



Gag Grouper, Red Grouper, Vermilion Snapper Management
Review and Discussion
Report Date: December 21, 2007
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management



This is a review and discussion of management alternatives for South Atlantic gag grouper and vermilion snapper, and Gulf of Mexico gag and red groupers. These management alternatives are being considered by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC). The Gulf Council will meet January 29-February 1, 2008, and will be developing more specific alternatives for gag grouper and red grouper. This document will be updated following that meeting.

Authors: Mark Robson, William Teehan

Vermilion Snapper



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Allocation Alternative (Currently no allocation)

- 68% commercial and 32% recreational
- Council Preferred Alternative



Staff recommends supporting this alternative



Vermilion Snapper (SAFMC)- Regulatory changes are under development that would significantly restrict fishing for vermilion snapper in the South Atlantic. A public hearing document is under preparation and is scheduled to be approved for public review at the March 2008 meeting. However the amount of harvest reduction needed is not certain because of data deficiencies in the last stock assessment. An updated assessment has been ordered and will be available in late 2008, in time to modify any management recommendations. The Council must proceed with proposed regulatory options now in order to address federal requirements to end overfishing within one year. It is very likely that harvest must be reduced by more than 50%.

Alternatives are being developed to establish management benchmarks for allowable harvest and minimum population.

Currently there is no established allocation. The Council selected a preferred allocation of 68% commercial and 32% recreational harvest. The allocation is considered interim and is based on average landings from 1986 to 2005. Different ranges of years do not significantly change this ratio.

Staff recommends supporting this alternative.

Vermilion Snapper



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Harvest Reduction



- Establish a commercial quota
- Recreational Measures to reduce harvest 50-70%
 - Lower bag limit from 10 fish
 - Raise size limit from 12 inches
 - Implement closed seasons as needed

Staff recommends implementing incremental recreational restrictions



Vermilion Snapper (SAFMC) cont'd- The Council approved development of management alternatives that would combine size and bag limit changes and possible seasonal closures to reach a harvest reduction target of about 65 percent.

Staff Recommendation: The Council is scheduled to review alternatives, select a preferred management alternative, and approve a public hearing document at the March 2008 meeting. Staff recommends supporting the proposed allocation and taking an incremental approach to recreational restrictions as follows:

- 1) Lower bag limits
- 2) Raise size limits
- 3) Implement seasonal closures

Gag Grouper

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council



Allocation Alternative (Currently no allocation)

- 51% commercial and 49% recreational
- Council Preferred Alternative

Staff recommends supporting this alternative



Gag Grouper (GMFMC)- Regulatory changes are under development that would significantly restrict fishing for gag grouper in the South Atlantic. A public hearing document is under preparation and is scheduled to be approved for public review at the March 2008 meeting. The latest assessment for gag grouper indicates that harvest must be reduced by 37% to end excessive fishing pressure (overfishing).

The Council selected a preferred allocation of 51% commercial and 49% recreational harvest. The allocation is considered interim and is based on average landings from 1999-2006. These years take into account regulatory changes put into effect in 1999 that tended to lower the relative amount of commercial harvest. Staff recommends supporting this alternative.

Gag Grouper

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council



Harvest Reduction

- Establish a regional commercial quota
- Establish a spawning season closure for all harvest
 - January through April (most likely scenario)
- Recreational bag limit reduction
 - 1 gag or black grouper out of an aggregate bag limit of 3 shallow-water groupers
 - Other bag limit combinations to be evaluated

Staff recommends supporting this alternative



Gag grouper (SAFMC) cont'd– Alternatives are being developed to establish management benchmarks for allowable harvest and minimum population.

Management measures are being developed for a public hearing document. These include:

- Establishing regional commercial quotas to more evenly distribute catches.
- Establishing a spawning season closure for both recreational and commercial harvest. The length of the closure is dependent on other management restrictions that may be approved, but is likely to be from January through April.
- Restrict recreational harvest by combining a seasonal closure with a reduction of the bag limit. The most likely alternative is a limit of 1 gag or black grouper in an aggregate bag limit of 3 shallow-water groupers (the current bag limit is 2 gag or black groupers in the aggregate bag limit of 5 fish).

Staff Recommendation: The Council is scheduled to approve management alternatives for public review at the March 2008 meeting. Staff recommends support for the preferred allocation, and concurs that commercial and recreational harvest restrictions are needed to properly manage this fishery. Staff recommends taking an incremental approach to recreational restrictions as follows:

- 1) Lower bag limits
- 2) Raise size limits
- 3) Implement seasonal closures

Gag Grouper

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council



- Set gag grouper total allowable catch
 - 2008 = 3.13 mp
 - 2009 = 3.38 mp
 - 2010 = 3.62 mp
 - 2011 = 3.82 mp
 - 2012 = 3.99 mp
 - 2013 = 4.13 mp



Gag grouper (GMFMC)– The Council will continue to develop the amendment by reviewing an options paper that will address total allowable catch (TAC) and other management measures aimed at ending overfishing for gag grouper. Additional protected areas, similar to the Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps marine reserves, may be considered to provide additional protection for spawning gag grouper and other reef fish. The Council selected several preferred alternatives for the public hearing document.

The preferred alternative for gag grouper is to set TAC on a yearly basis during 2008 through 2012 at 3.13 million pounds (mp) in 2008, 3.38 mp in 2009, 3.62 mp in 2010, 3.82 mp in 2011, 3.99 mp in 2012, and 4.13 mp in 2013 (and thereafter unless modified by a subsequent amendment).

Red Grouper



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

- Set red grouper total allowable catch
– 7.57 mp



Red grouper (GMFMC)– For red grouper, the TAC may be increased since the most recent stock assessment shows a larger stock size. The Council selected several preferred alternatives for the public hearing document.

The preferred alternative for red grouper is to set TAC at 7.57 mp.

Gag and Red Grouper



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

- Did not select a preferred alternative for gag and red grouper allocation
- Move accountability measures to a new generic amendment that addresses allowable catch limits and accountability measures



Gag and Red Grouper (GMFMC)- The Council voted not to select a preferred allocation alternative, instead recommending that the allocation and accountability measure issues be folded into an amendment that would address allocation for greater amberjack, gray triggerfish, gag grouper, red grouper, and red snapper.

Gag and Red Grouper

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council



- Shallow water grouper commercial quotas
- Commercial quota closure mechanisms
- 3-fish recreational aggregate bag limit
- Removing the minimum size for commercial and recreational shallow water groupers
- All federally permitted reef fish vessels must comply with stricter regulations; state or federal



Gag and Red Grouper (GMFMC)- Other Council actions include: 1) shallow water grouper (gag, red, black groupers) commercial quotas; 2) commercial quota closure mechanisms; 3) 3-fish recreational aggregate bag limit; 4) adding alternatives to look at removing the minimum size limits for commercial and recreational shallow water groupers to reduce discard mortality; and, 5) adding an action to Reef Fish Amendment 30B that all reef fish vessels with federal commercial or charter permits must comply with the more restrictive of state or federal regulations when fishing in state waters. What this means is that for-hire and commercial vessels with federal permits (necessary to operate in federal waters) would be held to federal regulations no matter whether they were in federal or state waters as a condition of the permit. If a state had more restrictive regulations, then the vessels would have to adhere to the state regulations while in state waters. An example would be when the red snapper bag limit is 2-fish in the federal waters, but 4-fish in state waters, a permitted vessel fishing in state waters would only be allowed the 2-fish bag limit. The amendment is scheduled for public hearings in January and February, and is scheduled to be finalized by the Council in April 2008.



QUESTIONS?

