



**Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System**  
Draft Rule  
April 16, 2014



**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**  
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 1

This is a draft rule to create a Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System, which would require private recreational anglers to report their intention to harvest or attempt to harvest reef fish species such as red snapper, gag grouper, and amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico. This data reporting system would be used to collect more accurate, precise, and timely catch and effort estimates for key recreational reef fish fisheries off Florida's Gulf coast.

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## Background

- In February, staff presented proposed recreational data collection improvements for Gulf reef fish, including red snapper
- Proposal included a new recreational reef fish permit that would require rulemaking
- Commission directed staff to hold public workshops and return with a draft rule in April



At the February Commission meeting, staff presented the Commission a proposal to improve recreational data collection efforts for Gulf reef fish, including red snapper. Part of this proposal included a new recreational fishing permit for private anglers that would help define the universe of anglers who fish for Gulf reef fish, and would be used for targeted surveys of these anglers. Although staff proposed that this permit would be free, rulemaking would be required to make the permit mandatory. The Commission directed staff to hold public workshops on the data collection improvements and proposed permit before the April Commission meeting. As a result of public input received at the workshops, staff is proposing a Gulf Reef Fish Data Collection System instead of a permit. Staff will present the results of those workshops and a draft rule for the Commission's consideration in the following slides.

## Current Recreational Fishing Survey

- MRIP – survey used to estimate recreational fishing harvest and effort in saltwater fisheries throughout FL and most of the southeast
  - Federal survey, but partly conducted by FWC biologists
  - Separate surveys for private anglers and for-hire vessels
- Two main components:
  - Dockside surveys estimate catch
  - Telephone survey estimate effort
- Data used in stock assessments and management (e.g., quota management, predicting season lengths)



Data on the recreational fisheries harvest, number of fish caught and released, and fishing effort (number of recreational fishing trips) is collected through NOAA Fisheries' Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) in most southeastern states. The MRIP survey collects information through two main components: 1) information on catch is obtained from onsite surveys, and 2) information on fishing effort is obtained from phone surveys of residents in coastal counties using random digit dialing. Separate surveys are used to gather catch and effort data from private anglers, charter boats, and headboats. In Florida, MRIP dockside surveys are conducted by FWC biologists and the phone survey is conducted by a third-party contractor hired by NOAA. These data are important because they are used in stock assessments and analyses that can have direct implications on management, particularly for federally-managed species like red snapper that have annual quotas. MRIP data is used to evaluate of fisheries regulations, predict the length of fishing seasons, and to track and manage fishery quotas.

