

This is a review and discussion of actions taken at the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) meeting on June 17-21 in Pensacola and July 17 in New Orleans, LA and scheduled discussions for the Council's Aug. 26-30 meeting in San Antonio, TX.

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

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Report date: September 3, 2013

2013 Red Snapper Quota and Recreational Season – Final Action



- Stock is rebuilding ahead of schedule
- Quota increased from 8.46 to 11 million pounds for 2013
- Allowed for supplemental recreational season to begin Oct. 1 pending available quota
 - Consecutive days
 - Preliminary season estimate of 21 days, but number of days depends on harvest during summer season
- Pending approval by U.S. Secretary of Commerce



In June, the Council received the new red snapper stock assessment and learned that the stock is still overfished, but is rebuilding ahead of schedule. In response, the Council held a special meeting on July 17 to increase the red snapper quota and set a supplemental recreational season for 2013. If the Council's actions are approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, the overall red snapper quota will increase from 8.46 million pounds (mp) to 11 mp for 2013. This equates to a 5.39 mp quota for recreational and a 5.61 mp quota for commercial harvest in 2013. Quotas for 2014 and 2015 will be set during future Council meetings and are expected to also be approximately 11 mp.

The Council also approved a supplemental red snapper season for 2013 for the recreational fishery so that anglers can harvest this additional quota. If quota is available, this supplemental season is scheduled to begin Oct. 1. When the Council met in July, NOAA Fisheries estimated that the season would be approximately 21 consecutive days. However, the length of the season will depend on how much of the recreational quota was harvested during the summer season. This season opening is also pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

Preliminary Recreational Landings Estimates Through June 2013



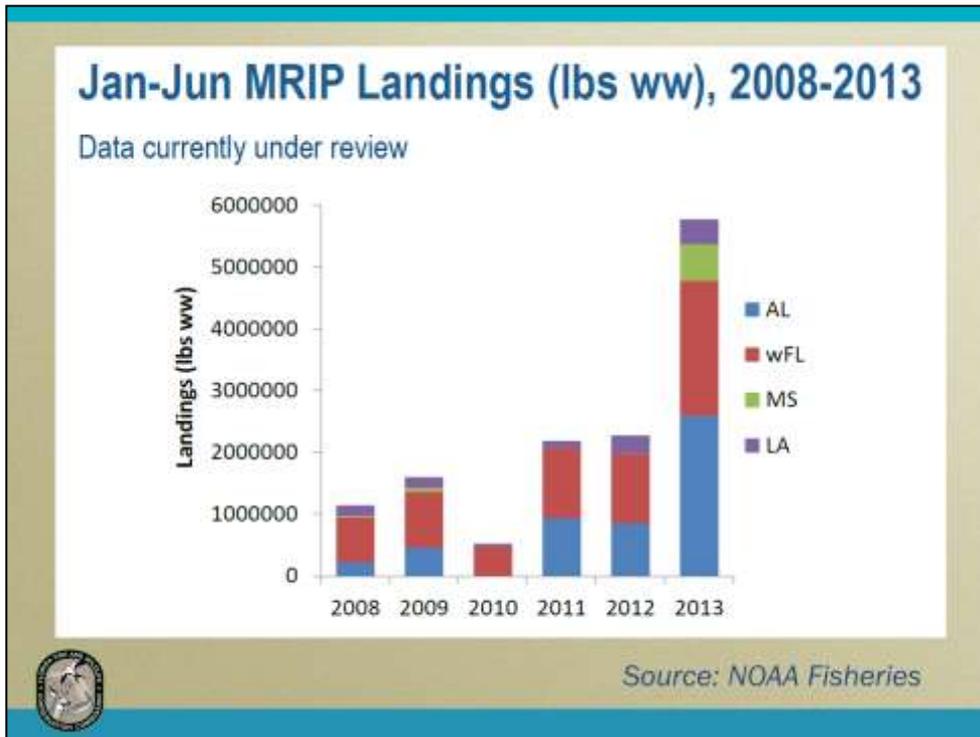
- Preliminary recreational landings from Jan. – June suggest drastic increase in harvest compared to previous years
 - New recreational angler intercept methods in 2013 raise questions about the validity of these and previous harvest estimates
 - NOAA Fisheries still reviewing data
- Status of the October 2013 supplemental season in federal waters to be determined

Staff recommends creating a supplemental season for Gulf state waters once more information about federal season is available

