

2009-10

## Commercial Fishing Regulations for Gulf of Mexico Federal Waters



### For Species Managed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

This publication was prepared for general informational purposes in May, 2009, and has no legal force or effect. Fishing regulations are subject to change. A separate summary of recreational fishing regulations is available from the Gulf Council.

A publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NAO5NMF4410003



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# About the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

**T**he 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 which are designed to manage fishery resources within the 200-mile limit of the Gulf of Mexico.

The Council consists of 17 voting members: the Southeast Regional Administrator of NMFS (or his designee), the directors of the five Gulf state marine resource management agencies (or their designees), and 11 members who are nominated by the state governors and appointed by the Secretary of Commerce. Appointments are three-year terms with a maximum of three consecutive terms. In addition, there are four nonvoting members representing the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of State, and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

The Council meets five times a year at various locations around the Gulf coast. When reviewing potential rule changes, the Council draws upon the services of knowledgeable people from other state and federal agencies, universities, and the public, who serve on panels and committees.

Prior to taking final action on any proposed rule change public hearings are held throughout the Gulf. Public testimony is also heard during the meeting at which final action is scheduled. Proposed rule changes are then submitted to NMFS for further review and approval before implementation.

### State Agencies:

Alabama Department of Conservation and Marine Resources	251-861-2882
Information or to report state fishing violations	251-968-7576
24-hour voice mail to report state fishing violations	251-476-1256
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission information	850-488-4676
To report state fishing violations	850-488-9924
Cellular phone	888-404-3922
	*FWC
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries information	225-765-2800
To report state fishing violations	800-442-2511
Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Information and to report state fishing violations	228-374-5000
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Information	800-792-1112
To report state fishing violations	512-389-4848
	281-842-8100
	800-792-game

### Errata and Update Sheets

Supplemental "errata and update sheets" will be published periodically to reflect changes in fishing regulations implemented since this pamphlet was published. Contact the Gulf Council to obtain the most recent supplement.

**NOTE:** The Official Electronic Code of Federal Regulations for 50 CFR 622—for Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic is available online. [Please visit www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html).

## Important Phone Numbers

NMFS Operations Branch 727-824-5305  
 NMFS Permits and Regulations Branch 877-376-4877  
 (see below for tuna permit applications)

To apply for permits online: [www.nmfspermits.com](http://www.nmfspermits.com)

NMFS nationwide federal fishing violations hotline 800-853-1964  
 NMFS 24-hour tuna information line 888-872-8862  
 (also for tuna permit applications) 978-281-9260  
 NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division 301-713-2347  
 NMFS Swordfish/Billfish Recreational Reporting 800-894-5528

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary 409-621-5151

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary 305-809-4670

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council 843-571-4366

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission 228-875-5912

U.S. Coast Guard, 7th District 305-415-6781  
 (Florida east of St. Marks)

U.S. Coast Guard, 8th District 504-671-2245  
 (St. Marks, Florida to Texas)

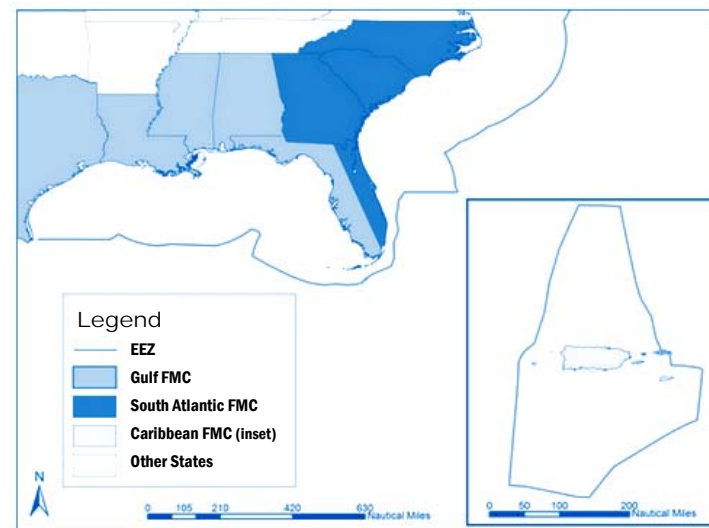
Regional NMFS Office for Law Enforcement 727-824-5344

NMFS Enforcement Field Offices:

St. Petersburg, FL 727-893-3616  
 Marathon, FL 305-743-3110  
 Niceville, FL 850-729-8628  
 Slidell, LA 985-643-6232  
 Galveston, TX 409-770-0812  
 Harlingen, TX 956-423-3450

