

# Gulf Council Updates



Review and Discussion  
February 19, 2020



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This is a review and discussion of items from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) Jan. 27-30, 2020 meeting in New Orleans, LA.

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

# Council Discussions



## Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps

- Illegal grouper fishing occurring under the guise of trolling
- Potential prohibition of surface trolling and possession of Gulf reef fish

## Commercial IFQ program

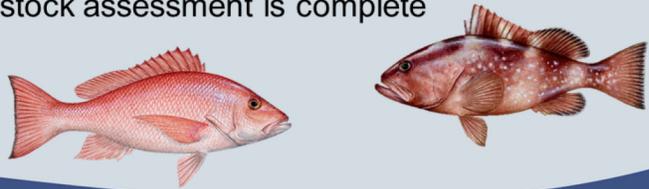
- Potential changes to ownership of shares and creation of a quota bank in red snapper and grouper/tilefish IFQ programs

## Red grouper

- Considering changes to quotas and allocations based on recent stock assessment

## Red snapper reallocation

- Postponed further discussion until next stock assessment is complete



The Council discussed several reef fish items at their January meeting.

**Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps:** The Council discussed concerns that illegal recreational bottom fishing is occurring under the guise of surface trolling in Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps. These areas were originally established to protect gag grouper spawning aggregations, and are located far offshore of Florida's Big Bend. Currently, no bottom fishing is allowed in these areas but trolling is allowed May through October. The Council is considering prohibiting surface trolling and the possession of reef fish in these areas.

**Commercial Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Programs:** The Council is considering changes to the commercial red snapper and grouper/tilefish IFQ programs that could affect who may own shares in these fisheries. Currently, any U.S. citizen or permanent resident can own shares, even if they have never fished commercially or do not have a commercial reef fish permit to fish their shares. The Council is considering ways to ensure shares of these fisheries are in the hands of commercial fishermen, which could mean requiring shareholders to hold a commercial reef fish permit to harvest. The Council is also considering establishing a quota bank to assist small participants and new entrants to the IFQ programs, which would be intended to reduce discards and increase access to shares to those who are actively commercial fishing.

**Red grouper:** The Council is considering changes to red grouper catch levels and allocations. The stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing, but is below management targets and was likely impacted by the 2018 red tide event. The recent red grouper assessment includes the new Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES) estimates, which more than doubled the estimates of recreational harvest compared to the previous survey. These new estimates have implications for sector allocations. The Council will continue discussions at future meetings.

**Red snapper reallocation:** The Council postponed further discussions on reallocating the red snapper quota between the recreational and commercial sectors until the next stock assessment is completed in 2023. This delay will also allow the Council to consider results from the Congressional Government Accountability Office report and examine recalibrated recreational harvest estimates.

## Other Recreational Council Discussions



### Greater amberjack

- Postponed management changes until after next stock assessment
- NOAA Fisheries indicated May 2020 season will occur



### African pompano

- Florida state regulations of 2 fish per vessel extend into federal waters
- For-hire captains interested in a higher vessel limit in Florida federal waters



Photo courtesy of Brett Cardinal

The Council continued discussions on other recreational items.

Greater amberjack: The Council decided to postpone further consideration of adjusting seasons and other management options for recreational greater amberjack until results of the next assessment are available in early 2021. The Council was considering management changes with the goal of allowing consistent recreational harvest in both May and fall. Additionally, NOAA Fisheries indicated they expect the recreational season to open in May 2020 as scheduled. In 2018, a new season structure for recreational greater amberjack was implemented with the open season from Aug. 1 to Oct. 31 and May 1-31, and the fishing year being monitored annually from Aug. 1 to July 31. Last year, the recreational season did not open in May in federal waters and closed early on May 3 in state waters because the quota was met during the 2018 fall season.

African pompano: At the January meeting, several charter and head boat captains provided public comment that Florida's recreational vessel limit of 2 fish per vessel is too restrictive, and they would like the Council to set a limit of 1 fish per person for the entire Gulf of Mexico. Currently, Florida's state regulations extend into federal waters because the Council does not regulate this fishery. The Council will send FWC a letter relaying the public comments they received at their recent meeting. FWC staff will include this topic for the Commission's consideration for the next Division of Marine Fisheries Management workplan.

# Anticipated Recreational Gray Triggerfish Quota Closure



- NOAA Fisheries indicated fishery is likely to close for the year in May
- Reopen March 1, 2021
- No payback required
- Large amount of harvest in state waters
- Stock is rebuilding
  - Anglers report stock is improving
- Staff recommends closing recreational harvest if NOAA Fisheries announces a closure in Gulf federal waters



*Direction requested*

At the January Council meeting, NOAA Fisheries indicated that the Gulf recreational gray triggerfish fishery is likely to meet its quota in early May, prompting an early quota closure in federal waters. The fishery would remain closed through the end of 2020 and reopen next March 1, 2021. An exact closing date will be announced when harvest projections are finalized. The 2019 recreational annual catch limit was exceeded by 28% even with the recreational fishery closing early in Gulf state and federal waters on May 11.

In previous years, NOAA Fisheries has requested Florida close recreational harvest in state waters to be consistent with the federal closure and help prevent exceeding the annual catch limit. There are several factors to deliberate when considering an early recreational harvest closure in Gulf state waters. Because gray triggerfish is not currently considered overfished or undergoing overfishing, quota paybacks are not required. However, it is important to prevent the overfishing limit (OFL) from being exceeded, which would require the Council to take action to prevent overfishing. While keeping state waters open provides Florida anglers more opportunities for harvest, it is important to note that a large amount of recreational harvest comes from Florida state waters. Keeping state waters open could potentially result in a quota overage or the OFL being exceeded. The stock is considered to be rebuilding, and many anglers have reported more and larger gray triggerfish in recent years.

Staff recommends closing recreational harvest of gray triggerfish in Gulf state waters if NOAA Fisheries announces a recreational harvest closure in Gulf federal waters.

## Direction Requested



- Staff recommends closing recreational harvest of gray triggerfish if NOAA Fisheries announces a closure in Gulf federal waters
- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next meeting is March 30 – April 2 in Gulf Shores, AL



Photo courtesy of Gregory McConnell

Staff recommends closing recreational harvest of gray triggerfish in Gulf state waters via Executive Order if NOAA Fisheries announces a recreational harvest closure in Gulf federal waters.

Input on Council items is always welcome. The next Gulf Council meeting is March 30 – April 2 in Gulf Shores, AL.