

Gulf Council Issues and 2019 Gulf Red Snapper Season



Review and Discussion
February 20, 2019



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) Jan. 28-31 meeting in Orange Beach, AL. Commission direction is also requested on final approval of the 2019 Gulf recreational red snapper season.

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Unless otherwise noted, images throughout the presentation are by FWC.

Outline

- Red snapper state management plan 2020 and beyond
- Red grouper and gray snapper
- Other Council discussions
- 2019 Gulf recreational red snapper season *DIRECTION REQUESTED*



This presentation will provide an update on recent Gulf Council discussions including red snapper state management, gray snapper, red grouper, and several other Council items. Staff will also present a review of the 2018 EFP recreational red snapper season and discuss the proposed 2019 Gulf season. Commission direction is requested on finalizing the 2019 Gulf recreational red snapper season for state and federal waters off Florida.

Future Red Snapper State Management through Council Process – 2020 and Beyond



- Federal government shutdown delayed final action on state management
- Council selected new preferred allocation alternative
 - Florida's EFP allocation (previously preferred): 45.78%
 - **New preferred allocation for Florida: 44.822%**
 - Compromise between five states still provides a large allocation to Florida
- *Final action expected at April Council meeting*



At the January meeting, the Council continued discussions on establishing long-term state management plans for recreational harvest of red snapper starting in 2020. The Council was originally scheduled to take final action on state management in January. However, due to the federal government shutdown, this item was also not properly noticed and the Council could not take final action at the meeting. At the January meeting, the Council scheduled a special Council meeting to convene on February 18 to take final action on state management, but, the special meeting was not properly noticed in time and had to be canceled. The Council will take final action on the state management at its April 1-4 meeting in Biloxi, MS.

In January, the Council added and selected a new preferred alternative for state-by-state allocations. This alternative is a compromise between the EFP allocations in place for 2018 and 2019 and another allocation alternative that was introduced at the October Council meeting. The new preferred alternative would allocate Florida 44.822% of the private recreational angler quota for red snapper, and is only slightly below Florida's EFP allocation of 45.78%. This preferred alternative is a compromise between the five Gulf states and provides a large allocation to Florida. This allocation will allow Florida to set recreational seasons that are satisfactory to anglers while promoting conservation of red snapper.

State-by-State Allocation Options for Recreational Red Snapper

State	EFP Allocation (Previous Council Preferred)	Alternative 7	New Allocation Alternative (Council Preferred)
Texas	6.21%	6.445%	6.21%
Louisiana	19.12%	19.843%	19.12%
Mississippi	3.55%	3.684%	3.55%
Alabama	25.34%	26.298%	26.298%
Florida	45.78%	43.73%	44.822%



This table provides state-by-state allocation options that have been recently considered by the Council. Each state's current EFP allocation is shown on the column second from the left. The EFP allocations were the Council-preferred alternative until the Council's January meeting. However, multiple states were not supportive of using these allocations for state management in 2020 and beyond. The next column to the right shows Alternative 7, which was introduced at the October Council meeting. Alternative 7 would redistribute the additional quota Florida received to make a 40-day season possible in 2018 proportionally across all five of the Gulf states and results in about a 2% decrease in quota for Florida. This alternative was also not acceptable to multiple states, including Florida. The new Council-preferred allocation alternative, shown in the righthand column, is a compromise between the EFP allocations and alternative 7. In this option, the additional quota is only distributed to Alabama and Florida, which had the shortest seasons and incurred quota overages in 2018. FWC staff supported this alternative.

State Management Outlook for 2020 and Beyond



If approved by Council with the current preferred alternatives:

- Private anglers only
- New allocation for Florida (44.822%)
- Full delegation to manage season, bag, and size limits
- Area or depth-specific regulations (e.g., 20 or 35 fathoms)
- Quotas could be adjusted based on underage/overage



The Council is scheduled to take final action on red snapper state management at its April meeting. If the Council approves the program with the current preferred alternatives, FWC would have authority to manage the private angler component of the recreational red snapper fishery off Florida, in both state and federal waters. FWC would manage this harvest under a Council-set annual catch limit, which would be 44.82% of the private angler ACL. FWC would be delegated authority to set seasons, bag limits, and size limits, and could also implement closures beyond 20 or 35 fathoms if necessary. The Florida quota could be adjusted if an overage or underage occurs during the previous fishing year.

