



**Gulf Council Issues**  
Review and Discussion  
July 11, 2017  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 1

This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) June 5-8 meeting in Naples, FL.

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

## Final Council Actions



**Vermilion Snapper**

- Adjust the annual catch limit
- Not overfished or undergoing overfishing

**Reef Fish Bottom Longline Vessel Hook Requirements**

- Allow an unlimited number of unrigged hooks to be carried aboard reef fish bottom longline vessels
- Number of rigged hooks remains at 750

**Reef Fish Stock Status Determination**

- Define criteria for determining if reef fish stocks are considered to be overfished
- Change could mean red snapper and gray triggerfish would no longer be considered overfished

In June, the Council took final action on several amendments that are now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. The Council took final action to adjust annual catch limits (ACLs) for vermilion snapper based on the latest stock assessment. Vermilion snapper is not overfished and is not undergoing overfishing.

The Council also took final action to allow an unlimited number of unrigged hooks to be carried aboard reef fish bottom longline vessels. The number of hooks that could be rigged for fishing would remain at 750. The number of hooks aboard and rigged on bottom longline vessels was originally restricted to limit longline interactions with sea turtles. Florida commercial fishermen who take multi-day trips for grouper requested an increase in the allowance of unrigged hooks that could be kept aboard their vessel to replace hooks that are lost during normal fishing activity. Since the limit on the number of hooks that can be rigged for fishing on a longline vessel will remain at 750, no negative impacts to sea turtles are expected.

Each Council is required to set criteria for determining whether stocks are overfished (also known as the minimum stock size threshold). The Council took final action to modify this criteria for several reef fish stocks. If approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, this change could mean that red snapper and gray triggerfish would no longer be considered overfished. This could mean that the “payback provisions,” which require quota overages in one year to be deducted from the following year’s quotas for these fisheries would no longer apply. However, the Council would continue with the rebuilding plans for these stocks and would continue to manage these stocks to prevent overfishing.

## Red Snapper – Council Discussions




- Louisiana Exempted Fishing Permit Application**
  - Pilot IFQ-type program for recreational anglers
  - Consideration postponed until August
- Annual Catch Target (ACT) Buffers for Recreational Fishery**
  - Adjusting ACTs could expand for-hire harvest opportunities, since for-hire component has not reached its ACT since sector separation
  - Could mean larger ACT buffer for private recreational angler component
- Red Snapper, Grouper, and Tilefish Commercial IFQ Updates**
  - Commercial IFQ programs could be adjusted to address issues such as bycatch and increasing access to shares for new entrants
- IFQ-type Management for For-Hire Vessels**
  - Considering managing for-hire harvest of red snapper, gag grouper, red grouper, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish under IFQ-type programs



Red snapper was also discussed by the Council at their June meeting. The Council discussed how the 20% buffer between the recreational annual catch limit (ACL) and the recreational annual catch target (ACT) could be adjusted to account for the fact that the for-hire component of the fishery has not met their ACT since sector separation took effect. There was some discussion of whether adjusting the buffers is feasible at this time. Council staff will continue to explore options for future Council consideration.

The Council also discussed an Exempted Fishing Permit Application submitted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries that would test a pilot IFQ-type program for Louisiana private recreational anglers. 150 anglers would be chosen at random and would each receive an allocation of around 20 red snapper that could be caught in federal waters when the federal season is closed. These anglers would be required to hail out and electronically report their trips. Due to the controversial nature of this proposal, Louisiana asked to postpone consideration until the August Council meeting.

The Council discussed how the commercial IFQ programs might be adjusted to address issues in the IFQ programs, such as bycatch and difficulty for new entrants to obtain shares. The Council may consider changes that could affect who may own shares and allocation.

The Council also discussed options for managing for-hire harvest of red snapper, gag grouper, red grouper, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish under IFQ-type programs. The Council discussed potentially removing the groupers from consideration for a charter boat IFQ program based on feedback received from Florida captains, and expressed their preference for focusing on red snapper, gray triggerfish, and greater amberjack.

## Greater Amberjack Rebuilding Plan Development



- Stock continues to be overfished and undergoing overfishing
- Council considering management options for rebuilding
  - Reducing annual catch limits
  - Options discussed for expanding fixed recreational closed season (currently June 1 – July 31)
    - March 1 – May 31 (consistent with commercial closure)
    - March 1 – June 30 (spawning season)
    - January 1 – June 30 (extends fishing later into the year)
    - January 1 – July 31 (minimizes chance of a quota closure)



*Direction requested on recreational closed season options*

A 2017 stock assessment update for greater amberjack indicates the stock continues to be overfished and is undergoing overfishing. The Council discussed modifying the rebuilding plan for greater amberjack, which would entail reducing ACLs and setting longer, fixed recreational closed seasons.

Currently, there is an annual fixed closed season for recreational harvest of greater amberjack during June and July. The Council is considering expanding that fixed closure to optimize fishing opportunities and potentially make it easier for anglers to anticipate when the fishery will open, since greater amberjack has closed early in recent years due to quotas being met or exceeded. The Council discussed four potential closure options. The first would replace the June 1 – July 31 closure with a March 1 – May 31 closure that is consistent with the commercial closed season and keeps the fishery closed during part of the spawning season. The second option is a four-month closure from March 1 – June 30, which would protect greater amberjack during their spawning season. The third option would keep greater amberjack closed from Jan. 1 – June 30. This option would ensure harvest opportunities during the summer and later in the year. Under these three scenarios, the recreational quota would likely be met before the end of the year, and quota closures would occur in addition to the fixed closed season. Under the fourth option, which would keep harvest closed from Jan. 1 – July 31, harvest projections indicate that a quota closure is unlikely, so the fishery would likely stay open from Aug. 1 – Dec. 31. Florida stakeholders have varying opinions on which season to choose. Some feel that an opening early in the year or in March for spring break is very important. Others support the January 1 – July 31 option since it allows for some harvest during summer and would provide more predictable harvest opportunities, since the chances of a quota closure are minimized.

Staff requests direction on the recreational closed season options for greater amberjack in Gulf federal waters. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this item in August.

## Direction Requested



- Direction requested on expanding fixed recreational closed season options for greater amberjack harvested in federal waters
  - March 1 – May 31 (consistent with commercial closure)
  - March 1 – June 30 (spawning season)
  - January 1 – June 30 (extends fishing later into the year)
  - January 1 – July 31 (minimizes chance of a quota closure)
- Input on other Council items is welcome
- Next Gulf Council meeting is August 7 – 11 in San Antonio, TX



Staff requests Commission direction on which option to support to expand the fixed recreational season for greater amberjack harvested in federal waters. The current fixed recreational closed season is from June 1 through July 31 each year. The Council is considering the following season closure options for federal waters in future years.

- March 1 – May 31 (consistent with commercial closure)
- March 1 – June 30 (spawning season)
- January 1 – June 30 (extends fishing later into the year)
- January 1 – July 31 (minimizes chance of a quota closure)

As always, input on other Council items is welcome. The next Gulf Council meeting is August 7-11 in San Antonio, TX.