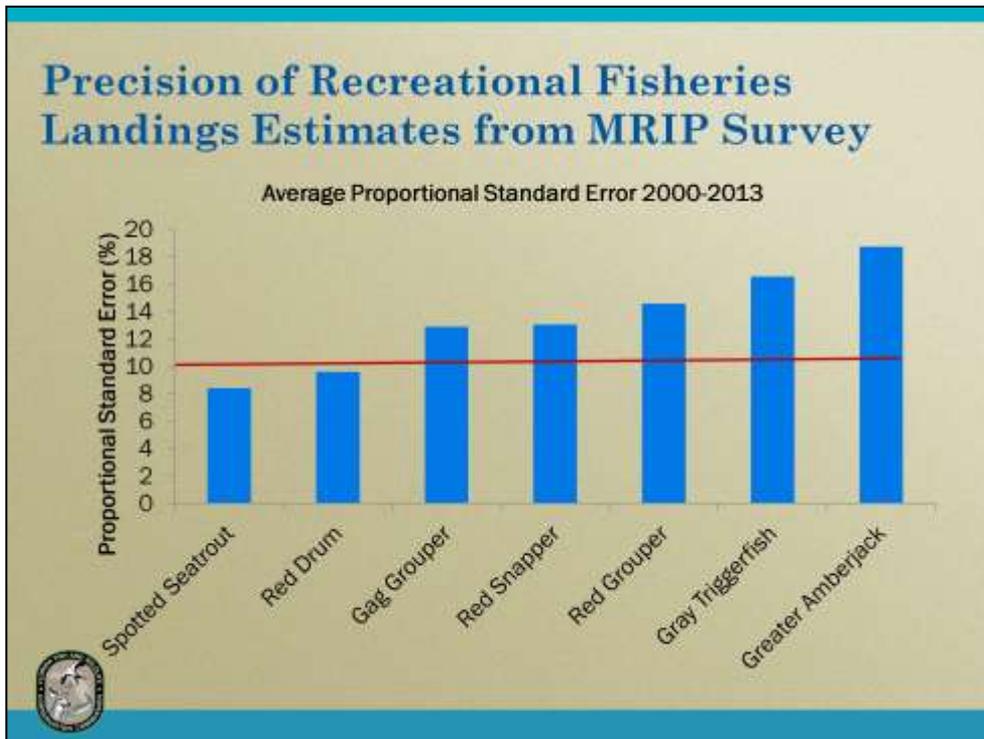
## Reef Fish Data Collection Needs

- MRIP survey shortcomings:
  - Universe of offshore reef fish anglers for telephone surveys is not defined (currently using random calls of coastal households to estimate fishing effort)
  - Low number of dockside intercepts on sites originating offshore fishing trips
- Growing number of Gulf reef fish anglers asking for data collection improvements that provide:
  - More accurate and timely estimates of fishing effort
  - More reliable, credible, and timely catch estimates
- Louisiana recently developed survey and Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit to improve recreational data collection for offshore species including reef fish



About 16 million saltwater angling trips are taken from the Gulf Coast of Florida each year. About one-half are offshore trips for species like red snapper, grouper, and amberjack. The current MRIP effort sampling methodology does not adequately sample the offshore component of these fisheries. Although there have been recent improvements to the MRIP survey, additional enhancements to the effort survey could improve recreational effort estimates for offshore fisheries. A growing number of Gulf reef fish anglers have been asking for data collection improvements that would provide more accurate and timely estimates of fishing effort as well as more reliable, credible, and timely catch estimates.

Recently, the Gulf states have been discussing ways to improve recreational fishery data collection, particularly for the red snapper fishery. The State of Louisiana has already introduced data collection program improvements in their state that include a special recreational fishing permit for species like red snapper and yellowfin tuna. This permit been used successfully to identify a universe of anglers targeting these species and generate more accurate estimates of offshore fishing effort in Louisiana.



In statistics the term "standard error" is used to describe the precision of the statistic being estimated. Proportional standard error (or PSE) is simply the standard error expressed as a percentage of the statistic being estimated. Low PSE values indicate that your modeling assumptions are valid and that your sample size was sufficient to generate a good estimate (a complete census would result in a PSE of zero). In this graph, the statistic being estimated is the annual landings in pounds for a number of species on the Gulf coast of Florida. Note that the PSE values for spotted seatrout and red drum (mostly inshore fisheries) do not exceed 10% while PSE values for offshore reef fish species (gag, red grouper, gray triggerfish, and greater amberjack) are all above 10% and, in some cases, above 15%. This indicates that landings estimates for the reef fish species are less precise than those for the inshore fisheries. This difference is most likely due to undersampling of these offshore fisheries in the current MRIP design. Use of the Gulf Reef Fish Registry will allow more targeted surveys and reduce the uncertainty of reef fish recreational catch and effort estimates.

## FWC Proposal Goals

- Establish a Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System to better identify the universe of private reef fish anglers
- Use this reporting system to improve recreational harvest and effort data collection for Florida's reef fish species (including red snapper) via targeted angler surveys



The overarching goal of FWC's proposal is to improve the quality of recreational fisheries data used for assessment and management of recreational reef fish fisheries off Florida's Gulf coast. This is to be achieved by 1) establishing a Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System to better identify universe of offshore private reef fish anglers, and 2) use this reporting system to improve recreational harvest and effort data collection for Florida's reef fish species via targeted anglers surveys.