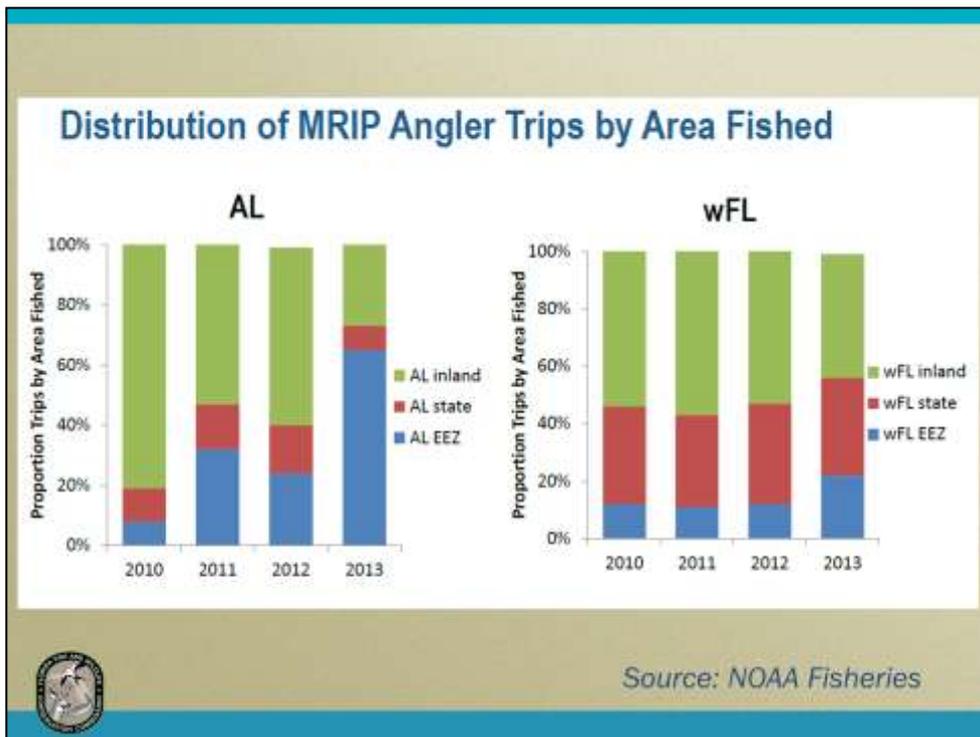


At the August Council meeting, NOAA Fisheries staff presented preliminary recreational landings estimates of recreational red snapper harvest for 2013 through June. The data suggest that there was a drastic increase in recreational red snapper harvest in 2013 compared to previous years, particularly in Florida and Alabama, and that the increased quota for recreational harvest (5.39 mp) that was approved by the Council in July has already been exceeded. NOAA Fisheries is reviewing this data to determine if this spike in landings is actually the result of a change in recreational harvest estimation methods in the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). NOAA Fisheries introduced new MRIP procedures for recreational angler intercepts in March 2013 to address potential biases in the previous survey design. It is unclear if these high red snapper landings are falsely inflated due to new MRIP recreational harvest estimation procedures, if the new survey is showing a more realistic picture of the fishery that has not been revealed in historical landings, if there was a change in the fishery in 2013 that resulted in a true spike of red snapper landings, or some combination of these is occurring.

Until the NOAA Fisheries' review of the data is complete, it is unknown if there will be an October supplemental season in Gulf federal waters, and if there is a season, how long it will be. NOAA Fisheries is expected make an announcement about the season in the next few weeks. Many charter captains that attended the October Council meeting noted that they had already booked trips for the anticipated October season. Staff recommends creating a supplemental season for Gulf state waters once more information about the potential federal supplemental season is available.



This graph shows Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) landings estimates by Gulf state for 2008-2013. These estimates are currently being reviewed by NOAA Fisheries. These preliminary estimates indicate that recreational red snapper harvest during the first six months of 2013 was approximately 5.8 mp, which is greater than the increased quota approved by the Council in July. These data do not include Texas landings because Texas has its own recreational landings estimation program and does not participate in MRIP.



These graphs show MRIP’s preliminary estimates of angler trips by area fished for Alabama and Florida’s Gulf coast. Preliminary data indicate that in 2013, a higher than usual proportion of angler trips were taken in federal waters (shown in blue) than past years. This difference could be attributable to the new MRIP angler intercept procedures that changed how angler intercept sites are selected, as well as when and how long samplers stay at sites to conduct interviews.

