

Gulf Council Issues



Review and Discussion
July 17, 2019



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This is a review and discussion of items from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) June 3-6 meeting in Miramar Beach, FL.

Division: Marine Fisheries Management

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Report date: June 13, 2019

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

Photo courtesy of Robert Pratte.

Greater Amberjack Discussions



Commercial - final action

- Reduced commercial trip limit from 1,500 to 1,000 lbs., with a reduction to 250 lbs. if 75% of ACT is projected to be met
 - Compromise between commercial fishermen directly targeting greater amberjack and those who catch them as bycatch

Recreational

- Panhandle fishermen requested adjusting recreational regulations to allow for a May season
 - Council will discuss moving the fishing year, setting fractional bag limits, and adjusting season structure



The Council discussed both the commercial and recreational greater amberjack fisheries at their June meeting.

The Council took final action to reduce the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack from 1,500 to 1,000 pounds, and created an additional reduction to 250 pounds once 75% of the annual catch target (ACT) is projected to be met. Over the past several years, the commercial fishery has closed early, and many fishermen have asked for reduced trip limits that would help ensure longer seasons. This trip limit is a compromise between fishermen who do not directly target greater amberjack, but want to retain them as bycatch, and those who directly target greater amberjack and want larger trip limits. These adjustments should still allow fishermen to commercially target amberjack, while still allowing for a longer season so that fishermen can keep bycatch and reduce dead discards of greater amberjack when targeting other species.

Based on requests from recreational fishermen in the Florida Panhandle and the discussion at the May FWC meeting, the Council will start an amendment with the goal of having both a May and a fall recreational greater amberjack season. In 2018, the new season structure for recreational greater amberjack began with the open season from Aug. 1 to Oct. 31 and May 1-31. The quota is monitored from Aug. 1 to July 31. In March 2019, NOAA Fisheries determined the recreational annual catch target was met in fall 2018, and they did not reopen recreational harvest in federal waters for May 2019. FWC also closed recreational harvest in state waters on May 3, 2019, to help prevent any overage and reduce the risk of another shortened federal season in 2020. At future meetings, the Council will consider options including moving the fishing year, fractional bag limits, and adjustment to the season structure.

Other Council Discussions



Carryover of unused quota

- Postponed further discussion until NOAA Fisheries conducts interim stock assessment analyses

Two-day for-hire possession limit

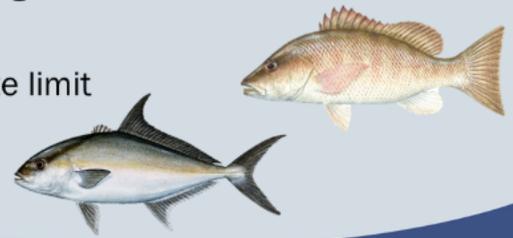
- Discussed clarifying rule language for two-day bag limits on for-hire trips longer than 24 hours

Gray (mangrove) snapper

- Discussed potential changes to quotas and management thresholds

Almaco jack

- Expressed interest in establishing a minimum size limit



The Council discussed several other items at their June meeting:

Carryover of unharvested quota: The Council was scheduled to take final action on allowing quota that goes uncaught in one year to be transferred to the next year's quota under certain circumstances. However, the Council decided to postpone further discussion of this topic until NOAA conducts interim stock analyses. NOAA's Southeast Fisheries Science Center is developing interim stock analyses procedures that could help the Council to quickly adjust quotas upward or downward based on fishery trends, which would make the carryover action unnecessary. This may be a better, more scientifically-informed approach to addressing quota that goes unharvested (or is overharvested) in a particular year.

Two-day for-hire possession limit: Currently, under limited circumstances, customers on for-hire trips longer than 24 hours can possess two daily bag limits of reef fish and mackerel. On these trips, customers must possess a paid receipt for a for-hire trip exceeding 24 hours, multiple licensed operators must be aboard, the vessel must have sleeping berths in accordance with U.S. Coast Guard regulations, and the trip must exceed 24 hours before returning to the dock. Several for-hire captains have asked the Council to clarify exactly when on these trips their customers can possess their two bag limits. The Council will be working on an amendment to explore this issue and clarify regulations.

Gray (mangrove) snapper: The Council continued discussions on making potential changes to gray (mangrove) snapper annual quotas and management thresholds. Based on the Council's current preferred alternatives, the quota would be similar to the current quota and other regulatory measures (i.e., bag limits, size limits) are not being considered. The Council will hold a webinar to receive public feedback on this issue and is slated to take final action at its August meeting.

Almaco jack size limit: Based on public testimony and the discussion at the May FWC meeting, the Council requested almaco jack size limits be added to the next meeting of the Council's scientific advisors. There is support from fishermen to establish a minimum size limit to help protect the stock. Recently, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council approved a commercial minimum size limit for almaco jack (20 inches fork length), and the FWC approved consistent regulations for commercial harvest in Atlantic state waters. The Council will continue discussions and decide whether to take action on this at a future meeting.

2018 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year



FWC's Lieutenant Jason Marlow



Photo courtesy of GMFMC

The Council presented FWC's Lieutenant Jason Marlow with the 2018 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year award for his and his team's work on offshore patrols in the Gulf of Mexico.

Photo (L to R): Captain Scott Pearce, Lieutenant Jason Marlow, Martha Guyas, and Gulf Council Chair Dr. Tom Frazer

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Gulf Council meeting is Aug. 12-15 in New Orleans, LA



Photo courtesy of Parker Fish

No Commission direction is requested at this time. Input on additional Council items is always welcome. The next Gulf Council meeting is Aug. 12-15 in New Orleans, LA.