The Commission will also have the flexibility to require tools such as descending devices and venting tools to minimize discard mortality.

If state management is not approved, the recreational fishery in federal waters would remain under federal management. The Council and NOAA Fisheries would manage red snapper in federal waters, and FWC would continue to manage the recreational fishery in state waters.

Red Grouper and Gray Snapper



Red grouper

- Fishermen's concerns and recent data indicate stock is likely undergoing overfishing and potentially overfished
- Pending emergency action to lower the quota for 2019
- Discussed reducing annual quotas beyond temporary emergency action



Gray (mangrove) snapper

- Considering potential changes to quotas and management thresholds
- Recent stock assessment indicates stock is undergoing overfishing
- Will continue discussions at future meetings



In recent years, many recreational and commercial fishermen from Florida have expressed concern about red grouper. A recent interim analysis indicated the stock is likely undergoing overfishing and is potentially overfished. Therefore, at the October meeting, the Council requested NOAA Fisheries take emergency action to lower the quota for Gulf red grouper for 2019 from 10.77 million lbs. to 4.154 million lbs, which is the total recreational and commercial harvest during 2017. This emergency action is pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

At the January meeting, the Council discussed reducing annual quotas beyond the temporary emergency action. The next red grouper stock assessment is expected to be completed in 2019. This new amendment would help keep quotas low until the Council can consider the stock assessment results before adjusting quotas and management measures again as needed.

The Council is also considering potential changes to gray (mangrove) snapper annual quotas and management thresholds due the results of a recent stock assessment. Prior to 2018, the stock condition of gray snapper had not been evaluated in a stock assessment. While the results of this assessment are very uncertain, they indicate Gulf mangrove snapper is undergoing overfishing. The majority of gray snapper landings are recreational and primarily from Florida.

The Council will continue to discuss these items at future meetings.

Other Council Discussions



IFQ-like programs for charter boats and headboats

- Postponed until for-hire electronic reporting data has been deemed suitable for management purposes

Red snapper sector reallocation

- Adjusting allocations between commercial and recreational sectors

Carryover of unharvested quota

- Allow quota that goes unharvested in one year to be harvested in the next year

Commercial red snapper and grouper/tilefish IFQ

- Adjustments to IFQ programs to address potential issues such as share ownership and unclaimed shares



The Council also discussed several items in January:

IFQ-like programs for charter boats and headboats: The Council voted to postpone further work on Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ)-like programs for charter boats and headboats for red snapper and reef fish until for-hire electronic reporting data has been deemed suitable for management purposes. This will likely take a few years after electronic reporting has been implemented. Support for the red snapper charter IFQ-like program has waned, but some headboats still support moving forward with the reef fish headboat IFQ program.

Red snapper sector reallocation: The Council discussed options for adjusting allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors. The Council decided not to pursue adjusting allocations between private anglers and federal for-hire components at this time because those allocations have only been in place for a few years. The Council will continue discussions at a future meeting.

Carryover of unharvested quota: The Council is considering allowing quota that goes uncaught in one year to be transferred to the next year's quota under certain circumstances. The Council will continue discussing plan details, such as which species should be eligible for quota carryover and how much leftover quota should be added to the next year's quota. The Council may take final action on quota carryovers at its April meeting.

Modifications to IFQ programs: The Council discussed potential adjustments to the commercial IFQ programs for red snapper and grouper/tilefish to address potential issues like whether ownership of shares should be limited to people who actively fish in the fishery and what to do with unclaimed shares. The Council will continue discussions at a future meeting.

2018-2019 Florida Exempted Fishing Permit

2018 Recreational Red Snapper Season

- June 11 – July 20 (40 days)
- 113% of the state quota harvested
 - Overage must be paid back in 2019



Proposed 2019 Season

- Florida quota includes quota increase and accounts for overage
- 2019 proposed season: June 11 – July 12 (32 days)
 - Reopen in fall if quota available



Direction requested: 2019 Gulf red snapper season

Florida and the other Gulf states are testing pilot programs to manage the recreational red snapper season in both state and federal waters through Exempted Fishing Permits (EFP). This pilot study allows FWC to test the concept of state management by managing recreational red snapper harvest in Florida's Gulf state and federal waters for 2018 and 2019. The 2018 red snapper season was open June 11 – July 20 (40 consecutive days) in Florida state and federal waters for private recreational anglers. For-hire operations that do not have a federal reef fish permit could also target red snapper during this 40-day season, but they were limited to fishing them in Gulf state waters only. The federal for-hire season in 2018 was open in federal waters June 1 – July 21 (51 days).