## Proposed Data Collection Improvements

- **Catch:** More dock-side intercepts targeting sites with offshore boats over a longer time period
- **Fishing effort:** Identify offshore anglers through a reporting system. Surveys would target offshore anglers through snail-mail, e-mail, and then follow up phone calls



Proposed recreational fisheries data collection improvements include:

- 1) Additional targeted survey efforts to collect catch data from offshore private recreational fisheries. A comprehensive list of recreational fishing access points is currently maintained by FWC and used for the access point intercept survey portion of the MRIP. This site list will be used to identify a sub-set of sites throughout the west coast of Florida where private recreational boats return from offshore fishing trips. Offshore private boat fishing sites will be selected for supplemental assignments using valid statistical sampling approaches.
- 2) Focused fishing effort surveys based on a better-defined universe of offshore anglers obtained through the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System. A subset of anglers that have reported in the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System would be surveyed to estimate fishing effort. These surveys would involve a combination of regular mail, e-mail, and follow up phone calls.

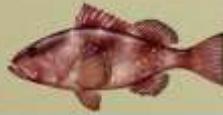
## What Do We Need for Good Effort Data Collection?

### Ideal Components:

- Mandatory
- Renewed annually
- Fee-based
- Boat-based
- No adult exemptions

### FWC Proposal:

- ✓ Mandatory
- ✓ Renewed annually
- No cost to anglers
- Angler-based
- Minimal exemptions



From a strictly data collection perspective the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System should have the following components:

- Mandatory: as to provide the most inclusive data set. Recommended for statistical estimation purposes.
- Renewed annually: so the system has the most up to date participation and contact information records.
- Fee-based: to discourage non-reef fish anglers from reporting just in case. Even a small fee helps prevent oversubscription.
- Boat-based: cheaper to implement. A boat-based reporting system would also decrease the probability of collecting inaccurate information from occasional visiting anglers.
- No adult exemptions: provides for the most complete list of anglers who fish for reef fishes in the Gulf (except for anglers fishing aboard for-hire vessels), which would lead to more accurate data.

FWC staff's Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System proposal includes many of the ideal data effort data collection components, but also some compromises based on feedback from anglers. Under this proposal, anglers fishing from a boat that intend to harvest, attempt to harvest, or possess certain Gulf reef fish species would be annually required to report this intention to the FWC through the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System. Staff is proposing that the reporting system be no cost to anglers so that it would not be a financial burden to anglers and could be created as soon as possible. Staff is also proposing an angler-based, rather than boat-based reporting system. This has been requested by many stakeholders that feel that an angler-based reporting system will be beneficial because it will give us a direct estimate of how many Gulf reef fish anglers are fishing in Florida. An angler-based system would also be compatible with MRIP and other states' data collection systems. Although staff's proposal does contain some exemptions from reporting requirements, these exemptions are minimal and should not compromise the integrity of data collected through the reporting system. The following slides contain details about how the proposed Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System would be structured.

## Proposed Reporting System Structure

- Mandatory for private recreational anglers (i.e., not for-hire sector) on a boat along Florida's Gulf coast intending or attempting to harvest or possess one or more of the following reef fish
  - Red snapper
  - Gag
  - Amberjacks/Rudderfish/Almaco jack
  - Red grouper
  - Black grouper
  - Vermilion snapper
  - Gray triggerfish
- Gulf reef fish anglers would report annually
- No cost to anglers (funding for the first 5 years provided by NFWF Gulf restoration grant)
  - Continuation in future years would require additional funding



The proposed Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System would be mandatory for private recreational anglers fishing from a boat off Florida's Gulf coast that intend to harvest, attempt to harvest, or possess one or more of the following reef fish species: red snapper, gag, amberjacks/rudderfish/almaco jack (a complex of closely related jacks that are difficult to tell apart), red grouper, black grouper, vermilion snapper, and gray triggerfish. These species represent the majority of offshore reef fish harvest by Florida Gulf coast anglers and use of the reporting system would improve estimates of recreational harvest of these species.

