



This is a review and discussion of issues that were discussed at the January 7-8 Reef Fish Committee (Committee) Meeting concerning red snapper in Tampa, and issues that were discussed at the February 5–8 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting in Mobile, AL. The next Council meeting will be April 15-19, 2013, in Gulfport, MS.

Update: This document has been updated following the Council meeting.

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## Red Snapper – 2013 Federal Recreational Season



- Season estimated to be 27 days
  - Increased quotas for 2013, but quota is expected to be caught faster due to increased catch rates and larger fish size
- Bag limit will stay 2 fish
- Season estimate will likely change based on upcoming assessment
  - Positive results could allow for supplemental season
  - Staff suggests fall weekends



***Direction requested***



According to NOAA Fisheries, the 2013 recreational red snapper season in the Gulf of Mexico is currently projected to be 27 days. The 2013 season is expected to be shorter than last year's 46-day season due to an increasing amount of effort in the fishery and the larger size fish that are being caught.

At last week's Council meeting, the Council increased the quotas for the upcoming 2013 season based on the acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendation of 8.46 million pounds (mp) from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee. In 2012, the commercial quota was 4.121 mp and the recreational quota was 3.959 mp. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the 2013 quota will be 4.315 mp for the commercial sector and 4.145 mp for the recreational sector. The quota increase for 2013 is 4.7% relative to the 2012 quota. If the upcoming assessment is good, there may be additional quota increases for the 2013 season.

The Council considered decreasing the bag limit from two to one fish to lengthen the recreational harvest season. A one-fish bag limit would slow harvest rates by 38 percent and allow the season to be lengthened from 27 days to 44 days. However, the Council chose to keep a two-fish bag limit after hearing public testimony that a one-fish bag limit would have negative economic impacts and decrease fishing opportunities because of the time and fuel costs associated with fishing for red snapper offshore.

A benchmark assessment for red snapper is currently underway and is scheduled to be presented to the Council in the spring. If the assessment is positive, another quota increase for 2013 may be warranted, which could allow for additional recreational fishing days. If a quota increase is warranted, the Council will consider an emergency rule in April that will increase harvest quotas for 2013 and could allow for a supplemental recreational fishing season. It is unlikely that the emergency rule would be approved in time to add days to the end of the regular June recreational harvest season, so the Council would also need to decide when the supplemental season would open. Staff suggests that supplemental season days be open during fall weekends (Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays), but requests Commission direction on when the 2013 supplemental season should occur.

## Emergency Rule - 2013 Federal Red Snapper Season



- Emergency rule approved to grant NOAA Fisheries authority to shorten season off states with inconsistent regulations
- State inconsistencies could still shorten Gulf-wide federal season
  - Potential inconsistent seasons from LA or FL would shorten federal season Gulf-wide, not just off the inconsistent state to avoid a quota overage



Last week, the Council approved an emergency rule that will grant NOAA Fisheries the authority to shorten the federal recreational red snapper season off states that adopt inconsistent red snapper regulations in their state waters. For example, Texas has a year-round recreational red snapper season in its state waters, and a four fish bag limit. This emergency rule would shorten the federal season off Texas to account for state waters harvest when the federal season is closed and would result in an 11-day federal season in federal waters off Texas.

However, the Gulf-wide federal recreational red snapper season could also be further shortened if states adopt inconsistent seasons in their state waters. This would occur when shortening or eliminating the federal season off states with inconsistent seasons does not reduce harvest enough to stay within the Gulf-wide quota for recreational red snapper. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Commission has proposed an 88-day season for their state waters. Should Louisiana go inconsistent for the 2013 season, NOAA Fisheries estimates that there will be no federal season off Louisiana's coast and the federal season off the other Gulf states could be shortened to about 17 days to avoid a quota overage. Similarly, if Florida were to go inconsistent, the federal season would also be significantly shortened or eliminated off Florida and the federal season off other Gulf states may also be shortened or eliminated. In 2011, Florida accounted for 33 percent of Gulf red snapper catch, and a significant portion of this harvest occurs in state waters.

## Red Snapper – Future Recreational Seasons

- Under status quo management, federal recreational season length will likely continue to decrease or remain at ~27 days over the next 5 years
  - Estimates do **not** include data from the upcoming red snapper assessment and will likely change
- Council considering several long-term management options for the recreational fishery



In January, the Reef Fish Committee also learned that under status quo management, NOAA Fisheries projects that future recreational red snapper seasons through 2017 will likely continue to shorten, or at best, remain at about 27 days, even with scheduled quota increases. Future season lengths depend heavily on catch rates and average weights of red snapper. If catch rates and the average weight of red snapper continue to increase at the current rate, red snapper seasons would continue to shorten and could be as short as 18 days in 2017. As with the estimate of the 2013 recreational season length, these estimates do not include data from the upcoming red snapper assessment and will likely change.

