



Gulf Council Issues

Review and Discussion

February 10, 2016

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 3

This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) Jan. 25-28 meeting in Orange Beach, AL.

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Red Snapper Update



- Regional management discussions postponed indefinitely
- Council to consider extending or removing sector separation sunset
 - Currently sunsets after 2017 season
- Discussions on separate management of charter boats and headboats will continue
 - Options include traditional and allocation-based management tools
- Possible red snapper commercial IFQ modifications discussed
- Council to consider development of a mechanism to allow recreational season to possibly reopen in the fall if the annual catch target is not met during summer season



The Council discussed several potential management changes for the red snapper fishery at its January meeting. First, the Council voted to postpone indefinitely further work on regional management for the recreational red snapper fishery. Based on Commission direction on regional management, FWC staff supported this action. The Council also voted to consider extending or removing the three-year sunset on sector separation. Currently, sector separation is scheduled to sunset after the 2017 season. Meanwhile, the Council will continue to consider options for separate management of charter boats and headboats, including allocation-based tools like individual fishing quotas (IFQs) and traditional tools like seasons and bag limits. The Council also continued discussing potential modifications to the commercial IFQ program and will consider these changes in two separate amendments.

Finally, the Council voted to begin development of a mechanism to potentially allow the recreational red snapper fishery to reopen in the fall if the year's annual catch target is not met during the summer season. Details will be developed at future Council meetings and likely would not take effect until at least the 2017 season.

For-Hire Electronic Reporting



- Final Council action on electronic reporting requirement delayed to a later meeting
 - Technical committee to weigh reporting options and report to the Council in April
 - Discussions on preferred options will continue
- Current Council-preferred options
 - Electronically report at end of each trip before arriving at the dock
 - Require electronic device to automatically record vessel location



The Council was scheduled to take final action on an electronic reporting requirement for the for-hire fishery, but deferred their final decision until after a technical committee evaluates the various programs, devices, and platforms that could be used for electronic reporting. The Council will receive a report from the technical committee in April. The Gulf for-hire industry has been generally supportive of a requirement to report their trip information electronically to improve the timeliness and accuracy of for-hire fishery data that are used to track landings and quotas. However, some captains recently expressed concerns about the timing of these trip reports and the possibility of a vessel monitoring system (VMS) being required. The Council will consider all of this information at future meetings as it discusses its preferred options.

Currently, the Gulf Council-preferred options would require all federally-permitted for-hire vessels in the Gulf to electronically report fishery data at the end of each trip before arriving at the dock. The devices used to make this report would be required to automatically record vessel location at certain time intervals. Reporting devices would have to be approved by NOAA Fisheries and would include smartphones, computers, or vessel monitoring systems (VMS).

Other Council Actions



- Final action taken to extend moratorium on federal commercial shrimp permits for 10 years
 - Could help future stability and profitability of the shrimp industry
 - Pending approval by U.S. Secretary of Commerce
- Upcoming public hearings
 - King mackerel (joint amendment with South Atlantic)
 - Yellowtail snapper
 - Hogfish



The Council also took final action to extend the federal commercial shrimp permit moratorium for 10 years. This action is supported by the industry because it may provide stability and profitability to the Gulf shrimp industry. This action is now pending approval of the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

The Council is holding public hearings on king mackerel, yellowtail snapper, and hogfish this spring. For king mackerel, the Gulf and South Atlantic councils are proposing to set a new, year-round boundary between the Gulf and Atlantic king mackerel stocks at the councils' jurisdictional boundary west of the Florida Keys. Other management changes proposed for king mackerel include new ACLs for each stock, subzone trip limits, and subquotas. The Council is also seeking input on increasing the recreational bag limit in the Gulf from two to three king mackerel per person and changing sector allocations. Florida public hearings will be held in Destin on Feb. 24, Key West on Feb. 29, and Mar. 2 in Sarasota. A webinar will be held on Mar. 3.

For yellowtail snapper, the Council is considering 1) making an exception to the requirement to use circle hooks when commercially fishing for yellowtail snapper in South Florida and 2) changing the start of the commercial fishing year from Jan. 1 to Aug. 1 to be consistent with recent changes approved by the South Atlantic Council. Both of these changes are being considered at the request of the commercial industry. Public hearings will be held in Key West on Mar. 1 and Sarasota on Mar. 2.

Public hearings on hogfish management in the Gulf, including potentially raising the minimum size limit, will be held sometime in April in the St. Petersburg and Naples areas. A webinar will also be held.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Gulf Council meeting is April 4-8 in Austin, TX



No specific direction is requested at this time, but staff welcomes Commission input on any Council issues. The next Council meeting will be held in Austin, TX, from April 4-8, 2016.

The following slide is considered backup material
and are not anticipated to be part of the actual
presentation



Additional Council Discussions



Red Grouper:

- New stock assessment indicates stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing

Gray Triggerfish:

- Development of rebuilding plan and potential changes to recreational season, size limit, and bag limit



In January, the results of the latest stock assessment were presented to the Council. This assessment is positive and indicates that Gulf red grouper is not overfished or undergoing overfishing. At future meetings, the Council will consider adjusting management parameters (i.e., acceptable biological catch, annual catch limits (ACLs)) based on assessment results.

For gray triggerfish, the Council continued to discuss options for management, including changes to the recreational season, size limit, and bag limit. During public comment, several charter captains supported a triggerfish season opening March 1 with a one-fish bag limit and 14-16 inch minimum size limit. Currently, gray triggerfish opens Jan. 1, is closed during June and July, has a recreational bag limit of two fish, and has a minimum size limit of 14 inches fork length. In each year since 2012, recreational harvest has closed early due to the recreational ACL being met or exceeded. Preliminary estimates through October 31 indicate that in 2015, 206% of the recreational ACL was harvested, so the 2016 season will be shortened to account for this overage.