Anglers would report their intent to harvest, attempt to harvest, or possess these species to the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System using the system already in place for issuing FWC licenses and permits. The data reporting system will be free of charge but anglers that report will be required to provide their name, permanent mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address (if available) and must agree to submit to a survey whenever their reporting number is selected (only a subset of anglers in the data reporting system would be surveyed). Participation must be renewed annually to insure that contact information remains up to date. Since implementation of the data reporting system is associated with the enhanced data collection program funded by NFWF, the data reporting system would be free of charge to anglers during the first 5 years of the program (2014-2019). The Commission would need to secure funding to support continuation of this system after the NFWF grant ends.

## Proposed Reporting System Exemptions

- Children under 16 years of age
- Anglers fishing from a for-hire vessel or state-licensed recreational fishing vessel
- Commission and permitted harvest for scientific or educational purposes
- Propose **including** anglers 65 or older in the registry
  - 18% of Floridians are 65 and older
- **Includes** others exempt from recreational saltwater fishing license requirements as well as lifetime or multi-year license holders



Anglers exempted from participating in the proposed Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System include:

- Children under 16 years of age: children under 16 usually do not fish from a boat without an adult onboard, specially offshore.
- Anglers fishing from a for-hire vessel: the for-hire sector is already well-surveyed. The focus of this registry is on private recreational anglers.
- State-licensed recreational fishing vessels: a miniscule number of vessels possess this license, so this is not significant from a data collection perspective. These vessels are also required by statute to report harvest data by other means.
- Persons authorized to harvest for scientific and educational purposes: FWC employees harvesting for FWC business and any person otherwise authorized or permitted by the FWC to harvest for educational or scientific purposes would also be exempt.

Other anglers exempted from having a Florida saltwater fishing license (i.e., seniors over 65 years of age and certain members of the U.S. military) as well as anglers who possess lifetime or multi-year saltwater fishing licenses would be required to participate in the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System annually so they have the opportunity to participate in fishing surveys. From a statistical standpoint, it is important to include anglers 65 years or older because a large portion of Florida residents (18% according to the 2012 U.S. Census) are 65 or older. By including anglers that are 65 years and older, we would be able to better sample the actual population of anglers that fish for reef fish in the Gulf. Including lifetime or multi-year license holders in the data reporting system would be beneficial because it would identify which of these anglers are fishing for Gulf reef fish and ensure that contact information for these anglers is current.

## Public Workshops – March 2014

- Fort Myers – 22 attendees
- St. Petersburg – 29 attendees
- Perry – 22 attendees
- Destin – 35 attendees
- Pensacola – 37 attendees
- Teleconference – about 25 callers



At the request of the Commission, staff held six public workshops on the proposed data reporting system and data collection improvements in early March. Workshops were held in Fort Myers, St. Petersburg, Perry, Destin, Pensacola, and over the phone. In total, about 145 people participated in the workshops.

## Summary of Feedback from Public Workshops

- Support for improved data collection, but some felt the proposed data reporting system would be intrusive and that data could be collected other ways
- Call it a registry, not a permit
- Concerns about fees and cost of permit after 5 years
- Some felt the data reporting system should be boat-based instead of angler-based
- Concerns about how the data reporting system would be enforced



Many that attended the public workshops were supportive of improved recreational data collection for Gulf reef fish and the data reporting system concept. However, some felt that the proposed data reporting system would be intrusive and that data could be collected other ways, like through boat registrations. Several people were supportive of staff's proposal but felt that it should be called a registry instead of a permit. They felt that since this is a data collection program, calling it a registry fits the purpose of the proposal better and would be better accepted by anglers than a permit. Staff is proposing that the title of the program be Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System because this captures the intent to improve data collection, while avoiding some legal conflicts associated with calling it a registry. Some workshop participants felt that the data reporting system should be boat-based instead of angler-based because this could provide for even more accurate data collection.

