

Gulf Council Issues

Review and Discussion

Report Date: May 15, 2009

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Marine Fisheries Management

This is a review and discussion of Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) issues that were discussed at the April Council meeting, specifically the turtle longline issue. The Council will meet again the week of June 15-18, 2009 in Tampa, Florida, the same week as the June Commission meeting.

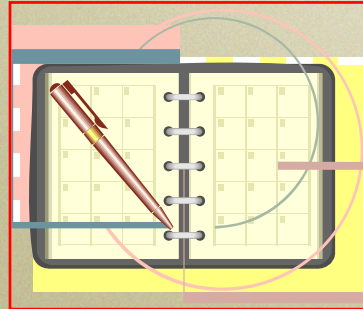
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Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council



Issues on June 2009 Agenda

- Outreach and Education
- Reef Fish
 - Longline/turtles
 - Sector Allocation
 - Reef Fish IFQ
 - Gag/Red grouper update
- Spiny Lobster
- Mackerel



As of this writing, the June 15-18, 2009 Council meeting agenda has not been finalized; however, the following topics are scheduled to be discussed at the June meeting:

Outreach and Education – report on the Outreach and Education Advisory Panel meeting; update on efforts to provide online coverage of the Council meetings.

Reef Fish Management – final action on draft Reef Fish Amendment 31 (longline/turtle interactions); discussion of loggerhead population assessment; status of the emergency rule for longlining; discussion of sector allocation; reef fish Individual Transferable Quota Program; gag and red grouper stock assessment update.

Spiny lobster - review of a scoping document for the joint management plan with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Mackerel – review of a scoping document for the joint management plan with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Sea Turtle Bycatch in the Reef Fish Fishery



- NMFS report on turtle bycatch in commercial reef fish longline fishery
- Estimated 861 turtles caught during 2006-2008 (30 month period)
 - 410 released alive
 - 246 released dead or unresponsive
 - 205 unknown condition



Loggerhead turtle
(*Caretta caretta*)
Photo: Marco Giuliano/ Fondazione Cetacea

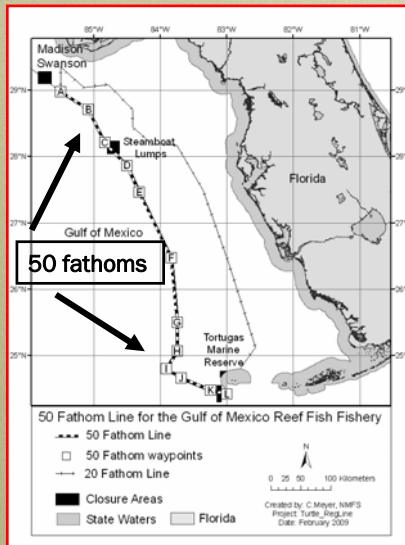
Public Hearing Document- prohibit reef fish longline gear east of Cape San Blas, inside the 35 fathom boundary during June-August



Sea Turtle Bycatch – In October 2008, the Council heard a report regarding sea turtle bycatch in the commercial reef fish longline fishery in the Gulf. This was a preliminary report by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). This report indicates that during 2006-2007, 974 sea turtles were caught in the reef fish fishery, of which 433 were released alive, 325 were released dead or unresponsive, and the status of release was unknown for 216. The report was updated in April 2009 and indicated that over a 30 month period (2006-2008) 861 turtles were taken with 410 dead, 246 released alive, and 205 status unknown. The Council voted to begin the process of addressing this issue through an amendment to the reef fish plan. A public hearing document was developed in April 2009, and further public hearings will be held in May/June throughout the Gulf states. The preferred alternatives for the document would prohibit reef fish longline gear east of 85 degrees 30 minutes north (Cape San Blas), inside the 35 fathom boundary during the months of June through August. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this amendment during their June 15-18, 2009 meeting.

The Commission staff representative is a member of this Committee and will continue to work with the Council on this issue.

Sea Turtle Bycatch in the Reef Fish Fishery



Loggerhead turtle
(*Caretta caretta*)
Photo: Marco Giuliano/ Fondazione Cetacea



Emergency Action
implemented on
May 18, 2009



Sea Turtle Bycatch – The Council requested that NMFS implement an Emergency Rule to address the turtle/longline issue while the amendment process was being developed. The Emergency Rule became effective May 18, 2009, and included prohibiting reef fish longline gear within the 50 fathom boundary. This rule has a duration up to 180 days with the potential of being extended another 186 days.

Sector Allocation



- *ad hoc* Allocation Committee
- Continue exploring sector allocation issues



Sector Allocation – The Council’s *ad hoc* Allocation Committee finalized and adopted the Principles and Guidelines for allocation and will incorporate these as a Council policy document. The Council also voted to have the *ad hoc* Allocation Committee continue to look at reallocation issues.

The Commission staff representative is a member of the Allocation Committee and recommends that the allocation issue continue to be explored through this mechanism.

Commercial Reef Fish IFQ



- Council is developing an IFQ program for commercial reef fish fisheries
- Similar format to red snapper IFQ
- Council has not yet finalized the program
- Will consider between sector transfers



Reef fish individual fishing quota – In April, the Council voted to begin an Individual Transferable Quota Program (IFQ) for the remaining species in the reef fish complex. This program would be based upon similar programs for red snapper and grouper. Unlike the existing IFQ's the Council will consider the transfer of quota shares between the commercial and recreational sectors for this new program.

The Commission staff representative is a member of this Committee and will continue to work with the Council on this issue.

Spiny Lobster



Spiny lobster – In June, the Council will begin to review a scoping document for the joint management plan with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. This document will contain, among other things, an alternative to turn the management of spiny lobster over to the State of Florida. The Commission representative is the Chairman of the Council's Spiny Lobster Committee.

Mackerel



Mackerel – In June, the Council will begin to review a scoping document for the joint management plan with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. The Commission representative is the Chairman of the Council's Mackerel Committee.