

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: April 20, 2017
Subject: Gulf Red Snapper and Gray Triggerfish

Purpose:

Staff will present a proposed final rule to set the state waters recreational harvest season for Gulf red snapper and options for a limited fall 2017 harvest season for gray triggerfish in Gulf state waters. Staff will also provide updates on the Gulf Council discussions on red snapper and gray triggerfish.

Summary:

At its February meeting, the Commission approved a draft rule for a 78-day Gulf recreational red snapper season. If approved, the season would have three segments: 1) May weekends, 2) a summer season open every day starting Memorial Day weekend through the weekend following July 4, and 3) three-day weekends in September and October plus Labor Day. In future years, if October 31 falls on a Saturday, the last day of harvest will be Sunday, November 1.

The proposed final rule would maintain fishing opportunities for red snapper, approximate last year's season, and allow for a 78-day state waters season in 2017. Any available information about the 2017 federal season and 2016 harvest updates will also be presented.

The Commission closed recreational harvest of Gulf gray triggerfish for 2017 in response to the announcement that the 2016 quota was estimated to be exceeded by more than 200% and federal waters would be closed in 2017. The Commission also expressed interest in having a limited harvest season for gray triggerfish in fall 2017. Staff will provide for Commission consideration an update on 2016 gray triggerfish landings and stakeholder input regarding opening gray triggerfish in the fall.

Staff will also report on Gulf Council actions and discussions relating to red snapper and gray triggerfish, including potential final action on a new rebuilding plan for gray triggerfish.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend setting the red snapper season to be open for Saturdays and Sundays starting the first Saturday in May. The season would be open each day starting the Saturday before Memorial Day through the Sunday following July 4, then reopen for Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in September and October, plus Labor Day.

For gray triggerfish, staff recommend waiting to consider opening gray triggerfish for a limited fall 2017 season until more information is available.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Guyas, Division of Marine Fisheries Management