This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions at the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) Aug. 25-28 meeting in Biloxi, MS. This document also includes feedback from FWC public workshops on Gulf recreational red snapper management.

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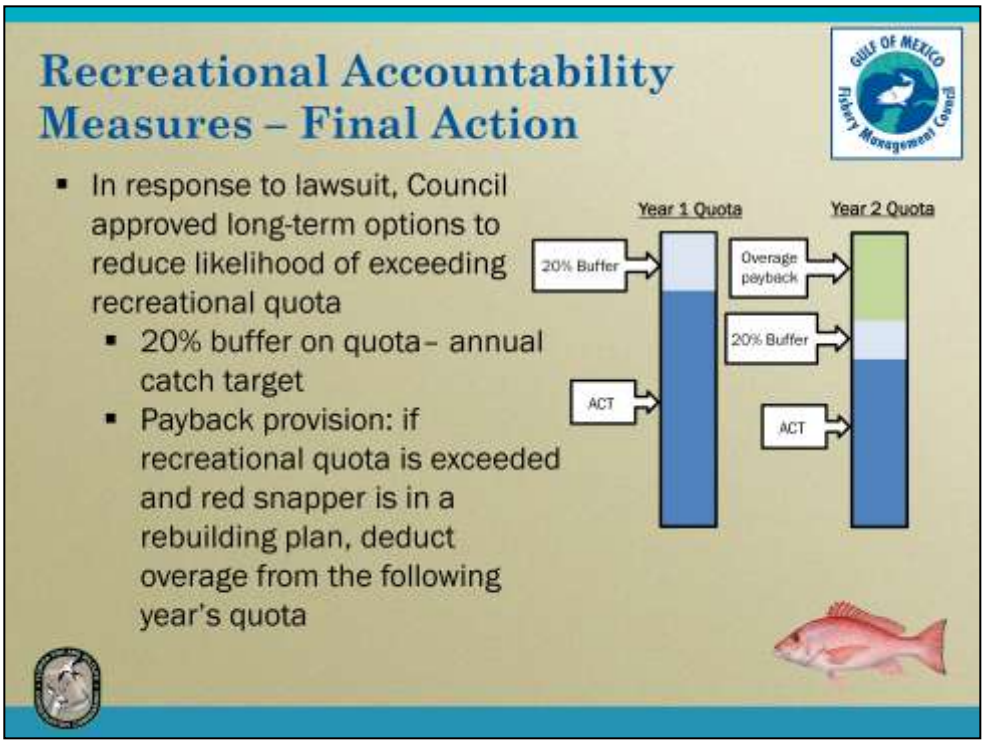


The Council took final action on an amendment that would set long-term accountability measures (AMs) in the recreational red snapper fishery. The purpose of the AMs is to reduce the likelihood of exceeding the recreational quota, in accordance with the outcome of a recent federal lawsuit. If approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, a 20% buffer would be applied to the recreational quota, which would essentially create an annual catch target (ACT). Earlier this year, a 20% buffer was applied to the 2014 recreational quota through a (temporary) emergency rule; action taken by the Council in August would set the 20% buffer as a long-term management strategy. The Council also approved using a "payback provision" as an AM for the recreational fishery. If the recreational quota is exceeded in a given year and red snapper is in a rebuilding plan, the overage would be deducted from the following year's quota.

These concepts are illustrated in the diagram above. The recreational quotas for Years 1 and 2 are represented by the rectangular boxes. The light gray portion of each box is the 20% buffer and the remaining portion shown in dark blue is the ACT, or portion of the quota that recreational anglers can harvest. If the recreational quota (not the ACT) is exceeded in Year 1, the overage (shown in green) would be deducted from Year 2's quota. The 20% buffer would then be applied to the remaining quota. The portion that recreational anglers could take (ACT), shown in dark blue, would be whatever is left after accounting for any overage and the buffer.

At the August Council meeting, NOAA Fisheries shared preliminary landings from the 2014 recreational red snapper season. So far, 77% of the 4.312 million pound (mp) ACT has been reported as harvested. However, several key data sources are not included in this estimate; therefore, actual landings thus far are higher.

