

## 2015 Gulf Red Snapper Workshops Summary

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Workshop Attendance:

March 9 (Pensacola) – 89

March 10 (Destin) – 63

March 11 (Panama City) – 65

March 12 (Carrabelle) – 20

March 16 (St. Petersburg) – 39



FWC Staff Present: Jim Estes, Martha Bademan, Tony Bresnen, Jessica McCawley (Pensacola), Steve Shea (Destin, Panama City, and Carrabelle), Michelle Semsprott (Pensacola, Destin, Panama City, and Carrabelle), Tom Graef (St. Pete), Nancy Sheridan (St. Pete), Gina Russo (St. Pete), Luiz Barbieri (St. Pete)

Commissioners Present: Charles Roberts (Destin and Carrabelle)

### Workshop Summary

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) held a series of public workshops to discuss the 2015 recreational season for red snapper in Gulf of Mexico state waters. Each workshop began with a brief presentation from FWC staff on the preferred season option selected by the Commission at their February meeting in Jacksonville.

After the presentation, workshop attendees were asked to provide comment on the proposed season option and offer any suggestions. The following pages contain a summary of the comments gathered from stakeholders at each workshop. Public comment submitted on the record from meeting attendees begins on page four of this document.

## *Meeting Summaries*

### Pensacola

- Most recreational fishermen were in favor of the Commission's 70-day state season proposal which would provide more fishing opportunities than they would experience with the projected federal season
- Some felt the Commission could shift some of the fishing days away from the summer to alleviate pressure on the inshore reefs, and instead have more days in the spring or fall
- Several people voiced support for a 10-day per month season that could alleviate continuous fishing pressure on inshore reefs and promote business year-round
- Several people commented that the state needs to be more aggressive in placing artificial reefs in state waters
- Many anglers spoke out against federal management and voiced their opposition to sector separation

### Destin

- Most private recreational fishermen were in favor of the Commission's 70-day state season proposal which would provide more fishing opportunities than the projected federal season
- Several federally-permitted for-hire captains spoke out against the Commission's proposal, stating that it could hurt their business because it would diminish the days that they would be able to fish in federal waters
- Many speakers highlighted the need for better recreational data and suggested options such as phone apps or fish tags
- Several speakers voiced their opposition to sector separation and the wedge it drives between private anglers and federally-permitted for-hire fishermen

### Panama City

- Several private anglers spoke in favor of the Commission's 70-day state season proposal which would provide more fishing opportunities
- Several speakers mentioned their desire for the Gulf states to work with NOAA Fisheries to improve management and increase the length of the federal season in future years
- Several federally-permitted for-hire captains spoke out against the Commission's proposal, stating that it would hurt their business and also reduce private angler fishing opportunities in federal waters

- Many speakers voiced their frustrations with federal management and voiced their desire for the state to take over management of red snapper in both state and federal waters

### **Carrabelle**

- During discussions, several stakeholders in attendance noted that red snapper are not common in state waters of Carrabelle and the state season doesn't really give them more opportunities
- Several speakers indicated that the state needs to build more artificial reefs in state waters of the big bend to provide more habitat for red snapper in this region
- Several stakeholders were supportive of the Commission's 70-day state season proposal which would provide positive economic impact for the area

### **St. Pete**

- Many speakers were opposed to the Commission's 70-day state season proposal because they noted that red snapper cannot be found in state waters off southwest Florida and longer state seasons diminishes the federal season, which is the only time they can fish for red snapper
- Several speakers suggested the Commission stick with the status quo season which would preserve opportunities for anglers fishing in the panhandle while not further hurting fishing opportunities off southwest Florida
- Many meeting attendees suggested having regional seasons for red snapper within Florida
- Several speakers suggested the state work with the other Gulf states and NOAA Fisheries to get the longest federal season possible

## *Public Comment*

### Pensacola

**Escambia County Commissioner Robson** - He stated that the red snapper fishery is an important issue for many northwest Florida counties, and several counties are working with the FWC and Florida DEP to improve fisheries and fish habitat. He stated that Escambia County has been involved in significant reefing projects. He also noted that there have been problems with working with the federal government in fisheries management, and stressed the importance of the state also working with county governments in fisheries management, even in federal waters. Finally, he stated that the federal system of management is not working even though reefing and water quality improvement have been improving fish stocks, and state and federal fisheries managers need to figure out alternative plans for fisheries management in the future.

**Susan Kladitis** - She stated that she grew up in Gulf Breeze. She noted that there would be a huge positive impact to the local economy if the 70-day proposed season is improved.

**Tommy Holmes** - He requested that the Commission consider a 10-day per month season. He noted that this option would promote the red snapper fishery year-round, reduce overall effort since effort in winter months is far less than in summer months, and this option would give red snapper a break during a large part of the spawning season. He stated that 10-days per month would provide economic impact during winter months, and he suggested a 1 per vessel trophy fish bag limit for reef fish (even during closed months). However, he did voice his support for the 70-day proposed season if he had to support another option.

**Roy Stoesser** - He stated his support for more artificial reefs being placed in state waters to support a state waters red snapper fishery.

**Randy Sharp** - He stated his support for the 70-day proposed season. He also noted that changes needed to be made to the Magnuson-Stevens Act to provide for better management of the red snapper fishery.

**Dianne Madison** - She stated her preference to have the season spread out over a period of ten weeks with the season being four days during the week ( such as Thursday through Sunday) to provide opportunities to local anglers.

