

Gulf Council Issues



Review and Discussion
October 2, 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) Aug. 12-15 meeting in New Orleans, LA.

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

Photo courtesy of Robert Pratte.

Final Action



Federal for-hire red snapper annual catch target (ACT) buffer

- Reduce the ACT buffer from 20% to 9%
- Will maximize season length while keeping harvest within quota

Gray (mangrove) snapper

- Update management targets and quotas based on recent stock assessment
- Minimal change to quota, and bag/size limits will remain the same



The Council took final action on two items at their August meeting and will submit these proposed changes to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.

Federal for-hire red snapper ACT buffer: The Council took final action to reduce the annual catch target (ACT) buffer for the federal for-hire component of the recreational red snapper fishery from 20% to 9%. This buffer is in place to help account for management uncertainty and reduce the chance of exceeding the annual catch limit (ACL). The 9% buffer is the same as the ACT buffer in place for 2019. Reducing the buffer permanently is expected to maximize harvest days for this fishery while still constraining harvest within the quota.

Gray (mangrove) snapper: The Council took final action to update gray snapper management targets and quotas based on a recent stock assessment. Under this action the annual quota will remain similar to the 2019 quota. Other regulatory measures such as the bag and size limit will not change. The majority of gray snapper landings are recreational and primarily from Florida.

Other Council Discussions



Recreational greater amberjack

- Potential changes to allow for both a May and fall harvest, and balance regional needs

Two-day for-hire possession limit

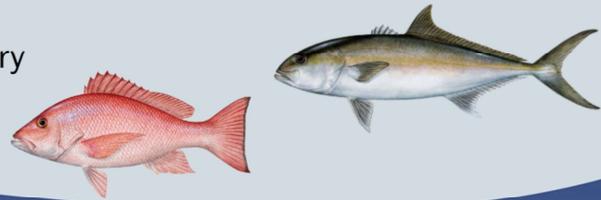
- Clarification to rule for two-day possession limits on for-hire trips longer than 24 hours

Commercial IFQ program

- Potential changes to red snapper and grouper/tilefish IFQ programs

Red snapper sector reallocation

- Postponed further discussion until January



The Council discussed several other items at their August meeting.

Recreational greater amberjack: Both the Council and FWC have received considerable feedback about revisiting the recreational greater amberjack regulations to allow for both a May and fall season. The Council is considering options including changing the fishing year for quota monitoring, fractional bag limits (e.g., one fish per two anglers), and modifying the season structure. The Council also decided to consider options for zone management of recreational greater amberjack harvest, as different regions of the Gulf have requested different fishing seasons. For example, the Panhandle prefers a May and a fall season, the western Gulf prefers a fall season, and southwest Florida prefers a winter/early spring season.

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-day bag limits. The Council selected a preferred alternative that allows passengers on these trips to retain the two-day possession limit at any time during trips that are at least 30 hours in duration. The Council's Law Enforcement Technical Committee will provide feedback on this issue before the Council makes a final decision.

Commercial Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Programs: The Council is considering several changes to the commercial red snapper and grouper/tilefish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) programs. These changes could affect those who may own shares in these fisheries, address how to distribute unused quota to fishery participants, and create a quota bank. The Council recommended uncoupling these decision points and considering the question of who can own shares of these fisheries (i.e., if stakeholders should be required to have a valid commercial reef fish permit) as a separate item because this decision could affect how unused quota is distributed, and how a quota bank would be set up for these fisheries. Currently, IFQ shareholders are not required to have a commercial reef fish permit, but commercial fishermen must hold a permit to land IFQ species.

Red snapper sector reallocation: The Council decided to postpone further discussion on red snapper sector reallocation until its January 2020 meeting so that it can consider the results of the Congressional Government Accountability Office report and examine the recalibrated recreational harvest estimates.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Gulf Council meeting is Oct. 21-24 in Galveston, TX



Photo courtesy of Parker Fish

No Commission direction is requested at this time. Input on Council items is always welcome. The next Gulf Council meeting is Oct. 21-24 in Galveston, TX.

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



Current Greater Amberjack Regulations

Recreational

- Bag limit: 1 per person per day
- Minimum size limit: 34 inches fork length
- Open season from Aug. 1 – Oct. 31, May 1-31

Commercial

- Minimum size limit: 36 inches fork length
- Annual season closure: March 1 – May 31
- Commercial harvesters must follow federal trip limits, seasons, and closures in state waters



Regulations for Gulf greater amberjack in state waters are similar to regulations for federal waters. For recreational harvest, there is a bag limit of one fish per person per day, a minimum size limit of 36 inches fork length, and an open season from Aug. 1- Oct. 31 and May 1-31.

The minimum size limit for commercial harvest is 36 inches fork length. There is an annual spawning season closure from March 1- May 31 each year. The fishery also closes for the year when the commercial quota is met. State rules require commercial harvesters to follow Gulf federal trip limits, seasons, and closures in state waters.

Greater Amberjack Recreational Catch History, 2011-2019

Year	Annual Catch Target	Percentage of ACT Harvested	Federal Recreational Closure Date	State Recreational Closure Date
2011	--	--	--	--
2012	--	--	--	--
2013	--	--	--	--
2014	894,538	102%	August 24	--
2015	1,130,000	119.7%	September 28	November 21
2016	1,034,442	189.7%	June 1	September 10
2017	385,413	206.1%	March 24	April 22
2017/2018*	716,713	87%	--	--
2018/2019	902,185	103%	November 1	May 3



In April 2018, a final rule modified the seasonal closure to be November through April, and June through July. The quota is monitored annually from Aug. 1 to July 31.

*As a result of the timing when these rules went into effect, only landings from Jan. 1 - July 31, 2018 are attributed to the 2017-2018 fishing year.

Two-Day For-Hire Possession Limit in Gulf of Mexico

Federal regulations (NOAA)

- Charter/headboat trip that spans more than 24 hours
- Must have two licensed operators and each passenger must have a receipt verifying trip length
- Applies to reef fish, king mackerel, and Spanish mackerel

Florida state regulations

- Charter/headboat trip that spans more than 24 hours
- Must have a sleeping berth for each passenger and each passenger must have a receipt verifying length of trip
- Applies to reef fish