Red Snapper Regional Management – Final Action Delayed



- Further action deferred to October meeting
 - Council felt issues with MRIP needed to be resolved first
- State allocation percentages not yet determined
- Public hearings held in August



The Council decided to defer further action on regional management until the October Council meeting based on the issues encountered with the preliminary 2013 season harvest data from MRIP. Based upon the new data, the Council also deferred action on selecting preferred state allocation percentages. This continues to be a controversial issue because landings have shifted toward the eastern Gulf of Mexico as the stock rebuilds and expands off West Florida, and the present uncertainty in the MRIP landings estimates raises questions about the validity of landings estimates in 2013 and previous years.

Under the Council's proposed plan, each state would be allocated its own recreational quota for red snapper. Each state would be responsible for tracking their quota to ensure that their allocation is not exceeded. Regional management would give states flexibility in setting the season and bag limit for red snapper landed in their state, but would not necessarily result in more fishing days because each state would be required to stay within their quota.

Florida public hearings on regional management took place in Panama City (7 people attended) on Aug. 7 and St. Petersburg (8 people attended) on Aug. 12. Recently, public support for the Council's regional management plan has eroded. Some feel that better data collection methods are needed before regional management occurs, and others feel that the Council's proposed plan does not provide enough control to the states, since the states would be required to follow the Magnuson Stevens Act and NOAA Fisheries would continue to oversee some aspects of management. Some for-hire captains feel that regional management could be a disadvantage to them if their state chooses seasons and regulations that favor private recreational anglers.

Other Red Snapper Management Options – Discussions and Actions



- Discussions on sector reallocation will continue in October
- Council to hold inter-sector trading scoping meetings in the fall
 - Florida meetings to be in Panama City and St. Petersburg
 - Teleconference/webinar



The Council continued discussions of other management options for the red snapper fishery and reviewed scoping documents on sector reallocation and inter-sector trading at their August meeting. Discussions on sector reallocation will continue in October. Shifting allocation from the commercial sector to the recreational sector could stabilize or lengthen the recreational season.

The Council will hold public hearings on inter-sector trading options sometime this fall. Meetings in Florida will take place in Panama City and St. Petersburg. Meetings will also be held via webinar or teleconference. If inter-sector trading is allowed, private recreational anglers or for-hire vessels could lease or purchase red snapper Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) shares or allocation from commercial harvesters for use on recreational trips, even outside the recreational red snapper season.

Reef Fish Management Developments



- Begin amendment that would remove requirement for federally-permitted for-hire boats to follow federal rules regardless of where they are fishing ("30B")
- Discuss splitting the recreational sector into two sectors
 - Private anglers
 - For-hire (charter and headboats)



At the August Council meeting, the Council directed staff to begin an amendment that would remove the requirement for federally-permitted for-hire vessels to follow federal rules when fishing for reef fish. Based on past Commission direction, the Commission's representative on the Council supported this action. The requirement for federally-permitted for-hire vessels to follow federal rules was originally approved in 2008 (as part of Amendment 30B to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan) and was a response to Florida approving inconsistent red snapper regulations in state waters. Many view this rule as unfair to the for-hire industry because it prevents federally-permitted for-hire vessels from fishing in open state waters if federal waters are closed. This amendment will be developed over the next few Council meetings before final action is taken.

At the October Council meeting in New Orleans, the Council will discuss separating the recreational sector into two sectors: private anglers and for-hire (charter boats and headboats). Sector separation is a contentious issue that had been previously tabled by the Council. Based on previous Commission direction, staff voted against moving forward with sector separation discussions. Staff will update the Commission as this issue develops at the Council.

Headboat Electronic Reporting – Final Action



- Federally-permitted headboats will be required to electronically report fishing records weekly
- Allows for more accurate and timely data collection
- Consistent with reporting requirements in Atlantic federal waters
- Pending approval by U.S. Secretary of Commerce



In June, the Council took final action on an amendment that if approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, will require federally-permitted headboats to report their fishing records to NOAA Fisheries Service electronically on a weekly basis. In federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico, a headboat is a vessel that meets all or a combination of the following criteria: 1) it is licensed to carry more than 15 passengers; 2) it fishes in federal waters or state and federal waters for reef fish, coastal migratory pelagics, or Gulf dolphin and wahoo; 3) and it charges primarily per person. Florida has about 40 headboats that fish in Gulf federal waters, which is about 52% of the Gulfwide total. This action will allow for more accurate and timely collection of effort, landings, and discard data. It is also consistent with recent action taken in the Atlantic by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Staff Recommendation



- Authorize Executive Director, in consultation with the Chairman, to create a supplemental Gulf state waters recreational red snapper season via Executive Order once more information about the federal season is available
- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next meeting is Oct. 28 – Nov. 1 in New Orleans, LA

