harvest in addition to the recreational quota.

Pros

Could foster more efficient resource use
Could contribute to (re)allocation process

Cons

Dilution of expected benefits by new entrants
Potential for free-riding
Asymmetry (There is no equivalent option that would allow the commercial sector to buy from the recreational sector)

Explore establishment of a reef fish permitting system and red snapper endorsement for private recreational fishermen (or vessels)

Brief Description:

Presently a federal registry is being established to identify all saltwater anglers and improve recreational angler surveys, but it is not specific to reef fish or red snapper. A federal recreational reef fish permit and red snapper endorsement would allow surveys, logbooks, or other monitoring methods to be designed that are specific to recreational reef fish and red snapper fishing, improving the data used in stock assessments. Such permits and endorsements could be created either as vessel permits and endorsement, or as individual angler permits and endorsements. If established on per vessel basis, the vessel operator would be responsible for keeping track of reef fish and red snapper catches on the vessel. This would potentially entail creation of a vessel logbook program to accompany the permit/endorsement.

Places where the idea is currently being implemented:

Currently, recreational vessel owners or operators targeting Atlantic tunas (bluefin, yellowfin, bigeye, albacore, and skipjack), sharks, swordfish, and billfish in Atlantic Federal waters, including the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea must obtain an HMS Charter boat/Headboat permit. General recreational vessels can target these species if they are participating in a registered recreational HMS tournament. Another place where this idea is implemented is the commercial sector of the red snapper fishery. A permit is required for the individual fishing quotas (IFQs) for reef fish and an additional endorsement is needed for red snapper harvest. Along the same lines, recreational fishers need a state fishing license and an additional stamp to harvest lobster, and a snook stamp to harvest snook.

Pros:

- Allows for better records, documenting number of recreational vessels specifically targeting reef fish and red snapper
- Allows permit sanctions as an enforcement tool to improve compliance with regulations Potential to improve in-season monitoring where needed due to accountability measures
- Federal permit endorsements could potentially go by the more restrictive regulations

Cons:

- Additional filed and tracked paperwork adding to cost
- State endorsements may not parallel federal endorsements
- A national salt-water registry is already being developed to improve recreational statistics

Explore the Possibility of a First Fish Rule to Reduce Bycatch Mortality

Brief Description:

Estimates of release mortality rates have been controversial throughout the history of red snapper management. Numerous scientific studies have been done, with results ranging from 1% to 100% release mortality (SEDAR 7 Data Workshop report). The major factor affecting survival of released fish is depth of capture, but other factors identified include surface interval, season, water temperature, circle vs. J-hooks, and predation of released fish from concentrations of large predators. Based on the relationship between release mortality and depth, along with the depths at which most of the recreational red snapper fishing is reported to occur, the SEDAR 7 assessment assigned recreational release mortalities of 40% for the western Gulf recreational fisheries, 15% for the eastern Gulf recreational fisheries, and 21% for the Gulf-wide average for the period 1997-2002.

NMFS analyses of a first fish rule (First Fish Powerpoint presentation at the January 2008 AHRRSAP meeting) concluded that eliminating the minimum size limit would significantly slow stock recovery. However, that analysis was done at 15% release mortality. Anglers have maintained that their release mortality is higher, and that the size limit is counterproductive. Even if the average estimate is correct, many individual anglers have release mortalities above the average. Eliminating the recreational minimum size limit and requiring anglers to keep the first fish caught (up to the bag limit) could reduce the number of dead releases and make more efficient use of the resource.

Places where the idea is currently being implemented:

On July 14, 1997, the NMFS Office of Protected Resources published a revised list of Candidate Species for Endangered or Threatened Species Status (now referred to as the Species of Concern list), which added speckled hind and warsaw grouper to the list. In response to this listing, the Council, in Amendment 16b, increased protections for these species by establishing a recreational bag limit of one fish per vessel for each species (to be included within the aggregate grouper bag limit). Due to the deep depths at which these fish are found (commonly 180 to 1,222 feet for warsaw, and 196 to 400 feet for speckled hind) and the likelihood of poor release survival, the Council did not consider a minimum size limit, opting instead to implement only a bag limit.

Scamp is another grouper species frequently caught in deep water and likely to have poor release survival. Florida had requested that the Council implement a 20 inch minimum size limit in Amendment 16b to be compatible with the state's rule, which was implemented to protect juvenile scamp. Instead, in response to release mortality concerns, the Council set a minimum size limit for scamp in federal waters at 16 inches TL. Most scamp caught in federal waters are above 16 inches TL, so a 16-inch TL minimum size limit would allow Florida to enforce its regulations on juvenile scamp in shallow waters while minimizing release mortality of mature scamp caught in deep water in the EEZ.

In the commercial red snapper fishery, Amendment 27 reduced the commercial minimum size limit to 13 inches in order to address release mortality concerns. The size limit was reduced rather than eliminated entirely in order to discourage fishermen from targeting the smaller fish, although it was reported that red snapper less than 12 inches were not considered marketable and would unlikely be retained by the commercial fishery (Porch 2005).

Pros:

- Reduces number of dead discards.
- Simplifies regulations.
- May improve rebuilding if actual release mortality is higher than estimates used in the stock assessment.

Cons:

- May slow rebuilding if actual release mortality is not higher than estimates used in stock assessment.
- May shorten fishing season as more anglers fill their bag limits faster.
- Could lead to recreational high grading, particularly in combination with small bag limits.
- If fishermen continue to fish after filling the red snapper bag limit, subsequent red snapper catch and releases will reduce the effectiveness of a first fish rule.

Limit the number of hooks dropped per line to two for the recreational red snapper for-hire sector

Brief description:

Presently, recreational for-hire sector is not limited to the number of terminal hooks that can be used on a line. Most tournaments have very specific rules about number of hooks and types of lures that can be used for fishing. Typically fishers use 1-2 hooks per line based to the targeted species; however, fishers can have multiple lines out at one time. However, most for-hire headboats do not allow customers to have more than one line out at a time, unless they are trolling. If this management approach were used in the recreational for-hire sector then potential bycatch mortality of reef fish could be limited, in particular red snapper. Ideally, fishers would only catch two reef fish at a time, so that they can quickly release and vent the fish if they are undersized or already have their limit. However, the new regulation for using dehooking devices and reef fish venting tools will also potentially reduce bycatch mortality by quickly releasing the fish, and venting it if necessary. Therefore, limiting the number of hooks per line to two does not seem to provide additional bycatch mortality reduction, when the for-hire sector presently uses 1-2 hooks.

Places where idea is currently being implemented:

Presently the number of hooks dropped per line for the recreational for-hire sector is not limited in most federal waters. However, off the coast of Alabama in the EEZ, a specific area known as the Alabama Special Management Zone was developed within the reef building zones to limit commercial fishing to 3 terminal hooks per line. Other places such as the state of Florida have suggested a “tending rule”, where a fisher must be holding the other end of the fishing rod. These rules were placed to keep people from leaving fishing gear soaking in canals and waterways for long periods of time, potentially resulting in mortality for fish.

Pros:

- Reduced bycatch mortality of reef fish in particular red snapper
- Deck-hands and fishers on for-hire sector could dehook and potentially vent fish faster if they are undersize or had their limit

Cons:

- Enforcement would be difficult
- Can still have multiple lines out (need to limit total number of hooks per fisher)
- This recommendation is unlikely to have any effect on bycatch mortality