



This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) March 30 – April 2 meeting in Biloxi, MS and expected actions at its June 8-12 meeting in Key West.

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Federal Red Snapper Management Updates



- Sector separation approved by Secretary of Commerce
 - Divides recreational quota into sub-quotas: 42.3% for federally-permitted for-hire and 57.7% for private anglers
 - 3-year sunset
- Council approved quota increase from 11 to 14.3 million pounds
- Preliminary federal recreational season estimates
 - 7-11 days for private anglers
 - 40-46 days for federally-permitted for-hire



Earlier this week, NOAA Fisheries announced to Council members that the Secretary of Commerce has approved sector separation for the recreational red snapper fishery and that it will take effect for the 2015 recreational season. This will divide the recreational quota into two sub-quotas: 42.3% will go to federally-permitted for-hire and 57.7% will go to private anglers. Sector separation is set to sunset in three years unless the Council takes action.

Back in March, the Council held a special webinar meeting and voted to increase the red snapper quota from 11 to 14.3 million pounds (mp) based on the results of the latest stock assessment update. This quota increase is the largest we have seen for red snapper and is now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

NOAA Fisheries will announce the 2015 recreational red snapper season for Gulf federal waters by May 1. If the quota increase is approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, NOAA Fisheries has estimated that the season for private recreational anglers will be seven to 11 days. In calculating this estimate, NOAA Fisheries assumed Florida would approve the 70-day season option being considered today, Louisiana would be open year-round beginning March 20, Mississippi would be open for the federal season and 3-day weekends in July and October, Texas would be open year-round, and Alabama would be consistent with the federal season.

Red Snapper Sector Reallocation



- Council considering new options based on recreational data changes
 - New Council-preferred option would reallocate based on calibration of MRIP catch estimates (48.5% commercial; 51.5% recreational)
 - Other new option would reallocate based on MRIP calibration and change in recreational fishery size selectivity (42.5% commercial; 57.5% recreational)
- Final action scheduled for August

Direction Requested



The Council also discussed sector reallocation for the red snapper fishery and is considering two new options based on some recent changes to recreational data for the red snapper fishery. The current sector allocations for the red snapper fishery are 51% commercial and 49% recreational. The first new option would reallocate based on the recent calibration of Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) catch estimates and would result in allocations of 48.5% for commercial and 51.5% for recreational. This option is the Council's current preferred alternative. The other option the Council is now considering would reallocate the red snapper fishery based on the recent MRIP calibration results as well as changes in the size selectivity of the recreational fishery. This second option would result in allocations of 42.5% for commercial and 57.5% for recreational. At its next meeting, the Council will receive more information about these new options.

Previously, the Commission had directed staff to support reallocating 75% of quota increases to the recreational fishery so long as the total allowable catch was above 9.12 mp (this would result in allocations of about 42% for the commercial fishery and 58% for the recreational fishery). Staff requests direction on supporting the new reallocation options being considered by the Council. The Council is expected to take final action on reallocation at its August meeting.

More Red Snapper Discussions



- Regional management of recreational fishery
 - Council's current preferred state-by-state allocation option heavily favors western Gulf states
 - Estimated to result in 13-19 day season in eastern Gulf and 46-55 days for western Gulf states
 - Council also considering option that would give states equal days
 - No consensus on whether to apply regional management to private anglers only or entire recreational fishery
 - Final action scheduled for August
- IFQ Program modifications to be considered



The Council also discussed regional management for the recreational red snapper fishery (Amendment 39). The Council is currently considering managing the recreational fishery through state-designed management plans that would be implemented by NOAA Fisheries. NOAA Fisheries staff presented season estimates for each state based on the Council's current state-by-state allocation scenario, which would allocate approximately 38% of the recreational quota to Florida. This allocation scenario heavily favors the western Gulf states and is estimated to result in a 13-19 day season for Florida, 17 days for Alabama, 46-47 days for Louisiana, and 55 days for Texas. It is unclear what Mississippi's season would look like. Based on this information, the Council's current proposed alternative for state-by-state allocation would not benefit Florida, but the Council also added an option that set state-by-state allocations so that each state's seasons were an equal number of days (assuming all states started their seasons June 1 and had otherwise matching regulations). At this point, the Council has not been able to agree on whether to apply regional management to the recreational fishery as a whole or only to private anglers. The Council is scheduled to take final action on regional management at its August meeting.

