



Reef Fish Amendment 28 Red Snapper Allocation and Recreational Accountability Measures

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Photos courtesy of: Kathy Hoak and Mike Jennings.

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What is a Public Hearing?

A public hearing gives you an opportunity to comment on a fishery management plan or amendment that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is developing. Public hearings are conducted after the Council has selected a preferred alternative for each proposed action, and comments should focus on possible benefits and drawbacks of the alternatives contained in each action. Suggestions, issues, and concerns expressed during the public hearings will be presented to the Council for review and consideration before final action is taken.

How does a public hearing affect fisheries management?

Comments provided during the public hearing process are reported to the full Council prior to final action. Your input is considered as the Council deliberates and chooses the most appropriate management measures to address the issue(s) at hand.

How else can I get involved?

There are many ways you can help the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council identify fishery management needs and develop reasonable management alternatives, each dependent on how actively involved you want to become. The first step to becoming involved is to educate yourself about the management process by visiting our website at www.gulfcouncil.org, signing up to receive our communications, and contacting Council members and staff to discuss management. You can attend meetings, serve on panels and committees that advise the Council on fishery issues, and even apply to become a Council member.

Introduction

Amendment 28 examines the reallocation of red snapper resources between the commercial and recreational sectors to increase the net benefits from red snapper fishing and increase the stability of the red snapper component of the reef fish fishery while achieving optimum yield. The amendment also aims to consider buffers and payback provisions as additional recreational accountability measures for the recreational red snapper sector that will support management efforts to maintain landings within the recreational quota and mitigate quota overages should they occur.

Allocation

The current allocation of Gulf of Mexico red snapper, which is 51% commercial and 49% recreational, was established in 1990 through Reef Fish Amendment 1. This allocation was based on the historical average of red snapper landings by sector from 1979 through 1987.

The red snapper stock in the Gulf of Mexico has been under a rebuilding plan since 1997, and in 2012, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) declared that overfishing of the stock had ended. Although red snapper are not undergoing overfishing, the red snapper stock is considered overfished and is under a stock rebuilding plan. Therefore, constraining recreational landings within the recreational quota and mitigating quota overages will aid in the stock recovery.

Since 2007, the recreational red snapper season has become shorter and shorter, with an overharvest every year except 2010, the year of the BP oil spill (Figures 1 and 2). The commercial sector, which has operated under an Individual Fishing Quota program since 2007, has the potential for a year-round season and has consistently harvested below its quota (Figure 2).



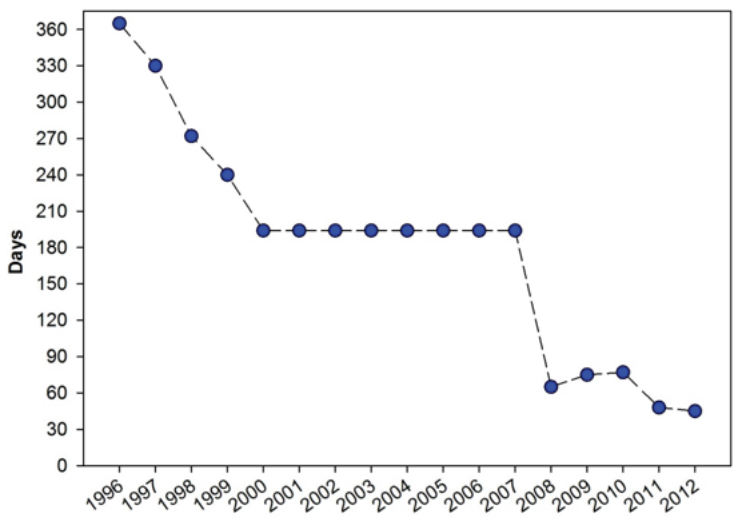


Figure 1. Season length (days) that the Gulf of Mexico recreational red snapper season was open from 1996 through 2012.

