

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: February 19, 2020
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) January 27-30 meeting in New Orleans, LA.

Why:

To keep the Commissioners up to date on several items relevant to Florida's recreational and commercial fisheries that will be discussed by the Council at its January meeting.

Top Points:

- 1) The Council will discuss several items including potential recreational greater amberjack regulations, red grouper management, potential trolling prohibition in Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps, 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:

Council discussions will include the following items.

- Changes to recreational **greater amberjack** management could increase the likelihood of having both a May and fall recreational season. Options include fractional bag limits, adjusting the seasons, split season quotas, and creating regional zones with their own unique quotas.
- Management changes to **red grouper** catch levels and allocations based on the recent stock assessment, which indicates the stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing. However, the stock is below the management target and was likely impacted by the 2018 red tide.
- Considering prohibiting trolling in **Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps** after learning that bottom fishing is illegally occurring in these areas under the guise of trolling. These areas were established to protect gag grouper spawning aggregations.
- 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 welcomed.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Guyas, Section Leader, Division of Marine Fisheries Management