

GMFMC wants your news and views

The Gulf Council would like to hear from you! Please contact us regarding fishery questions, comments, or concerns you would like to see covered in the *Gulf Fishery News*. Anyone interested in submitting information, such as articles, editorials, or photographs pertaining to fishing or fisheries management are encouraged to do so. Submissions may be mailed to Charlene Ponce, Public Information Officer, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 2203 Lois Avenue, Suite 1100, Tampa, FL 33607. Materials can also be sent via fax to 813-348-1711, or e-mail; charlene.ponce@gulfcouncil.org.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council is responsible for the development and modification of fishery management plans (FMPs) that are designed to manage fishery resources in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Gulf of Mexico from state boundaries to the 200-mile limit.

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The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Protecting our marine resources

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Gulf Fishery News

Volume 27, Issue 4

October-November, 2005

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The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council *Protecting our marine resources*

Commercial grouper regulatory amendment passes, action on recreational amendment postponed

After hearing more than three hours of public testimony, the Gulf Council moved to separate the commercial grouper regulatory amendment from the recreational amendment, passing the commercial portion and postponing the recreational portion until its November meeting.

The Council also received recommendations from the commercial fishing industry regarding trip limits for red grouper. Those recommendations came after Council referred the commercial section of the amendment back to the industry for

review and comment. Members of the industry met and two separate recommendations resulted.

The first, submitted by the Southern Offshore Fishing Association (SOFA) recommended a 7,500 pound trip limit, with a reduction to 5,500 pounds once 75% of the quota is reached. SOFA also recommended a May 15–July 15 closure.

The Gulf Fisherman's Association recommended a 6,000 pound trip limit.

In final action, the Council adopted a management alternative that establishes

an aggregate deep-water grouper and shallow-water grouper commercial trip limit of 6,000 pounds gutted weight for both deep-water and shallow-water grouper combined. The trip limit applies only to those grouper whose quota has not been met.

The commercial regulatory amendment will be submitted to the Secretary of Commerce and is expected to be fully implemented in early 2006.

The reduced trip limit is intended to address derby

See Grouper, page 7

Judge renders decision on challenge to recreational grouper interim rule:

- Reduced aggregate bag limit from 5 to 3—**Overtuned**
- Reduced red grouper bag limit from 2 to 1 (included in aggregate) - **remains in effect**
- Recreational fishery closure for **red grouper only** from Nov. 1 through Dec. 31, 2005



Robin Riechers,
Chair



Corky Perret,
Vice Chair

New Council Chair and Vice-Chair elected

By a unanimous vote, the Gulf Council elected Robin Riechers as its new Chair, replacing outgoing Chair, Julie Morris. Council member Joe Hendrix, nominated Riechers, telling his colleagues that Riechers will be a great chair, "particularly considering a lot of the national issues we're dealing with."

Riechers is Director of

Science and Policy for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Coastal Fisheries Division. He has served on the council since 2000.

"The Council has a full agenda that includes a wide variety of fishery management issues, many of which are extremely controversial. I'm honored that my colleagues have the confidence

in me to help move us forward with our agenda," Riechers said.

William "Corky" Perret was named Council Vice-Chair and replaces Joe Hendrix. Perret is serving his 25th year on the Council and represents Mississippi. He is the director of Marine Fisheries for the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources in Biloxi.

Council sends hurricane relief requests to Congress

In his briefing to the Gulf Council October 5, 2005, Dr. William Hogarth, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NMFS, told Council members that the agency has hired translators, provided additional money for enforcement, and temporarily removed Turtle Excluder Device restrictions, among other things, in an attempt to help rebuild the fishery in the Gulf of Mexico.

He urged the Council to send a letter to Congress outlining a request for funding to help rebuild and reorganize the fishery.

“We have a tremendous problem in the gulf,” Hogarth said.

He suggested the Council include in their list a permit buyback program, funding for rebuilding of infrastructure damaged by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, as well as money for the restructuring

of some of the fisheries.

“I just ask that you look at the tools you have and look at where we’re going,” he said.

“We need to strengthen the fishery and strengthen people’s lives at the same time,” he added.

In response, the Council prepared a list of recommendations to Congress related to disaster relief of the fisheries, with the overall goals being the compassionate relief response to those affected; restoring infrastructure; addressing overcapacity and overfishing through voluntary buyouts and gear improvements; employing fishermen in clean-up and research efforts; providing employment training for fishermen leaving the fishery; and improving management tools to the fishery.

In a letter to Senators Thad

Cochran and Trent Lott, outgoing Chairman, Julie Morris, outlined the Council’s recommendations in her request for relief.

“Congressional funding of these management tools would be a tremendous boost for sustainable fishery management in the Gulf of Mexico,” Morris wrote.