The Council is considering several long-term management options for the recreational red snapper fishery, including options that could stabilize or increase the number of recreational harvest days such as reallocation, shifting the season start date, creating a slot limit, and harvest tags. More information about these options is provided on the following slides.

## Red Snapper Regional Management

- Would divide Gulf into regions with individual quotas (could be state by state)
- Council allocates quota to states and sets size limit
- Allocating among states challenging
- State selects season and bag limit and tracks quota
  - Would require a substantial increase in state monitoring
- May not result in more fishing days
- Opposed by many at FL scoping meetings



*Direction requested*



One of the options the Council is considering for recreational red snapper harvest is a regional management system. This system could entail state-by-state quotas, or dividing the Gulf into two or three regions for red snapper management. So far, most Council interest has been in making each state its own region for red snapper management. Under regional management, the Council would be responsible for allocating the recreational quota to individual states or regions, and would also set the size limit. Deciding how the recreational quota should be divided among the Gulf states is likely to be challenging because historical landings by state have changed and the red snapper population is expanding more in the eastern Gulf than the western Gulf.

Each state or region would select their own season and bag limit. Each state would also be responsible for tracking their quota to ensure that their allocation is not exceeded, which would require a substantial increase in state monitoring efforts. Regional management would give states flexibility in terms of setting the season and bag limit for red snapper, but would not necessarily result in more fishing days. Details of how this program would work and how it would affect each state still need to be decided. The Council held scoping meetings on regional management in Destin (125 attended) on January 17 and St. Petersburg (24 attended) on January 22. Many that attended these workshops felt that regional management was overly complicated and would not optimize fishing opportunities.

Staff requests direction from the Commission on using regional management as a tool to manage the recreational red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico.

## Red Snapper Allocation

- Currently 51% commercial, 49% recreational
- Council considering increasing recreational allocation to stabilize or lengthen recreational season
  - Shift all at once (ex. allocate 46% commercial and 52% to recreational)
  - Reallocate after reaching a threshold ACL (9.12 mp overall)
  - Shift gradually by giving quota increases to recreational



**Direction requested**



Another option that the Council is considering for the red snapper fishery is reallocation. Currently, 51 percent of the annual catch limit is allocated to the commercial sector, with the remaining 49 percent allocated to the recreational sector. This allocation was established in 1990 and was based on historical averages between sectors from 1979-1987. Shifting allocation from the commercial sector to the recreational sector could stabilize or lengthen the recreational season. There are several ways the Council could reallocate red snapper harvest. The Council could simply shift the allocation for red snapper all at one time, reallocate only after reaching a certain annual catch limit (ACL) chosen by the Council, or shift allocation gradually by giving quota increases (or a portion thereof) to the recreational sector. Last week, the Council added an option to reallocate red snapper after reaching a threshold overall ACL of 9.12 million pounds (mp), which is the same as the highest total allowable catch (which was during 2006 and the year before the red snapper IFQ took effect).

Staff also requests Commission direction on whether to consider reallocation as an option for stabilizing or lengthening the recreational harvest season and any preferred method(s) of reallocation.

## Recreational Red Snapper Season Under Different Allocation Scenarios\*

Year	<u>1) Maintain Existing Allocation</u>	<u>2) Incremental Allocation Shift to Recreational</u>	<u>3) All Future Quota Increases to Recreational</u>
	Number of Season Days		
2013	27	30	30
2014	24 - 27	28-31	28-32
2015	22 -28	26-32	27-34
2016	20-28	24-33	26-36
2017	18-28	22-34	24-37



\*These estimates do **not** include data from the upcoming red snapper assessment and will likely change

NOAA Fisheries presented the Committee with projections of the recreational red snapper season length from 2013 through 2017 under three different allocation scenarios: 1) status quo, 2) incremental shifts to the recreational sector, and 3) giving all quota increases to the recreational sector. The table above summarizes this information and shows how changes in the red snapper allocation could affect the number of days in the recreational season. As with the previous recreational season projections, these estimates will likely change when data from the upcoming red snapper assessment is available.

If the allocation remains at the current ratio (Scenario 1), the recreational season length is expected to decline over the next five years, even with scheduled quota increases from 4.146 mp in 2013 to 5.232 mp by 2017. However, it is possible that the season would remain at about 27-28 days.