Landings that are accounted for in the preliminary data include: Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) landings data through June 30 for private anglers and charter boats in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi; Louisiana landings through Aug. 3; headboat landings through July 31, and landings from headboats participating in the exempted fishing permit program (EFP) through Aug. 14.

This preliminary landings estimate does not include any landings from Texas private anglers and charter boats. Texas landings will likely be available in late fall. It also does not include landings from Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi during each state's July open season (Florida was open through July 14; Alabama and Mississippi were open for three-days each weekend in July). These data should be available in late October. Finally, Louisiana landings after Aug. 3 are not included in the preliminary harvest estimate. Harvest data from Louisiana after Aug. 3 is also not included here. Louisiana generates updated landings estimates for their state every few weeks, but their state season is open through the end of the year, so complete landings will not be available until early next year.

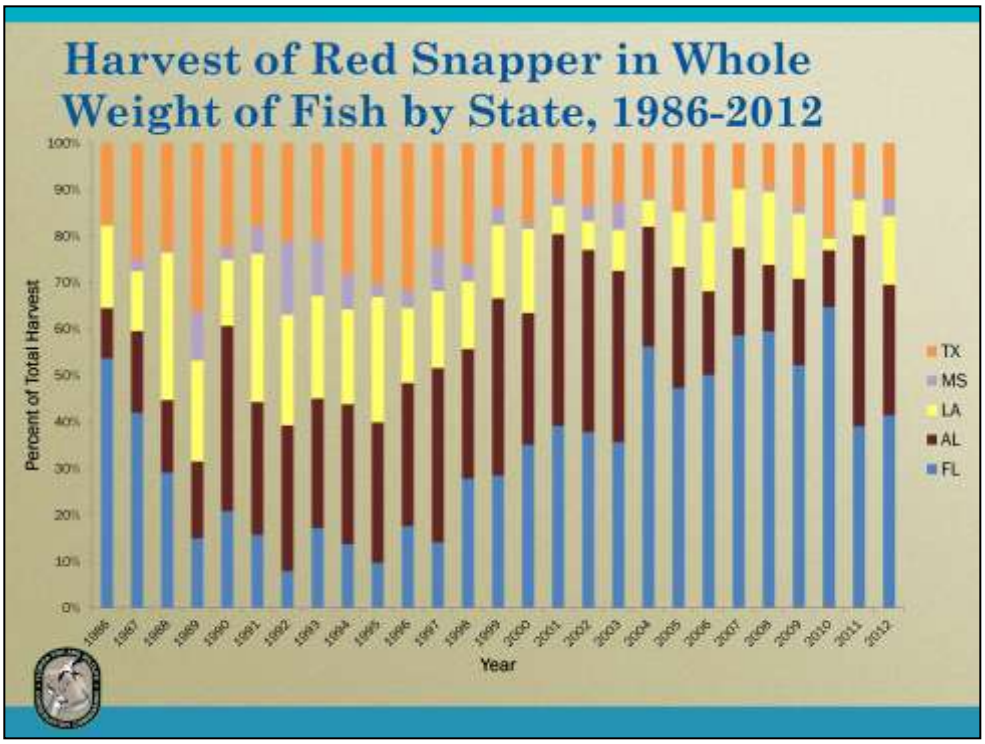
Although landings data are incomplete, the available landings show that the ACT projections of harvest through June were close to on target. The ACT is expected to be reached by the end of the year.

The Council is scheduled to take a final vote on sector separation for the recreational red snapper fishery at its October meeting. Because of this anticipated action, staff requests Commission direction on the Council's proposal. Sector separation would subdivide the recreational quota and ACT into federally-permitted for-hire and private angler sub-quotas and sub-ACTs. The Council's new preferred alternative would allocate the recreational quota and ACT based on average annual landings from 1986-2013 and 2006-2013 (excluding 2010), which equates to a 44% allocation for federally-permitted for-hire and 56% allocation for private anglers and state for-hire vessels. This alternative takes into account historical trends in the fishery, while also considering more recent landings trends. Under the current recreational ACT, this alternative is estimated to result in a 33-day season for federally-permitted for-hire vessels, while only allowing for a one-day federal season for private anglers if all Gulf states maintain their current state regulations. If all Gulf states match the federal regulations, the season for private anglers is estimated to be 14 days. Each sector would close to harvest when their respective ACL is met, but all recreational harvest would still have to close when the total recreational quota is met, even if one component of the fishery has not met their sub-quota.