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## Commercial Fishing Regulations—CMPs

Species	Minimum Size Limit	Trip Limit	Quotas/Closed Seasons
<b>Coastal Migratory Pelagics</b>			
Cobia (ling)	33" fork length	Daily bag and possession limit of 2 per person	NOTE: Drift gill nets are prohibited
King Mackerel	Minimum 24" fork length  Maximum of 5% by weight may be undersized	<p><b>Eastern Zone:</b> <b>FL east coast subzone</b> 11/1 to 3/31—50 fish per trip until quota filled. If 75% of quota is not harvested by 2/1, trip limit increases to 75 fish. 4/1 to 10/31—South Atlantic regulations apply, refer to South Atlantic Council regulation pamphlet.</p> <p><b>FL west coast subzone: Gillnets</b> 6:00 a.m. day after the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal holiday until gear quota reached—25,000 lbs/trip</p> <p><b>FL west coast subzone: Hook-and-line</b> 7/1 until 75% gear quota—1,250 lbs/trip then 500 lbs/trip until gear quota filled</p> <p><b>Western Zone:</b> 7/1 - 3,000 lbs/trip until quota filled</p>	<p>Quota (subdivided as shown): 3,264,000 lbs Gulf group</p> <p><b>Eastern Zone:</b> 2,252,160 lbs FL-east subzone 1,040,625 lbs</p> <p>FL-west subzone 1,209,374 lbs Northern Hook- and-line 168,750 lbs Southern Gillnets 520,312 lbs Southern Hook-and-line 520,312 lbs</p> <p><b>Western Zone:</b> 1,010,000 lbs</p>

## Additional Remarks

Stone Crab	Stone crab traps must have a biodegradable panel, and must be permanently marked with their Florida stone crab permit number and color or their federal number and color. Traps must meet Florida construction guidelines.			
Spiny Lobster	Only diving, bully nets, hoop nets, and traps not to exceed 2'x2'x3' allowed. Bycatch of 5% allowed with trawls. Removal of spiny lobster tail allowed only when fishing exclusively in the EEZ on a trip of 48 hours or more, and requires a tailing permit.			
Shrimp	Bycatch reduction devices required; prohibited areas include the Tortugas Shrimp Sanctuary, Texas Flower Gardens, and the Florida Middle Grounds; traps are prohibited for the harvest of royal red shrimp.			
Allowable Octocorals	Allowable octocoral—an erect, nonencrusting species of the subclass Octocorallia, except the seafans <i>Gorgonia flabellus</i> and <i>G. ventalina</i> , plus the attached substrate within 1 inch of allowable octocoral. Note: An octocoral with attached substrate exceeding 1" is considered to be live rock and is not allowable octocoral.			
Billfish	Retention prohibited on longline vessels; must be released in the water in a manner maximizing survival.			
Swordfish	Allowable gear: longline, handline, harpoon, rod-and-reel, bandit. Incidental catch allowed with squid trawl.			
Reef Fish	Sea basses, grunts, and porgies have been removed from federal management, and may be subject to state regulations even if caught in federal waters.			
Sharks	For up-to-date information contact the National Marine Fisheries Service at 301-713-2347. <b>Protected Sharks</b>			
Atlantic angel	Bigeye thresher	Bigeye sand tiger	Caribbean reef	Caribbean sharpnose
Bigeye Sixgill	Basking	Bignose	Dusky	Smalltail
Longfin Mako	Narrowtooth	Night	Sand tiger	Sixgill
Sevengill	Galapagos	Whale	White	

## Other Requirements/Restrictions continued

- The use of longlines and buoy gear for reef fish is prohibited inside of lines approximating 50 fathoms west and 20 fathoms east and south of Cape San Blas, Florida. Vessels fishing within this zone and possessing longlines or buoy gear may not exceed the recreational bag limits, and for reef fish without a bag limit, 5% by weight of all fish aboard.
- Bottom anchoring, trawling gear, bottom longlines, buoy gear, and all traps/pots are prohibited in East and West Flower Garden Banks, McGrail Bank, Pulley Ridge, Stetson Bank, and North and South Tortugas Ecological Reserves. Additionally, a weak link in the tickler chain of bottom trawls on all habitats throughout the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone is required.
- Closed areas: EEZ portion of Tortugas North—fishing and anchoring of fishing vessels prohibited. Coordinates are 24° 40' N. lat., 83° 06' W. long./24° 46' N. lat., 83° 06' W. long./24° 46' N. lat., 83° 00' W. long./thence along the seaward limit of Florida's waters to 24° 40' N. lat., 83° 06' W. long.
- Tortugas South—fishing and anchoring of vessels prohibited. Coordinates are 24° 33' N. lat., 83° 09' W. long./24° 33' N. lat., 83° 05' W. long./24° 18' N. lat., 83° 05' W. long./24° 18' N. lat., 83° 09' W. long.
- The Madison/Swanson site and Steamboat Lumps site of the west central coast of Florida are closed to all fishing except for highly migratory species.
 