For Scenario 2, allocation is shifted incrementally to the recreational sector as the quota increases, until the commercial sector achieves a 4.65 mp quota in 2017. The recreational quota would increase from 4.146 mp to 6.028 mp from 2013 to 2017. Under this scenario, the season could continue to shorten at a slower rate than the status quo, or at best, increase by a few days.

In the third scenario, all future quota increases are allocated to the recreational sector. The commercial quota would remain at 4.315 mp through 2017, but the recreational quota would increase from 4.146 mp to 6.557 mp from 2013 through 2017. Under this scenario, the season could continue to shorten at a slower rate than the previous scenarios, or at best, increase from 30 to 37 days.

## Red Snapper – Other Long-term Options for Recreational Harvest



- “Days at Sea” pilot program for for-hire boats
  - Would allow for-hire boats to choose when they fish instead of following a set red snapper season
  - Scoping meetings to be held in Destin, St. Pete, and Naples
- Inter-sector trading
  - Could allow purchase or lease of IFQ shares for use on recreational trips



**Direction requested**



The Council is also considering several other options for the red snapper fishery. One of these is a pilot “Days at Sea” management program for red snapper harvest in the for-hire sector. This would give for-hire vessels a set number of days, trips, or angler-trips to fish for red snapper each year, but would allow the vessels to choose their own fishing days rather than have an established season. This option could provide charter boats some flexibility in planning trips. The Council will hold scoping meetings on the Days at Sea pilot program in Destin, St. Petersburg, and Naples later this spring.

The Council will also consider inter-sector trading between the commercial and recreational sectors as a management option for red snapper. Inter-sector trading could allow for-hire or even recreational anglers to purchase or lease commercial individual fishing quota (IFQ) shares or allocation for use on recreational fishing trips. Council staff is preparing a document that examines issues with inter-sector trading for the Council’s review at a future meeting.

Staff requests Commission direction on using a Days at Sea pilot program and inter-sector trading in long-term management of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico.

## Red Snapper – Other Long-term Options for Recreational Harvest



- Harvest tags
- Recreational red snapper permit
- Shift season start date
- Slot limit or change in size limit
- Other options?



*Direction requested*



The Council discussed many other options for managing recreational red snapper harvest in the future. Some members of the Council expressed interest in a recreational red snapper harvest tag system (like Florida's tarpon tag) or a red snapper permit (similar to Florida's snook permit). The purpose of these programs could be to increase data collection and/or limit harvest within the quota. Such tags or permit programs would likely have to be administered by each of the Gulf states. The Council requested that the Gulf state fisheries management agencies discuss the processes and challenges for implementing such programs in their states at a future Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting. In Florida, one challenge to a harvest tag or permit system for red snapper would have to be approved by the Legislature if the tags or permits cost money.

The Council also received a report that listed other options for management of the recreational red snapper fishery including 1) a shift in the season start date to a time of year in which fishing effort is lower or 2) a change in the size limit or 3) creation of a slot limit. So far, none of these options are being considered by the Council. One issue that would need to be considered with changing the size limit would be a potential increase in discard mortality.

Commission direction is also requested on these and other options as potential management tools in the red snapper fishery.

## Red Snapper – 2013 Gulf State Recreational Season

- Scheduled to open June 1
- Consistent season estimated to be 27 days
  - Estimate will change based on new assessment
  - Proposed LA state season would shorten season
- Inconsistent season would result in shortened or eliminated federal season off Florida and other Gulf states



***Direction requested***



The Gulf state waters recreational red snapper season is scheduled to open June 1, just like the federal season. If the Commission chooses to implement a season in Gulf state waters that is consistent with the federal season, the state season would be approximately 27 days according to current estimates. This estimate will likely change based on the new stock assessment and could be less if Louisiana or other Gulf states select an inconsistent season in their state waters. If the Commission chooses an inconsistent season for state waters, the federal season off Florida would be shortened or even eliminated to account for harvest in state waters. If shortening or eliminating the federal season off Florida is not enough to avoid an overrun of the federal annual catch limit, the federal season off other Gulf states would also be shortened or eliminated.

