

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management

Date: November 18, 2015

Subject: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Report

Purpose:

Staff will provide Commissioners with a review of actions and discussions from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) October 5-8, 2015, meeting in Galveston, TX.

Summary:

The Council took final action on gag recreational season options, gag and black grouper minimum size limits, and gag annual catch limits at its October meeting. The Commission directed staff to support the Council-preferred options that would eliminate the Dec. 3 through Dec. 31 portion of the recreational closed season, raise the minimum size limit for gag and black groupers from 22 to 24 inches total length, and would not modify gag annual catch limits. The Commission also directed staff to seek stakeholder input on modifying the July 1 federal waters season opening date to a date earlier in the spring, such as April 1. The Council ultimately chose a season that is open June 1 through December 31. Staff will bring a rulemaking package for consistency in Gulf state waters to a future Commission meeting. Also on gag, the Council will begin an amendment to raise the commercial gag grouper minimum size limit to 24 inches so that it matches the recreational size limit.

The Council also discussed management of red snapper, hogfish, king mackerel, yellowtail snapper, and electronic reporting by for-hire vessels. The Council also discussed regional management of red snapper, which will be reviewed in a separate Commission presentation. Council discussions on mutton snapper will also be addressed in a separate Commission presentation. For hogfish, the Council discussed increasing the minimum size limit and redefining the stock boundary of the Gulf of Mexico hogfish stock which would allow the West Florida and East Florida/Florida Keys hogfish stocks to be managed separately. For king mackerel, the Council discussed potential changes to allocations, stock boundaries, and sale provisions. The Council also took action to begin amendment that will examine management options for the commercial yellowtail snapper fishery and could combine the Gulf and South Atlantic annual catch limits for yellowtail snapper. Finally, the Council discussed modifications to charter for-hire vessel reporting requirements, which could improve recreational data collection for charter for-hire vessels fishing in the Gulf of Mexico by requiring them to report landings electronically. The Council may take final action on this at its January meeting.

Staff will request direction from the Commission regarding the recent recreational ACL closures of greater amberjack (Sept. 28) and red grouper (Oct. 8) in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. NOAA Fisheries has requested Florida adopt consistent regulations and close Gulf state waters to recreational harvest of greater amberjack and red grouper for the remainder of the year.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that Florida close recreational harvest of greater amberjack and red grouper in Gulf state waters for the remainder of 2015. Staff may request direction on other Council items following the Council meeting.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Bademan, Division of Marine Fisheries Management