Madison Swanson coordinates are: 29° 17' N. lat., 85° 50' W. long., 29° 17' N. lat., 85° 38' W. long., 29° 06' N. lat., 85° 50' W. long., 29° 06' N. lat., 85° 38' W. long.

Steamboat Lumps coordinates are: 28° 14' N. lat., 84° 48' W. long., 28° 14' N. lat., 84° 37' W. long., 28° 03' N. lat., 84° 48' W. long./28° 03' N. lat., 84° 37' W. long.
- Pelagic longlining for highly migratory pelagic is prohibited from the DeSoto Canyon area. Contact the National Marine Fisheries Service at 301-713-2347 for detailed coordinates.

The gillnet fishery for Gulf group king mackerel in or from the Gulf EEZ is closed each fishing year from July 1 until 6:00 a.m. on the day after the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal holiday. The gillnet fishery also is closed during all subsequent weekends and observed Federal holidays, except for the first weekend following the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, which will remain open to the gillnet fishery provided a notification of closure of that fishery has not been filed. Weekend closures are effective from 6:00 a.m. Saturday to 6:00 a.m. Monday. Holiday closures are effective from 6:00 a.m. on the observed Federal holiday to 6:00 a.m. the following day.

Species	Minimum Size Limit	Trip Limit	Quotas/Closed Seasons
Spanish Mackerel	12" fork length	None	Quota: 5,187 MP Gulf group. Season opens 4/1 & closes when quota is filled.

## Commercial Fishing Regulations—Reef Fish

Reef Fish			
Red Snapper	13" total length	The Commercial red snapper fishery is managed under an IFQ program. Anyone commercially fishing for red snapper must possess IFQ allocation and follow established protocols.	2.55 MP
Vermilion Lane	10" total length	None	
Gray (Mangrove)	8" total length	None	
Mutton	12" total length	None	
Yellowtail	16" total length	None	
Mahogany	12" total length	None	
Schoolmaster	12" total length	None	
Dog	12" total length	None	
Cubera	12" total length	None	
Blackfin	None	None	
Queen	None	None	
Silk	None	None	
Wenchman	None	None	
Tilefish	None	None	440,000 lbs gutted weight

## Reef Fish continued

Species	Size Limit	Trip Limit	Quotas/Closed Seasons
<b>Deep-Water Groupers</b>			
Misty	None	6,000 lbs GW* trip limit for deepwater and shallow-water groupers combined.	Quota: 1.02 MP GW* Includes scamp after the shallow-water grouper quota is filled.
Snowy	None		
Yellowedge	None		
Warsaw	None		
Speckled Hind	None		

### Shallow-Water Groupers

Gag	24" total length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quota: 7.48 MP GW for all shallow-water groupers in aggregate.</li> <li>Gag quota for 2009—1.32 MP GW (included in the shallow-water grouper quota).</li> <li>A red grouper quota of 5.75 MP GW is included in the shallow-water grouper quota.</li> <li>Once 80% of either the gag or the red grouper quota is met, an incidental bycatch trip limit of 200 lbs applies to that species.</li> <li>Shallow-water grouper quota closure occurs when the sum of the gag and red grouper quota, plus a 0.41 MP allowance for other shallow-water grouper is reached.</li> <li>Seasonal closure of "The Edges" from 1/1 - 4/30. See page 14 for boundary information.</li> </ul>
Black	24" total length	
Red	18" total length	
Yellowfin	20" total length	
Scamp	16" total length	
Yellowmouth	None	
Rock Hind	None	
Red Hind	None	

**\*\*NOTICE\*\***  
An emergency rule is in effect that prohibits the use of bottom longline gear to harvest reef fish east of 85° 30' W longitude shoreward of 50 fathoms as long as the 2009 deep-water grouper & tilefish quotas are unfilled. Once the quotas are filled, the use of bottom longline gear to harvest reef fish is prohibited in water of all depths east of 85° 30' W. This emergency rule will eventually be replaced by Reef Fish Amendment 31. Please check with the Gulf Council for updated information.