Many people were concerned that the costs for the data reporting system would be passed on to anglers after the first 5 years. Some people were also concerned about transaction fees that phone and internet license vendors would charge anglers if they chose to enroll in the data reporting system online or over the phone and do not purchase another license or permit at the same time. These fees (which range from \$1.80 to \$4.36) are charged by phone and internet license vendors on all licensing and permitting transactions, even when the license or permit is free. However, there would be no cost to anglers that enroll in-person at tax collector offices, tackle shops, and other places that sell FWC licenses and permits.

Finally, many workshop attendees asked about how the data reporting system would be enforced and what the penalty would be for not enrolling. This issue will be addressed in the proposed rule on the following slides.

## Proposed Rule



### 68B-14.009 Reporting Requirement

- A recreational harvester may not harvest, attempt to harvest, or possess the following species in or on state waters of the Gulf of Mexico excluding Monroe County without reporting intent to the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System:
  - Red snapper
  - Gag
  - Amberjacks/rudderfish/almaco jack
  - Red grouper
  - Black grouper
  - Vermilion snapper
  - Gray triggerfish
- Proof that report of intent has been submitted would be required
- Proposed effective date: April 1, 2015



The proposed rule would create a new rule, Chapter 68B-14.009, FAC, (Reporting Requirement) to establish the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System. This proposed rule would state that a recreational harvester may not harvest, attempt to harvest, or possess red snapper, vermilion snapper, gag grouper, red grouper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, lesser amberjack, banded rudderfish, or almaco jack in or on state waters of the Gulf of Mexico excluding Monroe County, unless they have reported their intention to do so to the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System. Staff is proposing to exclude Monroe County because anglers fishing for grouper in state waters of Monroe County follow Atlantic grouper regulations.

Anglers that are required to complete the report would be required to carry proof onboard in the Gulf (excluding Monroe County) when these species are targeted for harvest, harvested, or possessed. Under 379.401(1) Florida Statutes, failure to file such reports is a non-criminal infraction.

Staff proposes that the reporting requirements take effect on April 1, 2015. In the meantime, staff would reach out to recreational anglers about this new data collection system and encourage Gulf reef fish anglers to report when renewing their fishing licenses.

## Proposed Rule

### 68B-14.009 Reporting Requirement

- Anglers that would not be required to report intent:
  - Children under 16 years of age
  - Anglers fishing from for-hire vessels
  - Anglers fishing from a state-licensed recreational fishing vessel
  - Persons authorized to harvest for Commission, scientific, and educational purposes

### 68B-14.002 Definitions

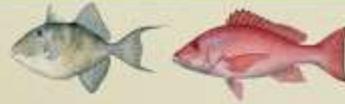
- Remove definition of recreational harvester



This proposed rule would also include the exemptions to the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System discussed on slide 10. Children under 16 years of age, as well as anglers fishing from for-hire vessels or anglers fishing from a state-licensed recreational fishing vessel would not be required to report. Additionally, FWC employees harvesting for FWC business and any person otherwise authorized by FWC permit to harvest for educational or scientific purposes would be exempt from reporting requirements.

Finally, the proposed rule would modify 68B-14.002, FAC (Definitions) to remove the definition of recreational harvester. This definition conflicts with the definition of recreational harvester in the General Definitions rule (68B-2.001, FAC), which applies to all FWC marine fisheries rules in Division 68B, FAC.

## Staff Recommendation



### Approve the proposed draft rule

- Create Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System for private recreational reef fish anglers to improve data collection
- If approved and directed, return for final public hearing in June

### Before April 1, 2015 proposed effective date

- Anglers could report intent on a voluntary basis starting May 2014
- Staff would reach out to anglers to encourage Gulf reef fish anglers to report intent



Staff recommends approving the proposed draft rule to create a Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System for private recreational anglers to improve recreational reef fish data collection, as outlined on the previous slides. If approved and directed, staff would return to the Commission for a final public hearing at the June Commission meeting in Fort Myers.

Based on rulemaking timelines, staff suggests a targeted effective date of April 1, 2015. In the meantime, staff would open the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System and anglers could report on a voluntary basis starting next month. Staff would also reach out to anglers to encourage those that fish for Gulf reef fish report to the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System.