Florida's state quota for 2018 was 1,778,515 lbs. Landings estimates for the 2018 Florida season show that 2,010,726 lbs. was harvested, which is 113% of the quota. The overage of 232,211 lbs. (13%) will have to be paid back in 2019, which will result in a shortened season for 2019. The estimated 2019 Florida EFP quota is 1,722,095 lbs. This number accounts for the overage from the 2018 season and Florida's portion of the expected 2019 red snapper quota increase, which is 175,791 lbs. The quota increase is pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

Staff estimates that Florida's 2019 recreational red snapper season could be 32 days, after adjusting the season based on last year's quota overage. This estimate accounts for the high catch rates observed in 2018 and is expected to keep harvest within Florida's quota, assuming the season structure for 2019 is similar to the season set in 2018. In December, the Commission proposed the 2019 season be a continuous season starting June 11 through July 12 (32 days), which would provide optimal harvest opportunities for Florida anglers and help reduce the risk of an overage. This season would be structured similar to the 2018 season, which also opened June 11. If there is quota available after the summer season, FWC could reopen over fall weekends for a limited harvest.

Commission direction is requested on the 2019 Florida red snapper season.

Considerations for 2019 Red Snapper Season

- Continuous season designed to maximize harvest opportunities
 - Structure similar to 2018 season
 - Effort is highest on weekends compared to weekdays
 - Includes private anglers and State Gulf Reef Fish Charter operations
- Imperative to prevent an overage in 2019
 - Any overage must be paid back in 2020
- Possible fall reopening if quota is available
- FWC-led data collection
 - GRFS recently certified by NOAA Fisheries
 - iAngler Gulf Red Snapper smartphone app

NEW



There are several factors to consider when setting the season for recreational red snapper in Gulf state and federal waters for 2019. The proposed June 11- July 12 continuous season is designed to optimize harvest opportunities for recreational anglers during summer. The proposed 2019 season structure is similar to the 2018 season, which ran from June 11 through July 20. While some anglers support a 3-day weekends only season, it is important to remember that fishing effort is higher on weekends compared to weekdays, which means Florida's quota would be reached faster during a weekends-only season than a continuous season. The proposed 2019 season would apply to private recreational anglers in Gulf state and federal waters, and to state charter operations with the State Gulf Reef Fish Charter designation. This designation was implemented in 2018 to identify state charter operations that intend to harvest or attempt to harvest red snapper and other reef fish species, which is a requirement of Florida's EFP.

Additionally, it is imperative to prevent a quota overage in 2019 because any overage must be paid back in 2020. This accountability measure was added to the proposed Council state management plans that could take effect in 2020 to ensure each state is accountable for their harvest. If quota remains after the 32-day continuous season, FWC could provide a fall reopening on weekends, as long as harvest remains below the 2019 quota.

Lastly, FWC continues to make improvements to data collection. FWC will again use the Gulf Reef Fish Survey (GRFS), which supplements the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), for tracking recreational red snapper harvest. Recently, NOAA Fisheries certified GRFS for use in future federal stock assessments and management. Also, this is the second year that anglers and state charter captains can share their real-time catch data with FWC by downloading and using the iAngler Gulf Red Snapper app. This smartphone app was designed specifically for voluntary reporting of red snapper catch information to help improve recreational data collection.

Direction Requested



- 2019 Gulf red snapper season – *DIRECTION REQUESTED*
 - Approve 2019 red snapper season: June 11 – July 12 (32 days)
 - Fall reopening if quota available
- Input on other Council items is welcome
- Next Gulf Council meeting is April 1-4 in Biloxi, MS
 - Expected to take final action on state management for 2020 and beyond



Staff recommends approving the 2019 red snapper season which would be June 11 – July 12 (32 days) with the possibility of a fall reopening if quota is available. If approved, the season would be set via Executive Order.

Input on additional Council items is always welcome. The next Gulf Council meeting is April 1-4 in Biloxi, MS, where the Council is expected to take final action on state management for 2020 and beyond.