Sector separation continues to be a polarizing issue. Those in favor of sector separation argue that federally-permitted for-hire vessels are already treated differently than private vessels because of the limited number of federal permits (compared to an unlimited number of private anglers) and the "30B rule" that requires federally-permitted for-hire vessels to follow federal rules in state waters. They feel that sector separation will allow management to be tailored to each component of the recreational fishery. Those against sector separation argue that it is a means to privatize the recreational fishery and it should not matter if anglers choose to fish on a private or for-hire vessel. At the Council meeting, 75% of the more than 100 people who spoke about sector separation favored the Council's proposal. Council public hearings on sector separation were held in St. Pete Beach and Panama City and were well attended. In St. Pete Beach, most speakers opposed sector separation. In Panama City, about 60% of the roughly 50 people who spoke favored sector separation. More public feedback on sector separation will be described in the FWC Gulf red snapper workshop portion of this presentation.

Although regional management has not been discussed at the last few Council meetings, it will be revisited as an option for recreational red snapper management at the October Council meeting in Mobile. Regional management would allow states to set recreational seasons and regulations for red snapper in all waters (state and federal) off their state. This could allow regulations to be better tailored to local needs. Based on the current preferred alternatives for regional management, 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 a payback provision that would reduce a state's annual quota if the state went over their allocation in the previous year. Under the current preferred alternative, such paybacks would not be applied during the first two years of regional management. Also, state quota reductions would only occur if the overall Gulf-wide quota was exceeded during the year of the state quota overage.

The states and the Council have yet to agree on preferred state-by-state allocations. Commission direction is requested on whether to pursue regional management as an option for the recreational red snapper fishery, and how to set state-by-state allocations. More information on possible state-by-state allocations is presented on the following slides. Public input on regional management from the FWC red snapper public workshops will be presented on slide 13. The earliest that the Council could take final action on regional management is at its January meeting, but the Council and states could select a preferred allocation prior to that.



The above graph shows recreational landings of red snapper in whole weight by state for the years 1986-2012. Florida landings are shown in blue. Since 1986, recreational landings have shifted toward more landings in the eastern Gulf of Mexico as the stock has rebuilt and the geographical range occupied by red snapper has expanded off the West Florida Shelf. If state-by-state allocations are based off past landings, as has been discussed at the Council, the years chosen as the basis for allocation will affect the quota each state receives. Basing allocations on more recent time series would benefit Florida, while using earlier years would benefit the western Gulf states.

Regional Management State Allocation Alternatives

Allocation Options*	Florida	Alabama	Mississippi	Louisiana	Texas
1986-2012	33.3	28.5	4.2	15.6	18.9
1996-2012	39.5	29.9	2.8	12.2	15.9
2006-2012	49.8	23.4	1.4	13.2	12.2
Average Annual Landings from 1986-2012 and 2007-2012	41.8	25.9	2.7	14.4	15.4
Weighted Landings from 1986-2012 and 2007-2012	36.1	27.8	3.7	15.2	17.2

* All options shown exclude 2010 landings because of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and do not yet include 2013 data

Direction requested

The table above outlines state-by-state regional management allocation options that were discussed as alternatives by the Council earlier this year. The percent allocations that are shown here for each state could change for a few reasons. First, the Council may choose to update these time series to include 2013 landings when the Council revisits regional management at its October meeting (2013 data were not available when regional management was last discussed). This would result in slight changes to each state's percent allocation. The percentages that would go to each state may also change if recreational landings data are adjusted as a result of the MRIP calibration workshop that is being held Sept. 8-9 to address MRIP survey changes that occurred in 2013 and may have influenced landings data. Finally, if the Council proceeds forward with sector separation, but also wants to pursue regional management for a particular component of the recreational fishery (i.e., private anglers), these percentages would be updated using landings data from that component of the recreational fishery. If the Commission is interested in pursuing regional management, staff requests direction on setting state-by-state allocations.

This portion of the presentation will focus on FWC public workshops on management of the Gulf recreational red snapper fishery. These workshops were held at the request of the Commission. Workshops were held in Pensacola on July 28, Destin on July 29, Panama City on July 30, Carrabelle on July 31, and St. Petersburg on Aug. 11. Twenty-four people attended in Pensacola, 41 in Destin, eight in Panama City, 24 in Carrabelle, and 42 in St. Petersburg.