Many of the requests complement current efforts to address overcapitalization and overfishing in several of the Gulf fisheries, while at the same time aid in the recovery of the social and economic impacts on both the Gulf of Mexico and the fishermen.

Complicating matters, however, are fears among the general public that anything harvested from the Gulf of Mexico is unsafe for consumption. Council member Corky Perret voiced concern over these fears saying “we

need to get the word out that it is safe to eat.”

Hogarth noted that there have been no federal closures. The only fishery closed to harvesters is the molluscan shellfish (oysters, clams, and mussels) beds in Louisiana and Mississippi, according to a report by the Congressional Research Service dated September 19, 2005.

Those are state closures due to the siltation and contamination related to Hurricane Katrina, and have, perhaps, contributed to the misconception that seafood from the Gulf of Mexico is unsafe.

“It’s just not true and it’s important for people to understand that. The situation is being closely monitored and safeguards are in place to protect the public from unsafe product—Gulf seafood is safe,” said Perret.

Reef Fish Amendment 18A adopted

Amendment 18A to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) is on its way to the Department of Commerce for implementation. The plan, under development since 1999 as part of Amendment 18, became 18A in 2004 and got its final blessing from the Council this month.

The Gulf Council developed Amendment 18A as a means to resolve several issues impacting the reef fish fishery. Chief among them are the issues associated with monitoring and enforcement of existing regulations.

The plan amendment will prohibit vessels from retaining reef fish caught under the recreational size and possession limits when commercial reef fish harvests are onboard the vessel. It also adjusts the maximum number of

crew members allowed onboard when a dually permitted vessel is taking a commercial reef fish trip in order to resolve a conflict with U.S. Coast Guard minimum crew size regulations. The use of reef fish for bait is also prohibited.

Perhaps most significant, though, is the requirement of vessel monitoring systems (VMS) onboard all commercially permitted reef fish vessels, including charter vessels with commercial reef fish permits. VMS units must be in operation 24/7. This measure aids enforcement of restricted areas.

Vessels fishing with fish traps under the fish trap phase-out program, however, are exempt from the VMS requirement.

The amendment also updates the framework procedure for setting total allowable catch, and requires vessels with commercial or for-hire reef fish vessel permits to comply with sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish release protocols.

Vessels must also possess a specific set of release gear, and adopt guidelines for the proper care of incidentally caught sawfish.

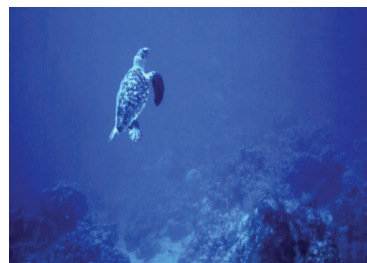


Photo by Cathy Readinger

Grouper

fishing, as well as prolong the fishing season and is part of an overall rebuilding plan established in 2004. The recreational grouper amendment remains under consideration while the Council deliberates several management alternatives.

The draft document includes preferred alternatives that would change bag and size limits; implement various vessel limits; restrict the catch of for-hire vessels to paying customers; prohibit captain and crew of for-hire vessels from keeping a bag limit of grouper while under charter; reduce the aggregate grouper bag limit; and a possible closed season.

Written comments will be accepted up until the final vote, which is scheduled for Wednesday, November 16, 2005 at 9:00 a.m. at the Ramada Plaza Beach Resort, Ambassador Room, Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

Comments can also be e-mailed to gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org, or mailed to: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 2203 N. Lois Ave., Ste. 1100, Tampa, FL 33607.

In other action, the Council tabled a motion to begin work on a plan amendment that would consider a reallocation of the total allowable catch for red grouper. The current distribution between commercial and recreational is 81% and 19% respectively. That discussion is expected to resume during the November Council meeting.

NRC Committee reviewing recreational fishing survey

The National Research Council (NRC) met in Tampa October 27, 2005, to hear public comment on the current methods used to survey recreational catches in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey, or MRFSS, is the current survey tool used to evaluate the sustainability of recreational fisheries and the effectiveness of regulations.

According to the NRC Committee web site, “the study will consider the match or mismatch between options for collecting recreational fisheries data and alternative approaches for managing recreational fisheries.”

The NRC is conducting a critical review of current survey methods and will examine other representative survey types.

As part of its review, the NRC will also consider:

- the suitability for monitoring different types of fishing (e.g., charter boats vs. private boats; offshore vs. near shore species, fisheries with temporally or spatially

restricted fishing seasons)

- the adequacy for providing the quality of information needed to support various approaches for managing recreational fisheries, with reference to how the management approach might be restricted by the type of survey method, stratification scheme, and sample size required. For example, is the management time frame appropriate for the resolution provided by the survey? How would the survey design need to be modified to match the requirements of the management approach?