## Other State Season Considerations

- ~40% of Gulf recreational red snapper harvested off Florida
  - Significant harvest in state waters
- Inconsistency would result in additional harvest restrictions
  - Federally-permitted for-hire vessels must follow federal season, even in state waters
  - If the ABC is exceeded, scheduled quota increases could be held back in future years
- Harvest seasons for other Gulf reef fish



There are many other points to keep in mind when selecting the season for recreational red snapper in Gulf state waters. From 2001-2011, nearly 40% of Gulf recreational red snapper harvest occurred off Florida, and more than half of this harvest occurred in state waters, so Florida plays an important role in the red snapper rebuilding plan. An inconsistent season would likely severely limit or eliminate their opportunities to catch red snapper because the federal season off Florida would be shortened or eliminated to compensate for harvest in state waters when the federal season is closed. Federally-permitted for-hire vessels must follow the federal season, even in state waters, so an inconsistent season would limit or eliminate fishing opportunities for tourists and anglers fishing from federally-permitted for-hire vessels. If the acceptable biological catch (ABC) for red snapper is exceeded, scheduled quota increases in future years could be withheld. This would affect commercial and recreational harvesters, and would again lead to shorter future recreational seasons. Finally, the Commission may want to consider the harvest seasons for other Gulf reef fish when considering red snapper harvest. The federal gag grouper season opens July 1, while amberjack is closed during June and July. A summary of these seasons is provided on slide 15.

## Other Final Council Actions



- Vermilion snapper and yellowtail snapper ACLs set
- Recreational vermilion snapper bag limit reduced to 10 fish (same as Florida bag limit)
- Requirement to carry and use venting tools when fishing for reef fish eliminated
- Aquaculture rule edits finalized



The Council also took final action to set the vermilion snapper and yellowtail snapper annual catch limits (ACLs). Both species were recently assessed and are not overfished or undergoing overfishing. The vermilion snapper ACL will remain the same, but the yellowtail snapper ACL will increase. The vermilion snapper bag limit was also reduced to 10 fish, which is the same as the bag limit in Florida state waters) to reduce the risk of overfishing by the recreational sector.

The Council also took final action to remove the requirement for recreational and commercial harvesters to possess and use a venting tool when fishing for reef fish. The purpose of requiring use of venting tools was to reduce mortality of released reef fish. However, recent studies indicate that there are other tools, such as recompression devices, that may be as or more effective at increasing survival of released reef fish. By removing the requirement to carry and use a venting tool, fishermen are free to use different methods to increase survivability of released fish. Staff will return to the Commission at a future FWC meeting with a federal consistency action to repeal the current venting tool requirement in Gulf state waters.

Finally, the Council took final action to approve an updated version of rule language to implement the Council's Aquaculture Fishery Management Plan. The Council approved the fishery management plan for aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico in 2009, but it has not yet been implemented. The purpose of this plan is to maximize benefits to the Nation by establishing a regional permitting process to manage the development of an environmentally sound and economically sustainable aquaculture industry in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Changes to the rule language were needed to make the rule consistent with the NOAA Marine Aquaculture Policy.

## Direction Requested – Recreational Red Snapper Management



### 2013 Recreational Season

- State waters season
  - Return to the Commission in April
- Desired dates and structure for federal supplemental season
  - Staff suggests fall weekends



*Direction requested*



Staff requests direction on the 2013 recreational season for Gulf state waters. Staff requests bringing the 2013 recreational red snapper season before the Commission at the April meeting in Tallahassee to consider consistency with the federal season.

Additionally, staff welcomes direction from the Commission on the 2013 recreational red snapper season. Specifically, staff requests direction on when the Commission would prefer to have a supplemental red snapper season in 2013, should additional quota be available after the red snapper season is completed. Staff suggests fall weekends (Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays), but welcomes Commission direction.

## Direction Requested – Recreational Red Snapper Management

### Long-term Management Options

- Regional management
- Allocation shift
- “Days at Sea” program for charter boats
- Inter-sector trading
- Shift seasons start date
- Slot Limit
- Harvest tags or permits
- Other ideas?



**Direction requested**



*Next Council meeting is April 15–19 in Gulfport, MS*

Staff also requests direction from the Commission on long-term management options for the red snapper recreational fishery. At upcoming meetings, the Council will consider a range of management tools that could be used to manage harvest in this fishery. Some of these options could result in longer red snapper seasons, while other approaches could provide more flexibility in planning future seasons. Management options include regional management, reallocation, the “Days at Sea” program, inter-sector trading, shifting the start date or end date of the season, establishing a slot limit, or implementing effort limitations like a harvest tag or red snapper permit.

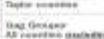
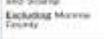
Direction on any other Council items is also welcome.

The next Council meeting will be held in Gulfport, MS from April 15 - 19, 2013, which is the week of the Commission meeting.

