



This is a review and discussion of Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) issues that were discussed at the Council's January 30 – February 2, 2012, meeting in Mobile, AL.

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Photo Credit: Terry Tomalin, www.visitflorida.com

Spiny Lobster – Final Action



- Closed area boundaries chosen with industry input
- Line marking – no action



The Council approved Spiny Lobster Amendment 11, which would create areas closed to spiny lobster trapping in federal waters off Florida but will not require trap lines to be marked. This is a joint amendment with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Public hearings on Spiny Lobster Amendment 11 were held on January 23 in Marathon and January 24 in Key West. At these public hearings, several commercial harvesters raised concerns with the boundaries of three of the 56 proposed closed areas. Based on this information, Council staff worked with the spiny lobster industry to refine the boundaries of the proposed closed areas. The Council approved action that subdivided the three closed areas based on discussions with the spiny lobster industry.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council must also vote to approve this amendment before it is submitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval and implementation.

Amberjack – Final Action Delayed



- Final action on rebuilding plan will be taken in April
- Overfished and undergoing overfishing
- Recreational: regulations would stay the same (minimum size limit of 30" fork length, 1 per harvester, per day, June-July closed season)
- Commercial: establish a 2,000 pound trip limit and keep Mar. – May closed season



The Council delayed approval of the rebuilding plan and management options for amberjack. The Council decided that both the annual catch limit (ACL) and annual catch target (ACT) for amberjack should be reduced in the season following an ACL overage. This change will require time-consuming edits to the amendment, so the Council directed staff to make the appropriate changes to the amendment and to bring the amendment to the April Council meeting for final action. A 2010 stock assessment indicated that greater amberjack remains overfished and is undergoing overfishing. The amendment would keep recreational regulations the same, including the minimum size limit of 30 inches fork length, the June 1 – July 30 closed season, and bag limit of one fish per person, per day. The June 1 – July 30 annual closed season took effect in 2011 and has generally been received favorably by recreational harvesters and the for-hire industry. There was some discussion at the Council about increasing the recreational size limit for amberjack, but this was ultimately voted down. For commercial harvesters, the amendment would establish a 2,000 pound trip limit and maintain the existing March 1 through May 31 commercial closed season. These measures are intended to keep harvest levels from exceeding the acceptable biological catch and reduce the likelihood of a derby fishery in the commercial sector. FWC staff supported the Council preferred alternatives for both the recreational and commercial sectors. The public has also been largely supportive of the Council preferred alternatives for amberjack.

The Commission staff representative is a member of the Reef Fish Committee and will continue to work with the Council on these issues.

Red Snapper – Final Action and Discussions



- Final action:
 - Set 2012 and 2013 annual catch limits
 - Fall closed season revision
- Weekend/weekday recreational season openings discussed but continuous days chosen
- Payback provision will be considered
- Commercial IFQ transferability



The Council took final action on two red snapper issues: to increase red snapper catch limits for 2012 and 2013, and to allow for future openings of the recreational red snapper season in late fall if there is remaining quota. The Council set the annual catch limit (ACL) for 2012 at 8.080 million pounds (mp) and the 2013 ACL at 8.690 mp. This equates to a recreational sector ACL of 3.959 mp and a commercial sector ACL of 4.121 mp for 2012. If there is an ACL overage in 2012, the stock ACL and sector ACLs for 2013 would stay at 2012 levels unless the best scientific information indicates that keeping the ACL at 2012 levels is unnecessary.

The Council also discussed the possibility of all-weekend or all-weekday recreational harvest seasons for red snapper. Neither option was supported by members of the public or the Council, so the Council chose to maintain a continuous season for 2012. There was some discussion of the projected number of days for the 2012 recreational season. Current estimates suggest that the season will be approximately 40 days in 2012, but this estimate is preliminary. The recreational season is projected to be shorter than last year's 48-day season because of high effort in last year's season and the fish are getting larger. The Council will discuss and decide on season dates for the 2012 season at the April Council meeting.