The Council is also continuing discussions on possible updates to the Gulf red snapper commercial individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. The Council recently held public scoping meetings to get ideas on possible changes from fishermen and other stakeholders. The Council will continue to develop proposed changes at its next meeting in June.

Other Council Actions



Greater Amberjack - Final Action

- Increased 30" FL recreational minimum size limit to 34" FL
- Reduced the 2,000 pound commercial trip limit to 1,500 pounds

Gag Grouper - Discussions

- Council considering modest increase to annual catch limit and longer recreational season
- Final action possible in June



The Council also took final action to rebuild greater amberjack, which is overfished. The Council increased the recreational size limit for greater amberjack from 30" to 34" fork length and reduced the commercial trip limit from 2,000 to 1,000 pounds whole weight. The Council considered changing the recreational closed season but decided to maintain the current June 1 through July 31 closed season. These changes are now pending approval by the Secretary of Commerce for federal waters. Staff will present these changes for the Commission's consideration in Gulf state waters at a future Commission meeting.

The Council is also considering action on gag grouper. A recent stock assessment indicates that gag grouper is not overfished or undergoing overfishing and that a quota increase is warranted. However, many fishermen have expressed concern about the number of gag grouper they are seeing on the water. Thus, the Council is considering a modest increase to the annual catch limit for gag. The Council is also considering lengthening the recreational season and could take final action at its June meeting.

New Red Snapper Fishery Management Concept

Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority

- Concept developed by Gulf states' agency staff
- Would transfer red snapper management from Gulf Council to states via this new management body (GSR SMA)
 - Composed of 5 Gulf state directors
 - States would set own management, conduct assessments
 - GSR SMA would approve management plans
 - Commercial fishery would stay with Council for 3 years then be transferred to GSR SMA
- Federal legislation would be required for this change



Although not directly a Council issue, staff from all five of the Gulf states recently developed a new red snapper fishery management concept in response to requests from Congressional staff about what changes the Gulf states' staff could agree on for red snapper management. Staff's concept is formation of a management body called the Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority (GSR SMA), which would be comprised of the marine fisheries directors from each of the Gulf states. The GSR SMA would assume red snapper management from the Council and coordinate management among the states. Each state would set their own management and conduct assessments and data collection, and the GSR SMA would approve these management plans. Under this proposal, the commercial red snapper fishery would continue to be managed by the Council for three years before being transferred to the GSR SMA.

At this point, GSR SMA is simply a concept that has been shared with Gulf coast Congressional leaders and interested stakeholders. Federal legislation would be required to create the GSR SMA or to transfer red snapper management from the Council to another management entity.

Direction Requested



Red Snapper Sector Reallocation

- Direction requested on supporting new alternatives based on recreational data changes
 - Reallocate based on MRIP calibration (48.5% commercial; 51.5% recreational)
 - Reallocate based on MRIP calibration and change in recreational fishery size selectivity (42.5% commercial; 57.5% recreational)
- Input on other Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is June 8-12 in Key West
 - Joint meeting with SAFMC



Staff requests direction on red snapper sector reallocation. The Council is considering two new alternatives that would reallocate red snapper based on recent recreational data collection changes. The first new option would reallocate based on the recent calibration of Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) catch estimates and would result in allocations of 48.5% for commercial and 51.5% for recreational. This option is the Council's current preferred alternative. The other option the Council is now considering would reallocate the red snapper fishery based on the recent MRIP calibration results as well as changes in the size selectivity of the recreational fishery. This second option would result in allocations of 42.5% for commercial and 57.5% for recreational. At its next meeting, the Council will receive more information about these new options.

The Commission had previously directed staff to support an alternative that would reallocate 75% of quota increases to the recreational sector if the overall quota is over 9.12 million pounds, which would result in allocations of about 42% for the commercial fishery and 58% for the recreational fishery.

Staff welcomes Commission direction on any other Council issues. The next Council meeting will be held in Key West on June 8-12 and will be a joint meeting with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.