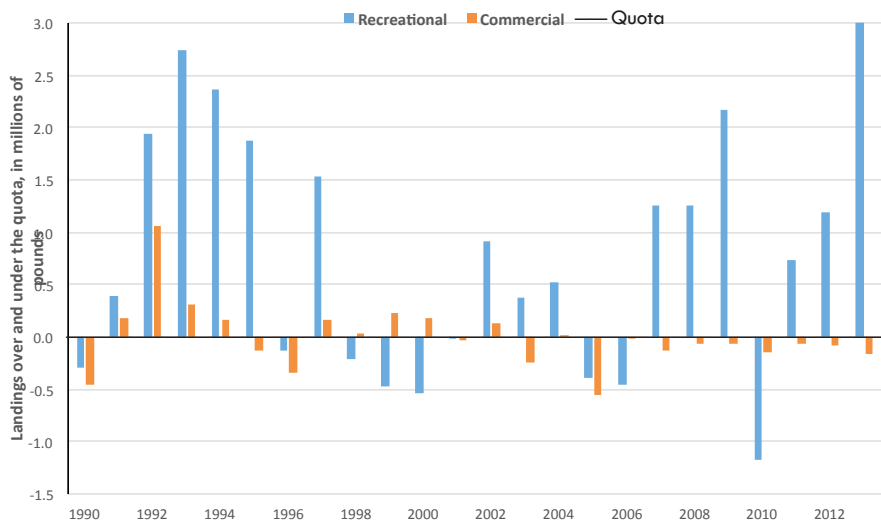


Figure 2. Differences between annual red snapper landings and quotas by sector, 1990 through 2012. Positive values indicate landings are greater than the quota; negative values indicate landings are less than the quota.

To provide an historical perspective of landings, Table 1 shows the recreational and commercial harvests in millions of pounds and as a percent of the total landings from 1986 to 2012.

Table 1. Recreational and commercial red snapper landings, in million pounds whole weight and in percent of the total landings.

	Recreational		Commercial	
	Pounds	Percent	Pounds	Percent
1986	2.77	42.81	3.7	57.19
1987	1.814	37.15	3.069	62.85
1988	2.568	39.34	3.96	60.66
1989	2.656	46.16	3.098	53.84
1990	1.614	37.85	2.65	62.15
1991	2.358	51.59	2.213	48.41
1992	3.899	55.66	3.106	44.34
1993	5.687	62.76	3.374	37.24
1994	5.299	62.19	3.222	37.81
1995	4.814	62.13	2.934	37.87
1996	4.346	50.19	4.313	49.81
1997	6.008	55.54	4.81	44.46
1998	4.258	47.64	4.68	52.36
1999	3.999	45.06	4.876	54.94
2000	3.932	44.84	4.837	55.16
2001	4.468	49.14	4.625	50.86
2002	5.383	52.97	4.779	47.03
2003	4.847	52.37	4.409	47.63
2004	4.996	51.79	4.651	48.21
2005	4.084	49.93	4.096	50.07
2006	4.021	46.38	4.649	53.62
2007	4.44	58.24	3.183	41.76
2008	3.712	59.91	2.484	40.09
2009	4.625	65.06	2.484	34.94
2010	2.239	39.76	3.392	60.24
2011	4.602	56.15	3.594	43.85
2012	5.146	56.04	4.036	43.96
2013	9.541	63.43	5.449	36.57

Source: NMFS SERO

Accountability Measures

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires the Council to set **annual catch limits** and **accountability measures** to end and prevent overfishing. For red snapper, the existing commercial and recreational quotas are the same as the **annual catch limits**. The individual fishing quota program for the commercial sector and an in-season closure for the recreational sector are the established red snapper **accountability measures**.

In September 2013, a lawsuit was filed in federal court challenging the 2013 recreational red snapper quotas and fishing season. In March 2014, the Court found that NMFS failed to require adequate accountability measures to prohibit the retention of fish after the recreational quota had been caught. In other words, the recreational in-season closure accountability measure is not working.

In response to the court ruling, the Council added recreational accountability measure actions, including buffers and quota overage adjustments to Amendment 28 as potential ways to improve red snapper management and reduce the probability of exceeding the recreational quota.



Summary of Actions

Action 1. Allocation of Red Snapper

In recent years, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has expressed its intent to evaluate and possibly adjust the allocation of red snapper between the commercial and recreational sectors. Amendment 28 aims to reallocate red snapper resources between the commercial and recreational sectors to increase the net benefits from red snapper fishing and increase the stability of the red snapper component of the reef fish fishery, particularly the recreational sector that has experienced shorter and shorter seasons. The resulting allocation must distribute benefits expected from red snapper resources in a fair and equitable manner.

Alternative 1: No action. Maintain the allocation set in Amendment 1 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan. The red snapper allocations remain at 51% commercial and 49% recreational. Based on a red snapper quota of 11 million pounds, resulting allocations to the commercial and recreational sectors are 5.610 mp and 5.390 mp, respectively.

Reallocation of Quota

Alternative 2: Increase the recreational sector's allocation by **3 percent**; allocate 48% of the red snapper quota to the commercial sector and 52% of the quota to the recreational sector.

Alternative 3: Increase the recreational sector's allocation by **5 percent**; allocate 46% of the red snapper quota to the commercial sector and 54% of the quota to the recreational sector.

Alternative 4: Increase the recreational sector's allocation by **10 percent**; allocate 41% of the red snapper quota to the commercial sector and 59% of the quota to the recreational sector.