The committee will make recommendations regarding possible improvements to current surveys and/or possible implementation of alternative methods, including setting priorities for revising monitoring methods that will yield the greatest improvements in effort and catch per unit effort estimates.

To receive updates on this initiative, E-mail Phil Long at plong@nas.edu with “add to recreational fishing contact list” in the subject line.

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**NOAA GCEL SOUTHEAST
NOVA
QUARTERLY REPORT
July 1, 2005 through September 30, 2005**

Case No.	Respondent's Name	Vessel Name	Area	LE Unit	Case Description	NOVA * Amount	NOPF** Amount	NOPS*** Duration
SE023013FM	Philip Clark Two Pirates, Inc.	PIRATE'S SON	GOM	USCG	bottom trawling in the Florida Middle grounds	\$12,000.00		30 days
SE023022FM	William Danielson Vilco 18, Inc.	VILCO 18	GOM	USCG	bottom trawling in the Florida Middle grounds	\$12,000.00		30 days
SE040213FM	Robert Lanier	N/A	GOM	FFWCC NMFS	possess stone crab traps during closure	\$4,500.00		
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SE043078FM	David L. Lee Roy F. Overby Michael R. Overby	M16541BJ	GOM	NMFS MDMR	possess undersize red snapper disposed of after approach by enforcement	\$2,500.00		
SE043090FM	John T. Reeves	AL3624KR	GOM	MDMR NMFS	possess undersized red snapper	\$1,000.00		
SE043091FM	Glenn Moran	CAPT. JERRY	GOM	MDMR NMFS	1) possess undersized red snapper and gag grouper 2) exceed bag limit (red snapper) 3) fail to maintain fish intact through offloading	1) \$1,000.00 2) \$1,000.00 3) \$1,000.00		
SE050198FM	Gloria Cruz, Inc. Alfredo Guzman Martinez	GLORIA CRUZ	GOM	USCG	1) possess limited-harvest species in excess of limitation (cobie) 2) possess undersize shark	1) \$1,500.00 2) \$1,500.00		

* NOVA = Notice of Violation and Assessment
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Scoping meetings for the Joint Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp Amendment 14 postponed

The joint Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp Amendment 14 initiated by the Gulf Council in order to address bycatch in the shrimp trawl fishery and adjustments to the red snapper rebuilding plan is currently under development.

Scoping meetings originally scheduled for this month have been postponed while Council staff continue to refine the scoping document. Once the document is approved by Council, scoping meetings will be rescheduled to solicit public comment on possible ways to reduce bycatch in the directed reef fish fishery, as well as ways to further reduce bycatch in the shrimp fishery, particularly of red snapper.

The amendment will also adjust the red snapper total allowable catch (TAC) and possibly change red snapper fishing regulations, including possible changes to size limits and closed seasons. These changes are in response to a red snapper stock assessment that was completed in 2005 and

are intended to maintain the rebuilding plan's targets of ending overfishing by 2010 and rebuilding the red snapper stock to a recovered status by 2032.

The scoping document will outline proposed actions to reduce bycatch in both of those fisheries, including alternatives to reduce effort in the penaeid shrimp fishery.

Other issues included in the document for consideration will be actions affecting the shrimp fishery that may not have direct effects on bycatch, but could have bycatch implications, such as vessel monitoring systems and limited transferability of shrimp vessel permits.

The Council will review the draft scoping document during its next meeting, which is scheduled for November 14-17, in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida. For more information on this or other issue, please contact the Council at 813-348-1630, or visit our web site at <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>.

Red Snapper IFQ moving forward

The Gulf Council adopted the public hearing document for the Red Snapper Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program during its October council meeting. The council will hold public hearings this month, and Council will take final action on the amendment at its November 14-17, 2005. A referendum for commercial reef fish permit holders is expected by the end of the year.

If approved by qualified voters, the IFQ program will become effective some time in 2006.

Some Council members expressed concern over whether those fishermen displaced by the hurricanes have the ability to receive mail, which could hinder their participation in the referendum.

Roy Crabtree, NMFS, told his colleagues on the Council

that efforts are currently underway to locate all permit holders to ensure the highest rate of participation possible.

"Certified letters have been mailed to all permit holders," said Crabtree.

Efforts to obtain alternate mailing addresses for returned letters are planned.

Copies of the public hearing document, which outlines preferred alternatives selected by the Council, are currently available. Preferred alternatives include: program duration; ownership caps; transfer restrictions on IFQ share certificates and allocations; eligibility requirements; adjustments in commercial quota; and the use of Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS), among other program details.

Under an IFQ program, fishermen are allocated

percentages of a total allowable catch (TAC), and quota holders will possess some of the privileges of property rights, but not others. For example, shareholders could decide when and how to take their share of the quota, but previous landings will control the amount of individual quota allocated. They can also purchase or lease quota shares from other holders.

