

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: November 6, 2018
Subject: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) Report

Purpose:

To report on actions from the GMFMC's October 22-25 meeting in Mobile, AL, discuss items for the Council's January 28-31 meeting, and request direction on the 2019 Florida red snapper season.

Summary:

At its October meeting, the Council took final action to increase the Gulf cobia size limit from 33 to 36 inches based on concerns from stakeholders. This action is pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. The Council also requested NOAA Fisheries take emergency action to lower the quota for red grouper in 2019 in response to stakeholder concerns and recent data that indicate the stock is likely undergoing overfishing and is potentially overfished.

The Council also discussed several other items:

- Gray (Mangrove) Snapper: Potential changes to the acceptable biological catch (ABC), annual catch limits (ACLs), and management thresholds.
- Carryover of Unused Quota: Developing a plan to allow the carryover of unused quota to be harvested the following year.
- Reef Fish Management Objectives: Reviewing the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan to modernize and streamline management objectives.
- Fishery Ecosystem Plan: Developing a Fishery Ecosystem Plan to help integrate ecosystem science into Gulf fisheries management.

The Council will work on these topics at future Council meetings.

The Council continued discussions on state management of the recreational red snapper fishery. A new state-by-state allocation alternative was added that would redistribute the additional quota Florida received in the EFP to the other states. After public hearings in December and January, the Council will likely take final action on state management at its January meeting.

Lastly, staff will provide an update on the 2018 Florida Red Snapper Exempted Fishing Permit and recreational red snapper season in Gulf state and federal waters. The 2018 Florida red snapper quota was exceeded by 13%, and the overage of 232,211 lbs. will have to be deducted from the 2019 quota. Staff will review options for the 2019 season and request Commission direction.

Staff Recommendation:

Approval of a draft season structure for the 2019 Gulf recreational red snapper season that would be finalized at the Commission's February meeting.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Guyas, Division of Marine Fisheries Management