Goliath (Jewfish)	Harvest Prohibited		
Nassau	Harvest Prohibited		

### Other Reef Fish

Gray Triggerfish	14" fork length	None	93,000 lbs for 2009 106,000 lbs for 2010
Hogfish	12" fork length	None	None
Greater Amberjack	36" fork length	None	0.503MP quota/ Commercial closure March-May
Lesser Amberjack	14" - 22" fork length slot limit	None	None
Banded Rudderfish	14" - 22" fork length slot limit	None	None

\*GW = Gutted Weight

## Other Requirements/Restrictions continued

- Vessels with shrimp trawls or entangling net gear aboard may not exceed the recreational reef fish bag limits.
- Venting tools and dehooking devices are required on board all vessels participating in the reef fish fishery.
- The use of non-stainless steel circle hooks is required when using natural baits in the reef fish fishery.
- Commercial vessels are prohibited from retaining reef fish caught under the recreational size and bag/possession limits when commercial quantities of Gulf reef fish are on board.
- Reef fish as bait, except sand perch or dwarf sand perch is prohibited.
- Stressed areas for reef fish begin at the shoreward boundary of federal waters and generally follow the 10 fathom contour from the Dry Tortugas to Sanibel Island; the 20 fathom contour to Tarpon Springs; the 10 fathom contour to Cape San Blas; the 25 fathom contour to south of Mobile Bay; the 13 fathom contour to Ship Island, Mississippi; the 10 fathom contour off Louisiana; and the 30 fathom contour off Texas. In designated "stressed areas" use of roller trawls, and power heads is prohibited.
- Reef fish gear is limited to no more than 3 hooks in a special management zone off Alabama. Nonconforming gear is restricted to bag limits, or for reef fish without a bag limit to 5% by weight of all fish aboard.
- Operators of vessels with Gulf of Mexico reef fish commercial or charter vessel/headboat permits comply with guidelines for proper care and release of incidentally caught smalltooth sawfish and sea turtles must and possess on board specific gear to ensure proper release of such species.
- A state may regulate vessels that are registered in that state and that are fishing in federal waters for species for which there are no federal fishery management plans or applicable federal regulations.
- All fish except for bait and oceanic migratory species taken from federal waters must have heads and fins intact through landing. Legal size fish within a bag limit may be consumed at sea.

## Commercial Permit Requirements continued

Aquacultured live rock permit	Possession or harvest of cultivated live rock. Appropriate Florida state permits are also required to land live rock in Florida. Wild live rock possession or harvest is prohibited.
Allowable octocoral permit	Harvest or possession of allowable octocoral, other than allowable octocoral that is landed in Florida. Appropriate Florida state permits are required to land allowable octocoral in Florida
Commercial tuna categories:  General, Longline, Purse seine, Harpoon, Charter/headboat	Vessels must have one of these permits to sell Atlantic bluefin tuna, albacore, Atlantic bonito, bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna, or yellowfin tuna. Separate Atlantic bluefin quota and gear restrictions apply to each category. For further information contact the Atlantic tunas information line (888-872-8862) or NMFS HMS Management Division at 978-281-9260.
Swordfish vessel permit	Vessels must have a directed or incidental limited access permit for commercial harvest and sale of swordfish under quota.
Shark vessel permit	Vessels must have a directed or incidental limited access permit for harvest and sale of sharks listed in the management unit of the Atlantic Sharks Fishery management Plan under quota and in excess of bag limits.

## Other Requirements & Restrictions

- January 1–April 30 closure of “The Edges” 40 fathom contour, a 390 nautical square mile region northwest of Steamboat Lumps.  
Boundaries:  
NE = 28° 51'N, 85° 04'W  
SW = 28° 14'N, 84° 54'W  
SE = 28° 14'N, 84° 42'W
- Vessel monitoring systems are required onboard all vessels with federal commercial permits for Gulf reef fish, including charter vessels/headboats that also have a commercial reef fish permit.
- Entangling nets may not be used for directed harvest of reef fish.
- Reef fish taken under the recreational bag limit may not be sold.

## Coral/Shellfish/Other

### Corals and Coral Reefs

Allowable Octocorals	Quota: 50,000 colonies (Gulf and Atlantic)
Live Rock	Harvest or possession of wild live rock is prohibited. Harvest and possession of aquacultured live rock by permitted individuals.
Other Marine Life Organisms	Marine life organisms from the EEZ harvested or possessed by Florida residents or landed in Florida are subject to Florida’s Marine Life Rule. Contact Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission for more information 850-488-4676.