The following slides are considered back up material and are not anticipated to be part of the Commission meeting presentation



### 2013 Recreational Seasons Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
 Atlantic Croaker	Open											
 Tag Snapper (Parrot, Weakfish, Yellowtail and Tiger snappers)	Open											
 Tag Snapper All snappers including Parrot, Weakfish, Yellowtail, Tiger and Mexico Croaker	Open											
 Other Snappers Includes Red, Black, Whitefish, Yellowmouth, Rock Head, Rosehead and Groupers	Open											
 Snapper Head	Open											
 Other Snappers Includes Black, Whitefish, Cuban, Gray, Lane, Mullus, Schomburgk, Wrenfish, Bluefish, Tag, Muliparty, Queen, Web and Webfooted	Open											
 One Tigerfish	Open											



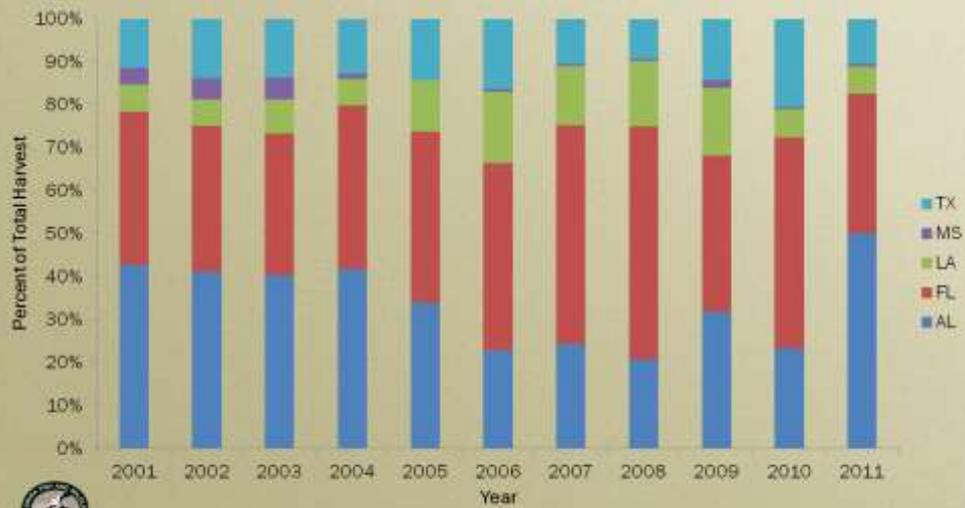
## Inconsistent Recreational Red Snapper Regulations in Other Gulf States

State	2013 Open Season	Bag Limit	Minimum Size Limit
Texas	Year round	4 fish	15 inches
Louisiana	3 day weekends from Saturday preceding Palm Sunday through Sept. 30 including Memorial Day and Labor Day (88 days)	3 fish	16 inches

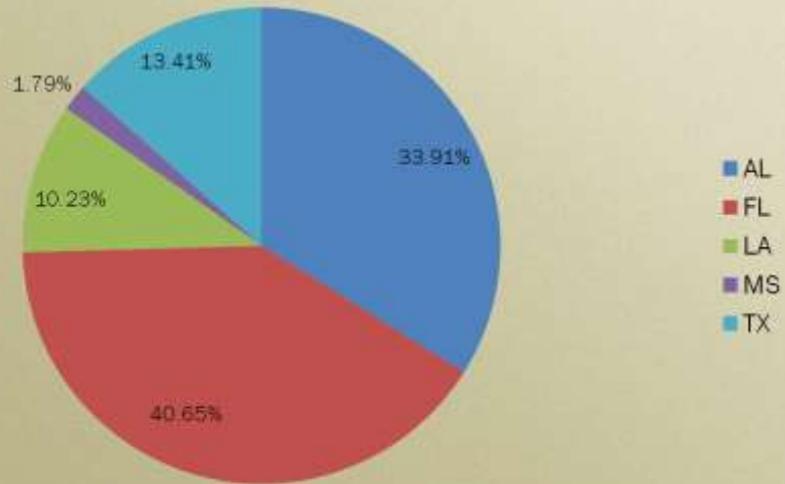


This table shows state red snapper recreational harvest regulations for Texas and Louisiana, which have both indicated that they will be inconsistent with federal red snapper regulations in 2013. For comparison, the federal season is currently scheduled to begin on June 1, but the season length has not yet been calculated. The federal bag limit is two fish per person per day and the minimum size limit is 16 inches total length. In 2011, 10.5% of the Gulf recreational red snapper quota was landed in Texas and 6.2% of the quota was landed in Louisiana.

## Harvest of Red Snapper in Whole Weight of Fish by State, 2001-2011



## Average Harvest of Red Snapper in Whole Weight of Fish by State, 2001-2011



# Harvest of Red Snapper in Whole Weight of Fish in West Florida, 2001-2011

