



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Managing Fishery Resources in the U.S. Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico

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Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council October Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in New Orleans, Louisiana, October 24 - 28, 2011, to discuss numerous fishery issues, including allocation issues, Reef Fish Amendment 35 for Greater Amberjack, and future fall season options for red snapper. During the weeklong meeting, the Council took the following actions:

Grouper Allocation – Reef Fish Amendment 28

The Council began discussions on setting allocations for gag, red grouper, and black grouper. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center will conduct analyses of existing allocations and alternatives for reallocation and present those analyses to the Council during its April meeting in Corpus Christi, Texas. The Council will then determine whether to move forward with a scoping document to address grouper allocation issues.

Allocation is the division of the total allowable catch for each fish stock between commercial and recreational fishing sectors. The Council set temporary allocations through Reef Fish Amendment 30B that give each sector a percentage of the Total Allowable Catch for gag and red grouper. Current allocations for red grouper are 76% commercial and 24% recreational; gag allocations are 39% commercial and 61% recreational. The Generic Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures amendment apportioned black grouper between the Gulf and South Atlantic and established a 73% commercial and 27% recreational allocation for the Gulf portion.

Greater Amberjack – Reef Fish Amendment 35

The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee met recently and reaffirmed its earlier finding that the greater amberjack stock continues to be overfished and undergoing overfishing, and that adjustments to the catch levels are necessary. As a result, the Council must consider options to adjust the current Annual Catch Limit so that it does not exceed the new Acceptable Biological Catch. The Council has chosen preferred alternatives for the following actions:

1. Adjust Annual Catch limits based on the Scientific and Statistical Committee recommendations. *The Council selected a preferred alternative that would modify the rebuilding plan for greater amberjack and sets the ACL=ABC=1,780,000 pounds whole weight and establishes an ACT = 1,539,000 pounds whole weight.*
2. Consider changing the fixed recreational season (currently June and July); adjusting the minimum size limit, and exploring proportional bag limits. *The Council took proportional bag limits off the table and chose a preferred alternative that would retain both the 30" size limit and the June – July closed season.*
3. Consider adding trip limits to the commercial sector and possibly modify the fixed closed season. *The Council chose a preferred alternative that would maintain the March – May closed season and add a commercial trip limit of 2,000 pounds whole weight.*

The Council is expected to take final action on this amendment during its January/February regular meeting. Public hearings will be held around the Gulf in January 2012. Details will be posted at www.gulfcouncil.org. If you wish to submit comments, please visit www.gulfcouncil.org/council_meetings/RF35GAJ.php.

Red Snapper

Fall Season Options and 2012 Total Allowable Catch

The Council reviewed an options paper that provides more red snapper season management options and options that may increase the 2012 Total Allowable Catch. The first action in the amendment considers a change to the fixed recreational red snapper closed season that runs from October through December (the recreational season has closed earlier than the fixed closed season for the past 3 years because NOAA Fisheries Service must initiate a closure when the quota is met or projected to be met). The Council chose an action to remove the fixed closure.

The amendment also includes an action to increase the red snapper catch limits in 2012. The Council is awaiting a review by its Science Committee before considering appropriate catch levels.

Finally, the amendment originally looked at alternatives to allow weekend only or weekday only periods during the regular recreational season or a supplemental season if the season is reopened. These alternatives were moved into a separate amendment so as not to slow down the change in the red snapper Annual Catch Limit.

Restrict Individual Fishing Quota Transfer – Reef Fish Amendment 36

When the red snapper Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program was established it included a provision that would allow any U.S. citizen or permanent resident alien to buy and sell shares beginning in 2012. The Council chose a preferred alternative that will continue to limit the transfer of red snapper IFQ shares and allocation to commercial reef fish permit holders. Public hearings will be held around the Gulf sometime next year.

The Council also requested NOAA Fisheries Service establish a control date of January 1, 2012, to notify red snapper shareholders that the Council is contemplating a “use it or lose it” provision, so if you own red snapper shares after January 1, 2012, and you are not using them you may be at risk of losing them.

Five-Year Individual Fishing Quota Review

The commercial Individual Fishing Quota program for red snapper was implemented in 2007. Recently, an advisory panel was convened to aid the Council in conducting a five-year review of that program. The Council began discussing the development of an amendment that will address potential changes to the red snapper IFQ program.

Spiny Lobster – Amendment 11

To minimize impacts the spiny lobster fishery has on endangered sea turtles, smalltooth sawfish, and elkhorn and staghorn corals, the Council is drafting an amendment that considers:

1. Creating closed areas to reduce the destruction of corals – the Council chose an alternative to create new closed areas in the EEZ off Florida consisting of identified *Acropora* colonies with straight-line boundaries. In the closed areas, spiny lobster trapping would be prohibited. There is also an alternative that would prohibit all fishing in the closed areas. The Council removed an alternative that creates closed areas consisting of identified *Acropora* colonies with a 500 ft. buffer surrounding each colony.
2. Using trap line marking requirements to reduce species interactions with gear – the Council chose an alternative that takes no action on this item.

The Council approved taking this amendment to public hearings. Dates and locations will be announced soon.

Crew Size and Income – Reef Fish Amendment 34

The Council reviewed a public hearing draft and chose preferred alternatives that:

1. Eliminate the income requirement for Gulf Commercial Reef Fish Permits
2. Increase the maximum crew size from three to four for dual-permitted vessels

The Council plans to take final action on Amendment 34 during its January/February meeting in Mobile, Alabama. Comments can be submitted online at http://www.gulfcouncil.org/council_meetings/comment_forms/crewsizes-income.php.

Sector Separation

The Council discussed issues relative to possible management scenarios that would separate the recreational sector into sub-sectors. The Council asked staff to develop a scoping document on sector separation and present it to the Council during the April 2012 Council meeting in Corpus Christi, Texas. The draft document will consider alternatives for allocation decisions and how those decisions translate into Annual Catch Limits and Annual Catch Targets.

Vermillion Snapper

The latest vermilion snapper stock assessment found that the stock is neither overfished nor undergoing overfishing. As a result, the Council is preparing a framework action that would increase the 3.42 million pound whole weight vermilion snapper catch limit that was proposed in the Generic Annual Catch Limits/Accountability Measures Amendment.

Goliath Grouper Panel

The Council will establish a joint ad hoc committee with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to explore approaches to move the goliath grouper fishery beyond the moratorium and collect information to support an informative assessment that will allow determination of stock status and possible recovery.