In additional to sector separation and regional management, the Council has discussed many management options for the recreational red snapper fishery. The Council is actively considering the options that are bold and italicized above. The other options have been discussed by the Council, but are not currently being developed. All of these items were discussed at the FWC public workshops.

The individual fishing quota (IFQ)-type program for for-hire vessels would allocate red snapper (in pounds or numbers of fish) to individual federally-permitted for-hire vessels each year, similar to the commercial IFQ program. The purpose of this program would be to reduce management uncertainty and improve management conditions for federally-permitted for-hire operators. In contrast, inter-sector trading would allow trade of commercial IFQ shares or allocation for recreational harvest. Recreational harvest of commercial shares or allocation could supplement existing recreational fishing opportunities.

The Council has discussed using a recreational slot limit and/or hook size requirements to protect large spawning fish and extend the season by reducing the size of landed fish. However, there are concerns about the effectiveness of these methods and increases in discard mortality. A one-fish bag limit could also be used to extend the recreational season by reducing the number of fish that are landed, but discard mortality is also a concern with this option.

A weekends-only season could optimize fishing opportunities for anglers since most private anglers fish on weekends. However, this option likely would reduce the number of fishing days overall. Harvest tags have been suggested as a way to ensure recreational harvest stays within the recreational quota/ACT while allowing anglers to choose when they want to fish. Finally, a days-at-sea program has been discussed as an option to provide for-hire vessels a set number of days that could be fished per year instead of a set harvest season.

The format for these workshops was different than our usual workshop format. Staff began each workshop with a presentation on Gulf red snapper, including biology, management history, and potential management options that have or are being discussed by the Gulf Council for federal waters. Workshop participants were encouraged to ask questions about each management option during the presentation.

After the presentation, workshop participants were divided into small groups and were tasked with answering two questions.

1) Considering limitations and management challenges, what are your expectations for the recreational red snapper fishery?
2) What management methods or regulations would you like to see implemented to improve the recreational red snapper fishery?

An FWC staff member assisted each group by listing ideas discussed on an easel board. Recorded ideas were not necessarily the consensus of the group, but ideas of individuals within the group. Finally, workshop participants were polled on the management options presented as well as management goals and ideas generated by workshop participants using "iclickers." Using this technology, we were able to share poll results with workshop participants in real time. The results of the workshops are summarized on the next several slides. A more in-depth summary of workshop results is available in the Gulf Recreational Red Snapper Workshops Summary report.

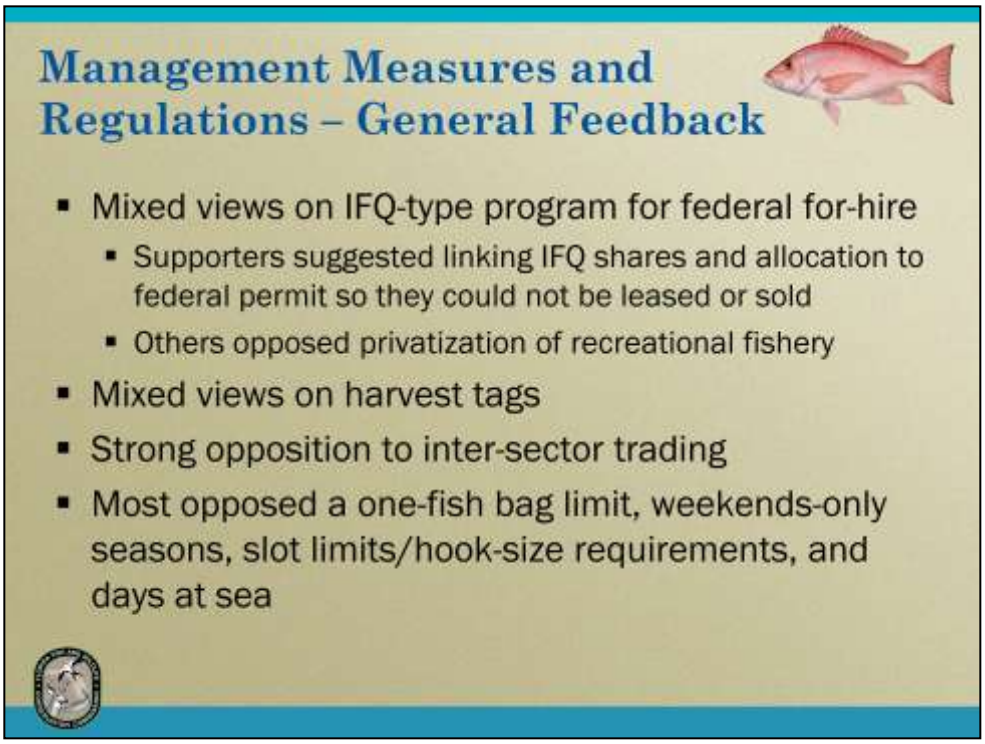
There were several common management goals and expectations expressed at most, if not all, of the workshops. Most workshop participants identified having more fishing days as their most important management goal for red snapper. For some participants, particularly those in areas where red snapper are not available in state waters, this meant more equitable access to red snapper across geographic areas. Predictable fishing seasons was another management goal expressed by many workshop participants.

