

## Gulf Council Issues



Review and Discussion  
February 8, 2018



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) Jan. 29 – Feb. 1, 2018, in New Orleans, LA. Council discussions on Gulf red snapper will be reviewed in a separate agenda item.

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

## Greater Amberjack



- Stock continues to be overfished and undergoing overfishing
- Council is developing measures to rebuild the stock while optimizing fishing opportunities

### Recent Management Actions

- **August 2017:** Council set an interim recreational season to keep the fishery from opening Jan. 1, 2018, and revised commercial and recreational ACLs and ACTs
- **October 2017:** Council approved new recreational season open from May 1-31 and Aug. 1 – Oct. 31 and fishing year start date changed from Jan. 1 to Aug. 1
- **December 2017:** Commission approved similar recreational regulations for state waters

### Potential Management Options

- **Recreational:** modify recreational bag limits and/or implement a recreational split quota
- **Commercial:** reduce the commercial trip limit to extend season



The Council discussed potential management actions for the greater amberjack commercial and recreational fisheries. The 2017 Gulf greater amberjack stock assessment indicates the stock continues to be overfished and undergoing overfishing. The commercial and recreational fisheries have closed increasingly early in recent years due to quotas being met or exceeded. In response to repeated early closures, the Gulf Council approved and continues to develop measures to rebuild the stock while optimizing fishing opportunities.

In August, the Council took final action to reduce annual catch limits and set an interim recreational season for the greater amberjack fishery that would open July 1. This interim recreational season was set to prevent the fishery from opening on Jan. 1, 2018, and allow time for the Council to analyze split season options to balance stakeholder preferences for season openings in the spring and fall. The Council also revised the commercial and recreational Annual Catch Limit (ACL) and Annual Catch Target (ACT). At the October Council meeting, the Council finalized the recreational season, which would open May 1–31 and Aug. 1 – Oct. 31. The fishing year start date will change from Jan. 1 to Aug. 1, which means quota accounting and monitoring will now occur from Aug. 1 – July 31 each year instead of on a calendar year. These measures will allow for fishing opportunities in both the spring and fall while minimizing the chance of a quota closure. These changes are now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and are expected to take effect in time for the May opening. At the December Commission meeting, the Commission approved similar regulations for greater amberjack in Gulf state waters.

Last week, the Council decided to consider making additional changes to the amberjack fishery that could allow for longer recreational and commercial seasons. Potential management options for the recreational fishery include creating fractional bag limits, such as one fish per two people, and implementing split quotas for the spring and fall. The Council will also consider reducing the commercial trip limit from the current 1,500 pounds (lbs) gutted weight (gw) per trip, based on requests from fishermen. Discussions on these potential changes will continue in April.

## Other Council Discussions

Quota Carryover

- Discussed options for allowing quota that goes unharvested in one year to be caught in the next year

Red Grouper

- Fishermen's concerns and abundance trends indicate Gulf red grouper may be declining
- Management action may be considered after stock assessment is completed in early 2019

Descending Devices

- Council is developing a policy to support use of descending devices or venting tools on vessels possessing reef fish to reduce discard mortality
- Outreach program being developed to encourage use of these tools

  




Several other items were discussed at the recent Gulf Council meeting.

The Council discussed options for allowing quota carryovers, or potentially allowing quota not caught in one year to be added to the next year's quota for red snapper and other fish managed by the Council. The Council will continue to discuss potential action details such as when a species should be eligible for quota carryover, and how much of the leftover quota should be added to the next year's quota.

Additionally, the Council received a report from the Council's scientific advisory group that indicates that the Gulf red grouper stock may be declining. Both commercial and recreational fishermen have also expressed concern about red grouper. The scientific advisory group noted declines in red grouper abundance in recent years, possibly due to the red tide event in 2014. However, the advisory group noted that trends have shown cycles of peak and valleys since the 1990s. Without more information that could be provided by a stock assessment, the scientific advisory group could make no conclusions about the cause of the decline and made no recommendation to the Council. A stock assessment is scheduled for later this year and should be completed in early 2019. The Council did not recommend taking any management action at this time, but will wait for the stock assessment results before considering changes to management.

Also, the Council is developing a policy to promote use of venting tools and descending devices on reef fish trips as a means to reduce release mortality of reef fish. The Council will also be conducting outreach to promote the use of these tools, and FWC staff will work with the Council on this effort.

## No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Gulf Council meeting is April 16-19 in Gulfport, MS



No direction is requested on Council items at this time. However, input on Council items is always welcome. The next Gulf Council meeting is April 16–19 in Gulfport, MS.