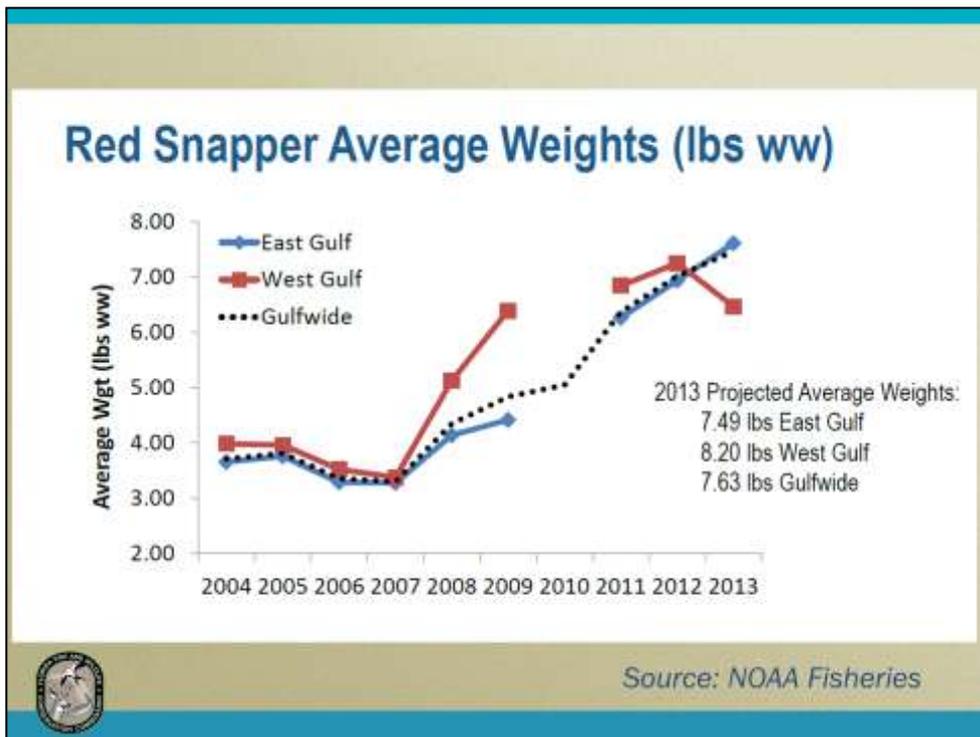


Staff recommends authorizing the Executive Director, in consultation with the Chairman, to create a supplemental Gulf state waters recreational red snapper season via Executive Order once more information about the federal season is available. This season could be consistent with the federal season that is pending opening on Oct. 1.

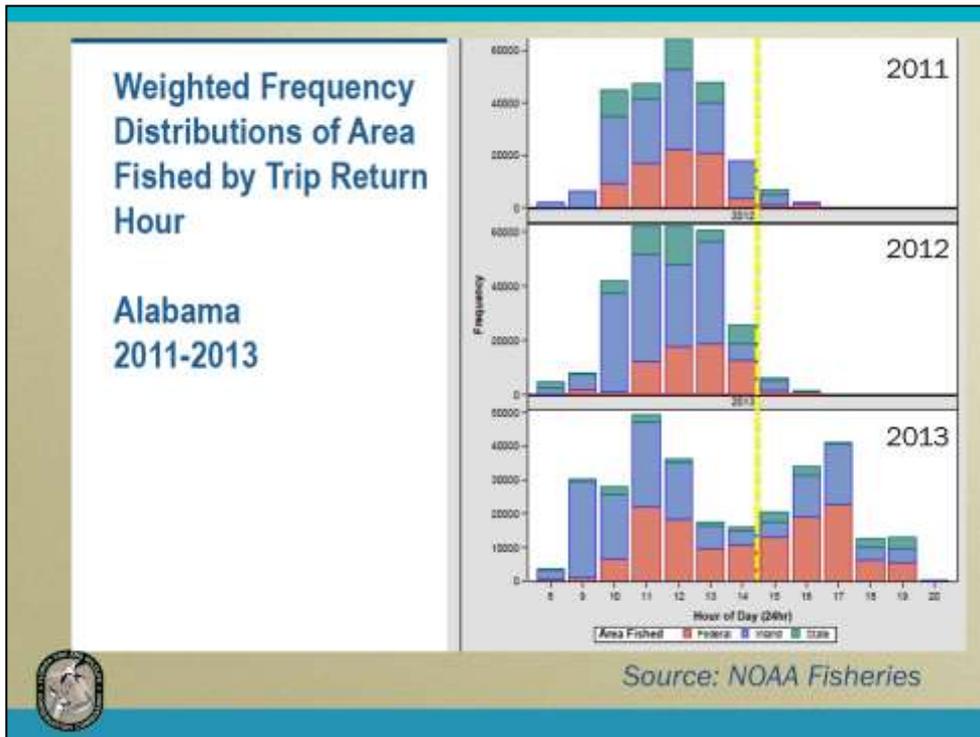
Commission input on other Council items is always welcome. The next Council meeting will be Oct. 28 – Nov. 1 in New Orleans, LA.