Species	Size Limit	Trip Limit	Quotas/Closed Seasons
<b>Shellfish</b>			
Stone Crab	Minimum 2 ¾” claw	None	Season closed 5/16–10/14
Spiny Lobster	Carapace more than 3” or tail more than 5 ½”. Divers must measure in water	None	Season closed 4/1– 8/5
Shrimp	None, but white shrimp taken in the EEZ and transported to Louisiana must comply with the minimum size limit of that state.	None	Royal red shrimp—392,000 lbs tail weight. Royal red shrimp season opens 1/1 and closes when quota is filled.

### Other Species

Red Drum	Illegal to harvest or possess in federal waters.
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## Measurement Guidelines

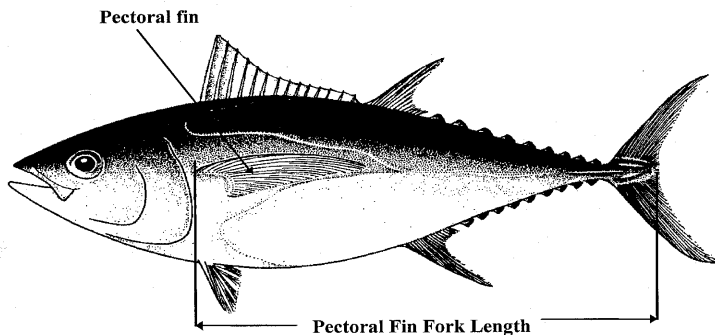
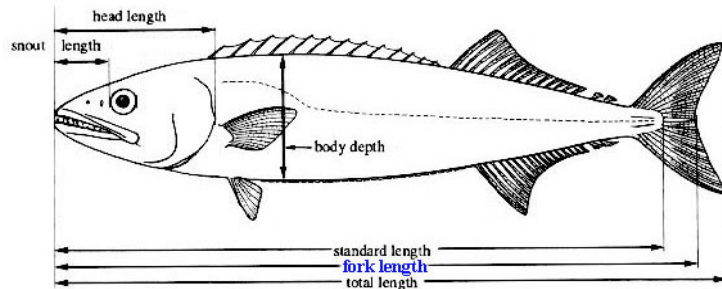
**Fork length:** the straight-line distance from the tip of the head (snout) to the rear center edge of the tail (caudal fin).

**Total length:** the straight-line distance from the tip of the snout to the tip of the tail (caudal fin), excluding any caudal filament, while the fish is lying on its side. The mouth of the fish may be closed and/or the tail may be squeezed together to give the greatest overall measurement.

**Dressed weight:** fish has been gutted and the head and fins removed, but is otherwise in whole condition.

**Curved fork length:** the tip of the upper jaw to fork of tail measured along the contour of the middle of the body.

**Carcass length:** the curved measure from posterior edge of gill opening to anterior portion of caudal keel.



## Commercial Permit Requirements










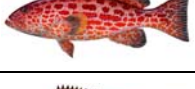


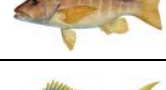



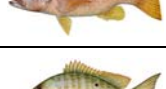







Commercial Permit Requirements: (Earned income qualification criteria apply to mackerel, reef fish, and shark permits.) Applications for permits may be obtained from National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue S., St. Petersburg, FL 33701, (telephone 877-376-4877), except for tuna permits, which may be obtained by calling 888-872-8862 or 978-281-9260.

Permit	Required for:
Spiny lobster federal vessel permit or Florida commercial harvester license and certificates	Florida commercial harvester license and certificates required for harvest or possession in excess of the bag limits in the EEZ off Florida or to land or sell in Florida. Federal vessel permit required for harvest or possession in excess of the bag limits in the EEZ other than off Florida or sale other than Florida.
Spiny lobster tail separation permit	Possession of a separated spiny lobster tail in or from the EEZ aboard a vessel. Also requires a spiny lobster federal vessel permit or Florida state license and certificates. See additional remarks on page 17.
Shrimp	Permit required for all vessels that intend to fish for shrimp in EEZ waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Permit moratorium in effect. See additional remarks on page 17.
Mackerel vessel permit	Harvest of king or Spanish mackerel under quota and in excess of the bag limits. Issuance of new king mackerel permits is under a moratorium, but existing permits are transferable. There is no moratorium on issuance of Spanish mackerel permits, but these permits are not transferable.
King mackerel gillnet endorsement	Harvest of king mackerel in the Florida west coast subzone using a gillnet. Also requires a mackerel vessel permit. <b>Permit moratorium, area restrictions, and restrictions on permit transfer in effect.</b>
Reef fish vessel permit	Harvest and sale of all reef fish listed in the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan under quota (where applicable) and in excess of the bag limits (where applicable), except goliath grouper and Nassau grouper (for which all harvest is prohibited). Issuance of new reef fish permits is under a moratorium. Existing permits are transferable.