IFQ programs are designed to reduce overcapacity in the commercial fishery, lengthen the fishing season, lower operating costs by giving vessel owners more flexibility, improve market conditions, and increased safety at sea.

In some cases IFQ programs have increased product quality by improving fishing and handling methods. They have also



NOAA Photo Credit
Shrimp, snapper, grouper and stone crab fishing boats.

been known to reduce bycatch by allowing fishermen greater flexibility in operations.

It is hoped that harvest privileges provided by the program will give fishermen a long-term interest in the health and productivity of the fishery, creating an incentive for conservation, thereby ending overfishing and overcapitalization.

Copies of the draft and final attachments are available from the Council. Please call 813-348-1630, or visit <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>.

COMMITTEE SCHEDULE
GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
RAMADA PLAZA BEACH RESORT
AMBASSADOR ROOM
FORT WALTON BEACH, FLORIDA
NOVEMBER 14-15, 2005

AP Selection Committee (CLOSED SESSION) (Tab D)*
 Appointment of Ad Hoc Grouper IFQ AP

SEDAR Committee (Tab H)*
 Appointment of Persons for SEDAR 10 (gag grouper)

Sunday, November 13, 2005
 New Council Member Orientation Session
 (3:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

Monday, November 14, 2005

8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

Budget/Personnel Committee (Tab I)
 • FMLA

10:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.
 NOAA Fishery Capacity Program (Terry) (Tab E)

10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon
 Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum Committee (Tab J)
 • Aquaculture Amendment Alternatives

1:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
 Reef Fish Management Committee (Tab B)

- Reef Fish Amendment 26 (IFQ for red snapper)
 - Public Hearing Summaries
 - Public Letters
 - AHRS AP Recommendations - Ken Roberts
 - SSC Recommendations - Walter Keithly
 - Committee Recommendations

- Draft Red Grouper Regulatory Amendment (for Recreational Sector)
- Report on Industry Business Plan for Longline Buy-Back Program (Spaeth)

-recess-

¹Persons wishing to testify must turn in a registration card before the beginning of the public testimony period.

²Persons wishing Council members to have copies of written testimony or information should provide 30 copies to staff for distribution to members. All written information shall include a statement of the source and date of such information. Oral or written statements shall include a brief description of the background and interests of the person testifying.

* Meetings Held Previously via Conference Call
 ** Council Discussion of Tabled Motion on SOPPs

COUNCIL AGENDA
GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
RAMADA PLAZA BEACH RESORT
AMBASSADOR ROOM
FORT WALTON BEACH, FLORIDA
NOVEMBER 16-17, 2005

Wednesday November 16, 2005

- I. Call to Order and Introductions - Chair (8:30 a.m. - 8:35 a.m.)
 - II. Adoption of Agenda - Chair (8:35 a.m. - 8:40 a.m.)
 - III. Approval of Minutes (Tab A) - Chair (8:40 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.)
- Appointment of Committees (Tab I) - Riechers (8:45 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.)
- V. Public Testimony ^{1 2} - Chair
 - a. Reef Fish Amendment 26 (Red Snapper IFQ)
 - b. Red Grouper Regulatory Amendment
 - c. Exempted Fishing Permits (if any) (9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.)
 - VI. Committee Reports
 - a. Reef Fish Management (Tab B) - Minton (1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.)
 - b. Joint Reef Fish/Shrimp Management (Tab C) Minton/Perret (3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.)
 - c. AP Selection (CLOSED SESSION) (Tab D) - Horn (5:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.)
 - d. SEDAR Committee (CLOSED SESSION)(Tab H) - Riechers (5:30 p.m. - 5:45 p.m.)

Thursday, November 17, 2005

- VI. Committee Reports (continued)
 - c. AP Selection (Tab D)* - Horn (8:30 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.)
 - d. SEDAR Committee (Tab H)* - (8:45 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.) Riechers
 - e. Budget/Personnel (Tab L) - K. Williams (9:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.)
 - f. Sustainable Fisheries/Ecosystem (Tab F) - Riechers (9:30 a.m. - 9:45 a.m.)
 - g. Law Enforcement (Tab G) - B. Walker (9:45 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.)
 - h. Administrative Policy Committee (Tab M)** - Hendrix (10:00 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.)
 - i. Joint Reef Fish/Mackerel/Red Drum (Tab H) - Minton/Fischer/Foote (10:45 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.)
- VIII. Council Chairs Meeting - Riechers/Perret (11:00 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.)
- IX. ICCAT Advisory Committee - B. Walker (11:15 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.)
- IX. Enforcement Reports - Kiesler/Rogers/McKinney (11:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.)
- IX. Regional Administrator's Report - Crabtree (11:45 a.m. - 12:00 noon)
- X. Director's Reports (12:00 noon - 12:30 p.m.)
- XI. Other Business - Chair (12:30 p.m. - 12:45 p.m.)

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