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



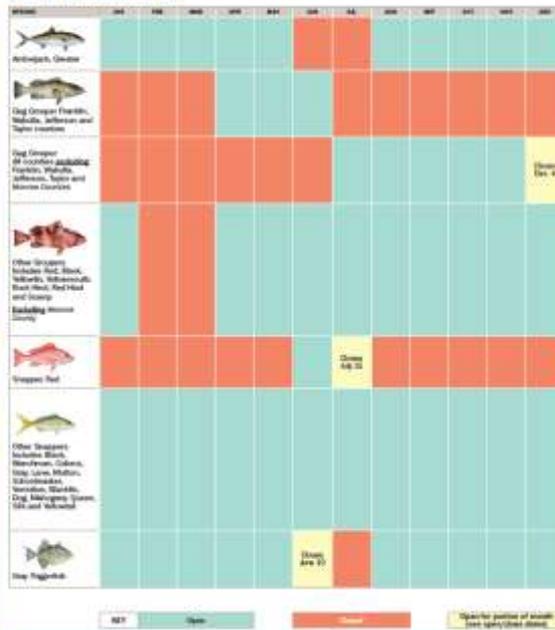


This graph shows preliminary MRIP data on the average weights of recreationally-harvested red snapper. The average weight of red snapper harvested in the eastern Gulf in 2013 continued to go up, but went unexpectedly down in the western Gulf. The Gulfwide average is similar to the average weight for the eastern Gulf because such a large proportion of red snapper are harvested off Florida and Alabama.



These graphs show frequencies of hours that anglers returned from fishing trips in Alabama from 2011-2013. As with the rest of the MRIP data shown in this presentation, these data are under review. NOAA Fisheries only shared these Alabama graphs with the Council at its August meeting, but noted that Florida trips had a similar trend. Hour of day (in military time) is shown on the x-axis and frequency is shown on the y-axis. Federal waters trips are shown in red. Note that many more trip returns are shown late in the afternoon in 2013 compared to 2011 and 2012, and that a large portion of these trips were from federal waters. This difference could be attributable to the new MRIP angler intercept procedures that changed how angler intercept sites are selected, as well as when and how long samplers stay at sites to conduct interviews.

**2013 State Recreational Seasons
Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish**



Red Snapper Regional Management



- Council would delegate recreational quota and allow states to manage harvest of that quota
 - Including bag limit, size limit, seasons, and ability to set closed areas
 - Regional accountability measure proposed
 - If a state exceeds their annual quota, their quota for next year would be reduced by the amount of the overage if the Gulf-wide quota is exceeded



In April, the Council chose preferred alternatives for red snapper regional management. Based on the current preferred alternatives, the states would have the authority to set bag limits, size limits, seasons, and closed areas in federal waters off their states and would be responsible for monitoring and staying within the quota allotted to them by the Council. Also included in the options for regional management is an accountability measure that would reduce a state's annual quota if the state went over their allocation in the previous year. However, this state quota reduction would only occur if the overall Gulf-wide quota was exceeded during the year of the state quota overage.

Red Snapper Regional Management – Florida Proposal



- Florida would initially calculate season length using MRIP and models similar to NOAA Fisheries models
- In time (with additional funding), would like to add MRIP-compatible sampling to identify sampling universe of reef fish anglers (ex. permit system)
 - Could allow for more timely data that could be used to monitor quota in-season



If the Commission accepts delegation of recreational red snapper management and its associated responsibilities, Florida must set its season length and regulations so that its quota is not exceeded. Initially, Florida would calculate its season length using existing Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) survey data and models similar to models currently used by NOAA Fisheries to predict red snapper season lengths. This could be done without additional funding as early as 2014 if regional management is implemented. In time, if additional funding is available, the FWC could also add MRIP-compatible data collection to identify anglers that fish for red snapper (and other reef fish). For example, the FWC could develop a permit system for anglers landing and possessing reef fish, similar to Louisiana's Recreational Offshore Landing Permit, and require anglers to report their catches. Such a system could allow for more timely catch data that could be used to monitor the red snapper quota during the fishing season.