To report federal fishing violations call the

24 hour toll-free hotline: 1-800-853-1964

## Identification Chart Artwork © Diane Rome Peebles

Red Snapper 	Black Grouper 
Vermilion Snapper 	Gag Grouper 
Lane Snapper 	Red Grouper 
Gray/Mangrove 	Yellowmouth 
Cubera 	Yellowfin 
Mahogany 	Scamp 
Schoolmaster 	Greater Amberjack 
Yellowtail Snapper 	Lesser Amberjack 
Dog Snapper 	Banded Rudderfish 
Mutton Snapper 	Cobia (ling) 
Blackfin 	Spanish Mackerel 
Silk Snapper 	King Mackerel 

2009-10

Abbreviated Commercial Fishing Regulations for Gulf of Mexico Federal Waters



### Special Pull-Out Section



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Web site: [www.gulfcouncil.org](http://www.gulfcouncil.org)

To report federal fishing violations call the

24 hour toll-free hotline: 1-800-853-1964

Species	Size Limit	Trip Limit	Quotas/Closed Seasons	Remarks
Red Snapper	13" TL	See remarks	2.55 MP	Commercial red snapper is managed under an IFQ program. Anyone commercially fishing for red snapper must possess IFQ allocation and follow established protocols.
Vermilion Snapper	10" TL	None	None	<p><b>**NOTICE**</b>                      An emergency rule is in effect that prohibits the use of bottom longline gear to harvest reef fish east of 85° 30'W longitude shoreward of 50 fathoms as long as the 2009 deep-water grouper &amp; tilefish quotas are unfilled. Once the quotas are filled, the use of bottom longline gear to harvest reef fish is prohibited in water of all depths east of 85° 30'W. This emergency rule will eventually be replaced by Reef Fish Amendment 31. Please check with the Gulf Council for updated information.</p>
Lane Snapper	8" TL			
Gray/Mangrove, Cubera, Mahogany, Schoolmaster, Yellowtail Snapper, Dog	12" TL			
Mutton Snapper	16" TL			
Blackfin, Silk, Queen and Wenchman	None			
Gag Grouper	24" TL	6,000 LB GW trip limit for all groupers—deepwater and shallow-water combined.	Quota: 7.48 MP gutted weight for all shallow-water groupers in aggregate. Gag quota for 2009—1.32 MP GW (included in the shallow-water grouper quota). A red grouper quota of 5.75 MP GW is included in the shallow-water grouper quota. Once 80% of either the gag or the red grouper quota is met, an incidental bycatch trip limit of 200 lbs applies to that species. Shallow-water grouper quota closure occurs when the sum of the gag and red grouper quota, plus a 0.41 MP allowance for other shallow-water grouper is reached. Seasonal closure of "The Edges" from 1/1 - 4/30. Deep-water grouper quota—1.02 MP GW, includes scamp after SWG quota is filled.	
Black Grouper	24" TL			
Red Grouper	18" TL			
Yellowfin	20" TL			
Scamp	16" TL			
Yellowmouth, Rock Hind, Red Hind	None			
Misty, Snowy, Yellowedge				
Speckled Hind, Warsaw	1 per vessel			
Hogfish	12" FL	None	None	
Gray Triggerfish	14" FL		93,000 lbs for 2009 and 106,000 lbs for 2010.	
Greater Amberjack	36" FL		0.503 MP quota. Commercial closure March through May.	
Lesser Amberjack, Banded Rudderfish	14" - 22" FL		None	
Stone Crab	Min 2 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> " claw	None	Season closed 5/16—10/14	
Spiny Lobster	Carapace more than 3" or tail more than 5 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> "	None	Season closed 4/1—8/5 Divers must measure in water.	
Cobia (ling)	33" FL	Daily bag and possession limit of 2 per person		
Spanish Mackerel	12" FL	None	Quota: 5,187 MP Gulf group. Season opens 4/1 and closes when quota is filled.	
King Mackerel	24" FL		Managed by zone—check with Council on closures.	