Many workshop participants also expressed a desire for improved recreational data collection, science, and stock assessments. Many people applauded the Commission's effort to improve recreational data collection through the Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System. We also heard calls for increased trust and transparency between anglers, fishery managers, and fishery scientists, particularly in the federal process.

Not surprisingly, workshop participant opinions on sector separation were polarized. Participants at the Destin workshop showed the strongest support for sector separation, while most attendees in St. Petersburg, Pensacola, and Panama City ranked sector separation as very unfavorable. Some participants felt that if sector separation occurs, the overall quota should be divided equally between commercial, for-hire, and private recreational harvesters.

Responses on the Council's proposal for regional management were mixed, but more favorable than unfavorable. At the same time, most people also favored the FWC taking over management of recreational red snapper. Some workshop participants, particularly in St. Petersburg, favored zone management of recreational red snapper harvest within the State of Florida (i.e., separate seasons for the Panhandle and central/southwest Florida). They felt that such an option could provide more equitable access to the red snapper fishery in the central and southwest regions of Florida, where red snapper are seldom available in state waters.

There was also wide support for simplifying recreational regulations for red snapper.



Views were mixed on developing an IFQ-type program for federal for-hire vessels, with slightly more participants opposing such a program than favoring it. As with sector separation, the strongest support for a IFQ-type program for for-hire vessels was in Destin. Participants at this meeting suggested that if a for-hire IFQ program is developed, the IFQ shares or allocation that is distributed to participating vessels should be tied to the vessel's federal reef fish permit. This would essentially prohibit lease or sale of shares/allocation except when the vessel's permit is sold or transferred. Many of those who opposed the IFQ-type program felt it was wrong to privatize the recreational fishery through an IFQ program.

Workshop participants also had mixed views on the use of harvest tags (similar to alligator tags) for managing the recreational red snapper fishery. Supporters felt that harvest tags could be used to collect more accurate recreational harvest data.

Most workshop participants strongly opposed inter-sector trading. This is in line with recent public testimony at Gulf Council meetings. Most workshop participants also opposed a one-fish bag limit, weekends-only seasons, slot limits and/or hook size requirements, and the Council's days-at-sea program for for-hire vessels.

Most workshop attendees supported having red snapper open for harvest during the summer, but many workshop attendees were also amenable to opening red snapper harvest during spring and fall instead of summer. Many attendees supported using split seasons (having multiple open seasons per year) as a management tool for the red snapper fishery. There was also strong support for creating more red snapper habitat by building more artificial reefs.

A full summary of ideas that were generated at the workshops is available in the Gulf Recreational Red Snapper Workshops Summary report.

Staff requests direction on recreational red snapper management options including: sector separation, regional management, a for-hire IFQ-type program, and inter-sector trading. The Council is scheduled to take a final vote on sector separation at its next meeting Oct. 20-24 in Mobile, AL. Regional management will also be discussed at this Council meeting and could be finalized in early 2015. A for-hire IFQ-type program and inter-sector trading are also being considered by the Council. Staff also welcomes input on other red snapper management options and Council issues.