




UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

Southeast Regional Office
 263 13th Avenue South
 St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
 (727) 824-5305; FAX (727) 824-5308
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

JAN 12 2009

F/SER24:SB

MEMORANDUM FOR: Thomas McIlwain, Chairman
 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

FROM: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D. 
 Regional Administrator

SUBJECT: January 2009 Regional Administrator's Report

Fishery Openings and Closings and Quota Monitoring Summary

Commercial Fisheries:

Red Snapper: For 2008, 97 percent of the quota was harvested. A total of 59,791 pounds were left in 304 different accounts. 2009 allocations were issued to 524 accounts.

King Mackerel: The 2008-2009 fishing year for the Gulf migratory group of king mackerel began on July 1, 2008. As of the end of 2008, 94 percent of the western zone quota had been taken. For the west coast of Florida, 33 percent of the northern zone quota had been taken as of November 1, and there were no landings for the southern zone at that time. For the Florida east coast zone, 46 percent of the quota had been taken through the end of 2008. The gillnet fishery opened in the southern zone January 20, 2009.

Shallow Water Grouper: As of December 15, 2008, 65 percent of the shallow water grouper quota had been landed; 81 percent of the red grouper quota had been landed. Gag landings for 2008 represented 83 percent of the quota established for 2009.

Deep Water Grouper and Tilefish: Using landings through mid-April 2008, and projecting subsequent catches based on previous years' landings, NOAA Fisheries Service closed the deep water grouper and tilefish fisheries on May 10, 2008. NOAA Fisheries Service re-opened these fisheries on November 1, 2008, for 10 days to allow the remainder of the quota to be harvested. Following the re-opening, 106 percent of each of the quotas was harvested.

Greater Amberjack and Gray Triggerfish: As of December 15, 2008, approximately 47 percent of the greater amberjack quota and 61 percent of the gray triggerfish quota had been landed.

Seasonal Closures: A commercial closure for gag, red grouper, and black grouper is in effect February 15 through March 14. A commercial closure for greater amberjack is in effect from March 1 through May 31.



Recreational: (NOTE: The following landings and percentages represent only Waves 1-5 for the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey, and do not include headboat or Texas landings.)

Red Snapper: Landings are estimated at 3,068,184 pounds or 125 percent of the quota. Preliminary review of the landings information indicate fewer but larger red snapper are being harvested compared to previous years.

Greater Amberjack and Gray Triggerfish: Approximately 76 percent of the recreational greater amberjack recreational quota was landed through October, and more than 88 percent of the recreational annual catch limit (ACL) for gray triggerfish was landed.

Gag and Red Grouper: Amendment 30B will establish ACLs for the recreational fishery for both gag (2.59 million pounds) and red grouper (1.85 million pounds) for 2009. Through October 2008, gag landings were at 101 percent of the designated ACL, and 127 percent of the designated 2.06 million pound catch target. Red grouper landings, through October, were estimated at 42 percent of the ACL.

Seasonal Closures: A recreational closure for gag from February 1 through March 31 is enacted in federal waters and Florida state waters. A federal water closure from February 15 through March 14 is in effect for red and black groupers, but there is no recreational closure for red and black grouper in Florida State waters.

Permits Status

Active permits as of January 12, 2009:

- 1,594 moratorium Gulf shrimp permits and 282 royal red shrimp endorsements
- 1,314 for-hire coastal pelagic moratorium permits; 40 historical captain permits
- 1,452 commercial king mackerel moratorium permits (includes South Atlantic)
(22 commercial king mackerel gillnet)
- 1,471 commercial Spanish mackerel permits (includes South Atlantic)
- 1,285 for-hire reef fish moratorium permits; 40 historical captain permits
- 885 commercial reef fish moratorium permits

Amendment Status

Red Snapper Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ): NOAA Fisheries Service continues to monitor, develop, and refine the support infrastructure for the IFQ program. NOAA Fisheries Service is attempting to integrate this IFQ program and the proposed grouper/tilefish IFQ program to minimize participant confusion.

Reef Fish Amendment 29: This amendment would establish a multi-species IFQ for the Gulf of Mexico commercial grouper and tilefish fisheries. During December 2008, NOAA Fisheries Service conducted a referendum vote among eligible reef fish permit holders for their approval or disapproval of the proposed IFQ program. Of 301 ballots mailed out, all but 5 ballots were delivered to eligible voters. Of the 273 ballots returned, 220 voters (81 percent) were in favor of the IFQ, 50 were opposed, and 3 ballots were declared invalid. Should the Gulf of Mexico

Fishery Management Council (Council) approve Amendment 29 for review by the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary), NOAA Fisheries Service anticipates the IFQ would be implemented effective January 1, 2010.

Reef Fish Amendment 30B: Amendment 30B includes actions to end overfishing of gag, increase red grouper harvest, and establish sector specific ACLs and accountability measures for these two species. NOAA Fisheries Service received this amendment from the Council for review and possible implementation by the Secretary. The comment period on the amendment and the proposed rule closed in early January 2009; the Secretary must approve, disapprove, or partially approve the amendment by January 28, 2009. A final rule is under development.

Reef Fish Interim Rule: Because gag are undergoing overfishing, the Council requested NOAA Fisheries Service implement an interim rule to apply harvesting restrictions for gag and other reef fish species undergoing overfishing until the actions in Amendment 30B can be implemented. The interim rule, effective January 1, 2009, includes the following temporary regulations:

- Establishment of a commercial quota and a 2-fish per person recreational bag limit for gag.
- Extension of the current recreational closure for gag to February 1 through March 31 (the recreational closure for red and black grouper remains at February 15 to March 15).
- Requirement for all vessels with federal reef fish permits to comply with the more restrictive of state or federal regulations when fishing for gag, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish, and red snapper in state waters.

The 5-grouper aggregate recreational bag limit remains in effect under interim regulations. For red grouper, the bag limit in federal waters remains at 1 fish per person. In Florida State waters, the red grouper bag limit is 2 fish per person.

Generic Aquaculture Fishery Management Plan: This action would establish a regional permitting process for regulating and promoting environmentally-sound and economically-sustainable aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone, consistent with the goals of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is scheduled to take final action at its January 2009 meeting.

Spiny Lobster Joint Amendment: The amendment would establish a minimum import size for spiny lobsters coming into the United States. Public hearings were held in July 2008. Following approval by all three southeastern fishery management councils, the amendment was submitted for review by the Secretary. A final rule implementing this action published in the *Federal Register* on January 12, 2009, and is effective February 11, 2009.