



Update: This document has been updated following the Council meeting that occurred April 16-19.

This is a review of issues that were discussed at the April 16-19, 2012, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting in Corpus Christi, TX.

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Amberjack – Final Action



- Overfished and undergoing overfishing
- Recreational: No changes to regulations (30" minimum size limit, 1 fish bag limit, June – July closed season)
- Commercial: establish a 2,000 pound trip limit and keep March – May closed season

No change to Florida's rules are needed at this time.



The Council took final action to approve the rebuilding plan and management options for amberjack (Amendment 35). A 2010 stock assessment indicated that greater amberjack remains overfished and is undergoing overfishing. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the amendment will 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. For commercial harvesters, the amendment will establish a 2,000 pound trip limit and maintain the existing March 1 - 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.

Existing rules in Florida Administrative Code effectively close commercial harvest automatically when federal commercial season is closed.

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

Gray Triggerfish – Interim Rule Approved (Final Action)



- Stock assessment update: overfished and undergoing overfishing
- Currently in rebuilding plan
- Acceptable biological catch set at 305,300 lbs.
- Interim rule approved to reduce the ACLs and ACTs for 2012
 - Could mean in-season harvest closures
 - Staff will return at later meeting with rule change



The Council also took final action on an interim rule for gray triggerfish that will reduce the annual catch limit (ACLs) and annual catch targets (ACTs). The latest assessment update 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. As required by Magnuson-Stevens, this interim rule will end overfishing of gray triggerfish by setting the ACLs and ACTs below the acceptable biological catch.

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. In the meantime, the interim rule will reduce the ACL and ACT for 2012. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, this rule will likely take effect this summer and could result in early closures for triggerfish, depending on when the recreational ACT is projected to be reached. Normally, gray triggerfish is open for harvest year-round.

Staff would return as needed to recommend any needed changes to state rules.

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

Gray Triggerfish – Long-term Options Under Consideration



- Establish recreational bag limit of 1 or 2 fish
- Establish recreational closed season
 - Peak spawning (June – July)
 - Peak harvest (May – June)
- Increase minimum size limit from 14” to either 16” or 18” fork length for both sectors
- Establish commercial trip limit of 50 or 75 pounds

Commission direction requested



The Council began development of long-term management options to rebuild the gray triggerfish stock (Amendment 37) at its April meeting. Possible management changes that are being considered for the recreational sector include establishment of a recreational bag limit and closed season for gray triggerfish. Currently, there is no specific bag limit for gray triggerfish in state or federal waters, but it is included in the 20-reef fish aggregate bag limit in federal waters. The closures being considered include either peak spawning (June – July) or peak harvest (May – June). Gray triggerfish have unique spawning behavior where males establish territories and build nests in the sediment. Males form harems with one to five females around reefs. Females defend the nest for 24-48 hours and aerate the eggs.

An increase in the minimum size limit from 14 inches fork length (FL) to either 16 or 18 inches FL is being considered for both recreational and commercial harvesters. The Council is also considering establishing a commercial trip limit of 50 or 75 pounds.

The Council will continue to discuss options for triggerfish at its June meeting and is anticipated to hold public hearings on gray triggerfish management options later in the summer.

The Commission staff representative is a member of the Reef Fish Committee and will continue to work with the Council on these issues. At the end of this presentation, even though it is early in the process, staff is requesting Commission direction on these long-term management options.

Recreational Grouper Seasons for 2013 and Accountability Measures



- At Florida's request, the Council will review options, including split seasons, for the 2013 recreational gag grouper season
- Modification or elimination of the shallow-water grouper closure will be considered
- Approved removal of overly restrictive accountability measures for shallow-water grouper



Based on Commission direction, staff requested that the Council review options, including split seasons, for setting the 2013 recreational gag grouper season. The Council approved this request and directed Council staff to look into options for modifying the 2013 gag grouper season.

As a part of this review, the Council also will also consider modifying or eliminating the annual February through March shallow-water grouper closure (includes red, black, yellowfish, yellowmouth, rock hind, red hind, and scamp) as part of this process. This spawning season closure was originally intended to help rebuild gag grouper and red grouper populations, but now red grouper is fully rebuilt and gag grouper has its own closed season, so this closure may not be necessary. Fishermen from southwest Florida requested removal of this closure during Council public comment.

The Council also moved forward with a framework action to remove overly restrictive recreational accountability measures for shallow-water grouper. Removal of these accountability measures (shortening seasons the following year if overages occur the previous year) should help shallow-water groupers achieve optimum yield and avoid unnecessary closures.

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

Grouper Allocation

- Council began examination of the allocation between the recreational and commercial sector for gag, red, and black grouper as per request
- Additional economic information will be collected



The Council began examining allocations between the recreational and commercial sector for gag, red, and black grouper as per request. A recommendation was made to NOAA to collect some additional economic information on IFQs as well as charter/for-hire info.

Photograph courtesy of Kyle Miller

Other Council Items



- Expansion of commercial reef fish IFQ program
 - Would include red porgy, vermilion snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, almaco jacks, banded rudderfish, and lesser amberjack
 - Discussion deferred until June meeting
- Designation of artificial reefs as essential fish habitat
- Venting tools and recompression devices
- Mackerel and dealer joint amendments



The Council considered expanding the commercial reef fish individual fishing quota (IFQ) program to include red porgy, vermilion snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, almaco jacks, banded rudderfish, and lesser amberjack. However, the Council decided that the program in its current form did not appear to accomplish its goals. The Council is giving the public until June to suggest why they should continue to work on this item.

The Council directed staff to evaluate the appropriateness of designating fixed petroleum platforms and artificial reefs as essential fish habitat (EFH).

The Council is moving forward with a framework action to modify venting tool requirements in the reef fish fishery. In addition, the Council will be considering the viability of recompression tools as an alternative to venting.

The Gulf and South Atlantic Councils are working on joint amendments for mackerel and wholesale dealer reporting. These items will be covered in the South Atlantic Council presentation.

Sector Separation: Approved for Public Scoping



- Evaluate subdividing the recreational quota for reef fish species into:
 - Private angler
 - For-hire
 - Charter
 - Headboat
- Purpose of scoping is to gather public comment
- Recommended exempted fishing permit for pilot headboat IFQ program



The Council reviewed information on sector separation in the reef fish fishery and decided to move this item to public scoping in order to gather public comment. The Council has heard debate on sector separation, which would divide the recreational quota for a species into either two components, private anglers and for-hire or three components, private anglers, charter and headboats. By moving this item forward Council staff will provide more detailed information for the public to review on the specifics of the concept.

The Council heard debate and testimony about a request for a pilot headboat IFQ program for red snapper and gag grouper using an exempted fishing permit. This program would allow predetermined headboats that are part of *The Gulf Headboat Cooperative* to do a two year study to test an alternative management system for the headboat industry. The participants would be limited to taking their individual recreational quota for these species and be able to take customers out year-round as long as they had quota available. With a very close vote, the Council recommended that NOAA approve this permit.

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

Photograph courtesy of Kyle Miller

Direction Requested



Gray triggerfish

- Recreational:
 - Bag limit
 - Closed season
 - Minimum size limit
- Commercial:
 - Minimum size limit
 - Trip limit
- Input on other Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is June 18 - 22 in Tampa



Staff requests Commission input on possible long-term management measures for gray triggerfish including: establishing a bag limit and closed season for the recreational sector, increasing the minimum size limits for recreational and commercial harvest, and setting a commercial trip limit. Staff also welcomes any input on other Council items from the Commission. The next Council meeting will be held June 18 - 22 in Tampa, FL.