

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management

Date: April 26, 2018

Subject: Final Rule: Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper

Purpose:

Provide an overview of recent federal Gulf red snapper discussions, an update on the 2018 recreational red snapper harvest season for state waters of the Gulf of Mexico, and final public hearing on requiring the Gulf state waters for-hire red snapper/reef fish fishery to report their intention to fish for these species.

Summary:

As part of Florida's proposed fishery management pilot program, staff will present a proposed final rule that would create the Gulf Reef Fish State For-Hire Pilot Program in 68B-14.009 Florida Administrative Code. The proposed final rule would require charter, headboat, and saltwater fishing guide operations that target or harvest certain reef fish in Gulf of Mexico state waters (excluding Monroe County), to report their intention to harvest or attempt to harvest the following species: red snapper, vermilion snapper, gag grouper, red grouper, black grouper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, lesser amberjack, banded rudderfish, or almaco jack. This requirement would not apply to vessels fishing under a valid federal Gulf of Mexico Charter/Headboat Permit for Reef Fish. As part of this pilot program, data collection from these state waters for-hire fishing operations would be enhanced for the purpose of improving harvest data and quota tracking.

Staff will provide an update on the status of Florida's proposed fishery management pilot program/exempted fishing permit (EFP) and may request direction on the 2018 recreational red snapper harvest season for state waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Finally, staff will present an update on actions since the last Commission meeting that could affect the Gulf recreational red snapper fishery. This item will be updated following the April Gulf Council meeting, but topics may include:

- Development of Council amendments that could delegate management of red snapper caught in federal waters to each of the Gulf states.
- Council discussions on potential establishment of IFQ-type programs for charter boats and headboats fishing for red snapper and other reef fish.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approving the proposed final rule to identify charter, headboat, and fishing guides that only fish in state waters for Gulf red snapper and reef fish. Staff may request direction on the 2018 recreational season and other Gulf red snapper items following the Council meeting.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Guyas, Division of Marine Fisheries Management