

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: December 11, 2019
Subject: Staff Report – Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Updates

Purpose:

To report on actions from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council’s (Council) October 21-24 meeting in Galveston, TX.

Why:

The Council discussed several items relevant to Florida’s recreational and commercial fisheries.

Top Points:

- 1) The Council took final action to modify multi-day federal for-hire possession limits to allow passengers to keep a two-day possession limit of reef fish and mackerel anytime during the trip if it is at least 30 hours in duration, under limited circumstances.
- 2) The Council discussed several other items including the recent red grouper stock assessment, Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lump Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), recreational greater amberjack regulations, and modifying the commercial Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program.

Affected Parties: Fishers for federally-managed species off Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas; commercial seafood dealers and retailers, fishing tackle manufacturers and retailers, and others with interests in fish stocks in Gulf of Mexico federal waters.

Summary:

Currently, anglers may possess two daily bag limits on certain for-hire trips that exceed 24 hours. In response to requests from for-hire captains, the Council took final action to specify that two daily bag limits of reef fish and mackerel may be possessed at any time on such trips if they last longer than 30 hours. Other Council discussions included the following items.

- **Red grouper** is not overfished or undergoing overfishing but is below the management target and was likely impacted by the 2018 red tide. New Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimates indicate recreational harvest has been significantly higher than previously thought and could have implications for recreational and commercial allocations.
- The Council decided to consider prohibiting trolling in the **Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps MPAs** after learning that bottom fishing is illegally occurring in these areas under the guise of trolling. These MPAs were established to protect gag grouper spawning aggregations.
- Changes to **greater amberjack** management could increase the likelihood of having both a May and fall recreational season. Options discussed include fractional bag limits, adjusting the seasons, split season quotas, and creating regional zones with their own unique quotas.
- Potential changes to the **commercial red snapper and grouper/tilefish IFQ programs** that could affect who can own IFQ shares.

Staff Recommendation:

No direction requested at this time. Input on Council items is always welcome.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Guyas, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management