Allocation of Quota Increases

Preferred Alternative 5: If the red snapper quota is less than or equal to 9.12 mp, maintain the commercial and recreational red snapper allocations at 51% and 49% of the red snapper quota, respectively. If the red snapper quota is greater than 9.12 mp, allocate 75% of the amount in excess of 9.12 mp to the recreational sector and 25% to the commercial sector. Based on a red snapper quota of 11 mp, resulting allocations to the commercial and recreational sectors are 5.121 mp and 5.879 mp, respectively.

Alternative 6: If the red snapper quota is less than or equal to 9.12 mp, maintain the commercial and recreational red snapper allocations at 51% and 49% of the red snapper quota, respectively. If the red snapper quota is greater than 9.12 mp, allocate 100% of the amount in excess of 9.12 mp to the recreational sector. Based on a red snapper quota of 11 mp, resulting allocations to the commercial and recreational sectors are 4.651 mp and 6.249 mp, respectively.

Alternative 7: If the red snapper quota is less than or equal to 10 mp, maintain the commercial and recreational red snapper allocations at 51% and 49% of the red snapper quota, respectively. If the red snapper quota is greater than 10 mp, allocate 75% of the amount in excess of 10 mp to the recreational sector and 25% to the commercial sector. Based on a red snapper quota of 11 mp, resulting allocations to the commercial and recreational sectors are 5.35 mp and 5.65 mp, respectively.

Action 2. Recreational Accountability Measures

Buffers - The Council is considering an **annual catch target** (ACT) to establish a buffer to help prevent quota overages. An ACT would be set below the recreational quota, and the red snapper fishing season length would be based on the ACT rather than the quota.

Overage adjustments - These are triggered only if the recreational quota is exceeded in a given year. During the following year, the quota and annual catch target would be adjusted downwards to limit any effects the overage might have on stock rebuilding.

Action 2.1 Establish an annual catch target (ACT). The recreational season length would be calculated based on the ACT.

Alternative 1: No action. Do not establish an ACT.

Alternative 2: Establish an ACT using a 20% buffer to the recreational quota based on the ACL/ACT control rule established in the Generic ACL/AM amendment.

Alternative 3: Establish an ACT using a 30% buffer to the recreational quota based on the 2012 overage.

Alternative 4: Establish an ACT using a 40% buffer to the recreational quota based on the average percent overage for 2011-2013.

Alternative 5: Establish an ACT using a 60% buffer to the recreational quota based on the 2013 overage.

Action 2.2 Recreational Overage Quota Adjustments

Alternative 1. No action. Do not establish payback provisions for quota overages.

Alternative 2. While red snapper is under a rebuilding plan, if the recreational red snapper quota is exceeded, deduct the full amount of the overage from the recreational quota in the following season. The recreational ACT will be adjusted to reflect this reduction in quota and existing buffers.

Alternative 3. While red snapper is under a rebuilding plan, if the recreational red snapper quota is exceeded, deduct the full amount of the overage from the recreational quota in the following season. The recreational ACT will be adjusted to reflect this reduction in quota and existing buffers. To reduce the likelihood of recurring overages, the ACT will be further decreased in the following season by:

Option a- 100% of the quota overage

Option b- 50% of the quota overage

Option c- 30% of the quota overage

Issues

Annual catch targets

How much of a buffer is needed between the recreational quota (ACL) and recreational annual catch target?

National Standard 1 (NS1) Guidelines state that if catch exceeds the annual catch limit for a given stock more than once in the last four years, the system of annual catch limits and accountability measures should be re-evaluated, and modified if necessary, to improve its performance and effectiveness. Establishing an annual catch target (buffer) that is set below the quota (ACL) reduces the probability that the quota will be exceeded. The greater the buffer, the lower the probability.

Overage adjustments

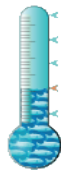
If the quota is exceeded, should there be an overage adjustment in the following year and how much should that adjustment be?

NS1 Guidelines also state that “For stocks and stock complexes in rebuilding plans, the accountability measures should include overage adjustments that reduce the annual catch limits in the next fishing year by the full amount of the overages, unless the best scientific information available shows that a reduced overage adjustment, or no adjustment, is needed to mitigate the effects of the overages.”

Because red snapper are overfished and in a rebuilding plan, these regulations indicate the adjustment to the annual catch limit should be at least the full amount of the overage.

The draft of Amendment 28 that was reviewed by the Council during its April 2014 meeting can be found [here](#).

To comment, please visit: <http://bit.ly/MS14U0>, or click on the thermometer icon on our home page at www.gulfcouncil.org.





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