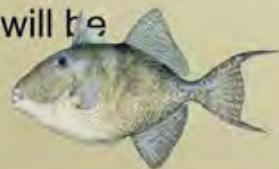
Although the recreational red snapper season has been shortened the last several seasons, there are currently no provisions that require ACL overages to be "paid back" in the year following an overage. Rather, recreational seasons have been shortened to account for high effort and increasing fish size. The Council will be considering a payback provision for the red snapper fishery to be more consistent with other management plans. Last year, the recreational sector went over their ACL by an estimated 18%.

Finally, there Council discussed the red snapper IFQ program. The Council will consider modifying IFQ share and allocation transferability provisions at future

Gray Triggerfish



- Stock assessment update: overfished and overfishing
- Acceptable biological catch set at 305,300 lbs.
- Council staff will prepare an interim rule to reduce the ACL and ACT to be considered at April Council meeting
- Long-term management measures will be discussed



The Council reviewed the latest stock assessment for gray triggerfish. The assessment indicates that gray triggerfish remains overfished and is undergoing overfishing. The Science and Statistical Committee set the maximum catch level for gray triggerfish (acceptable biological catch) at 305,300 pounds. Gray triggerfish is currently under a six-year rebuilding plan that was implemented in 2008. It is unlikely that gray triggerfish will be rebuilt by the deadline set in this plan, so this plan will need to be revised. The Council will consider long-term changes to ACLs, annual catch targets (ACTs), accountability measures, rebuilding scale, and other management measures at coming meetings. In the meantime, Council staff will prepare an interim rule to reduce the ACL and ACT for review at the April Council meeting and if approved by the Council, implementation later this year.

The Commission staff representative is a member of the Reef Fish Committee and will continue to work with the Council on these issues.

Other Reef Fish Discussions



- Crew size and income requirement
 - Final action
 - Removes income requirements for commercial permit renewals
 - Allows dual-permitted vessels to have up to four-person crew on commercial trips
- Vermilion snapper ACL
 - Not overfished or overfishing
 - Catch limits could be increased via framework amendment



In other reef fish news, the Council took final action to approve an amendment that eliminate income requirements for commercial reef fish permit renewals and will allow dual-permitted vessels to carry up four crew members when fishing commercially. Current rules only allow dula-permitted vessels to carry two crew members on commercial trips.

At its October meeting, the Council received a report on the latest stock assessment update for vermilion snapper. This update indicates that vermilion snapper stocks are not overfished nor undergoing overfishing and catch limits can be increased. Discussion of possible annual catch limit changes for vermilion snapper will continue at the April Council meeting.

The Commission staff representative is a member of the Reef Fish Committee and will continue to work with the Council on these issues.

Mackerel – Public Scoping



- Permits and prohibition of recreational sale (in conjunction with SAFMC)
- Boundaries and transit provisions
- Scoping meetings this spring in Destin, Ft. Myers, and Key West



The Council is also working on two amendments (Amendments 19 and 20) for the mackerel fishery. Amendment 19 is being developed with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and address permitting and recreational sale of mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia. The Council is also working on another amendment that includes options for boundaries and transit provisions for the mackerel fishery. The Council approved these items for public scoping and will hold scoping meetings in Destin, Fort Myers, and Key West sometime this spring.

Data Collection – Public Scoping



- Possible consolidation of federal wholesale dealer permits
- Electronic reporting for dealers
- Scoping meetings this spring in Destin, Ft. Myers, and Key West



The Council also approved an item for scoping that could reduce the number of federal permits required for wholesale dealers to purchase and sell federally-managed species and require wholesale dealers to report their transactions electronically. Scoping meetings will be held this spring in Destin, Fort Meyers, and Key West in conjunction with the mackerel scoping meetings. This amendment will be developed with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is April 16 – 20 in Corpus Christi, TX



No Commission direction is requested at this time; however, staff welcomes any input on Council items from the Commission. The next Council meeting will be held April 16-20 in Corpus Christi, Texas.