**Chris Phillips** - He stated his support for the 70-day proposed season which covers the summer and the fall. He suggested the Commission also consider adding days to the season in the spring next year.

**Kenneth Wright** - He noted his agreement with Chris Phillips' comments.

**Joe Zwierzchowski** - He noted that the 70-day proposed season would provide plenty of opportunity for anglers. He noted that the Commission did not support sector separation but sector separation is not a permanent management solution because of a 3 year sunset provision. He stated that there are many charter vessels that are not federally permitted and cannot fish in federal waters, and that fishing in the fall is great and wants to see that in the state season. Finally, he noted that red snapper is still a rebuilding fishery but the federal quota needs to be increased.

**Mark Tryon** - He noted that he is a commercial, former charter, and recreational fisherman. He stated that the Commission may want to break up the continuous days in the summer for the 70-day proposed season to relieve fishing pressure during the summer months. He commented that commercial fishermen do not often fish for red snapper in state waters because it isn't profitable.

**Geo Ballard** - He noted that he is an inshore guide. He commented that the continuous days in the summer for the 70-day proposed season is not good for fishing because of overfishing certain reefs. He suggested the Commission spread the season out and supported the 10-day per month season proposed by Tommy Holmes.

**Robert Turpin** - He suggested that the Commission approve the 70-day proposed season for this year. However, he noted that fishery managers should not be managing fisheries on a species by species basis. He also noted that Florida has substantial habitat with more reefs going into state waters and suggested a pilot program to test different management strategies in smaller areas. He suggested that the Commission could manage reef fish as a complex. Finally, he stated that people have been frustrated out of the fishery and highlighted problems with red snapper stock assessments recruitment information.

**Note:** Diana Dagostino, Scott Dagostino, Jeremy Clunan, Richard Rogers, Joseph Roberson, and Dean Trudeau declined to speak but wrote in their support for the 70-day state season proposal.

## **Destin**

**Thomas Turner** - He stated that he fishes out of Louisiana. He also stated that he would like the proposed 70-day season option at a minimum, and would be in favor of even more days.

**Candy Hansard** - She stated that a lot of people in local counties want access to red snapper, and she appreciated Florida's proposed 70-day state season. She noted that 1,200 charter boats in Gulf that would benefit from sector separation, but the state's job is to support 1.3 million recreational anglers in Florida. She felt that recreational anglers on charter boats should be treated like other private recreational anglers. Finally, she noted

that lionfish are eating native reef fish and the FWC needs to be aggressive and promote removal.

**John Garland** - He stated his approval of last year's state season and he supports this year's 70-day proposed season. He voiced concerned over a possible 1-day federal season.

**George Eller** - He stated that he cannot support a 70-day state season that he cannot participate in as a federally-permitted charter captain. He noted the longer the state seasons, the shorter the federal season gets, which harms federally-permitted charter vessels. He feels like the state doesn't care about the for-hire industry, and wants fish tags to be implemented for private recreational anglers so anglers could fish whenever they want. He noted that this would eliminate the chance for overfishing.

**Rich Jones** - He noted his support for the longest state season we can have and was supportive of the state's 70-day state season proposal. He noted that Florida has more recreational boat owners than charter boats. He felt that the state needs more information about the spawning biology of red snapper.

**Charlie Saleeby** - He stated his support for the 70-day proposed season. He stated his frustrations that commercial red snapper fishermen can fish whenever they want and would suggest closing state waters to commercial harvest of red snapper.

**Adam Peebles** - He noted his support for the 70-day proposed season as a state-permitted for-hire captain. He also noted that state charter guides provide access just like federally-permitted vessels and that private angler fishing effort is higher than charter fishing effort. He stated that he has never had a problem finding fish in state waters after a long state season and he commended the FWC's new GRFS program.

**Mike Guidry** - He stated his support to any increase in state season length. He would like to eliminate commercial fishing in the Gulf because he feels that Commercial boats deny local access. He would like the Commission to try a tagging system for red snapper as a better way to account for catch. He also suggested a phone app to track recreational harvest.

**George Blakeslee** - He noted that his favorite times in Florida is being out on the water with grandchildren, and he supports the proposed 70-day season. He feels that the GRFS is a good approach and gets us better data. He noted that the FWC could consider electronic tags as opposed to physical tags which could allow fishing during other times of the year.

**Don Dineen** - He stated that the GRFS program for recreational anglers is a start, but the FWC should have people pay a fee to reduce oversubscription. He noted that charterboats take millions of customers out each year. He stated that he is not opposed to the 70-day proposed season, but noted that private recreational fishermen will then have to deal with a short federal season.

**Mike Eller** - He stated his support for the GRFS program. He noted that many private anglers are ready for fish tags or electronic log books, because if you are providing more access, you need to provide more data. He noted that with the GRFS being free, it will cause oversubscription and felt that everyone would be willing to pay into a system that provides more access.

**Dr. Michael Rain** - He stated that he is a senior citizen who supports the state's 70-day state season proposal and the GRFS. He noted that almost all red snapper he caught came from state waters season last year.

**Adam Miller** - He stated that he is a federally-permitted for-hire captain opposed to sector separation. He noted that technology is available for the recreational sector to record and submit the weight of your snapper catch (via your fishing license). The FWC could put weighing devices at all major marinas and boat ramps to provide accountability and 100 percent of the recreational sector's red snapper catch (by weight) each year. He noted that he is for the same recreational seasons for everyone.

**Mark Koch** - He stated his support for the proposed 70-day season. He noted that red snapper is a public resource and if the season is short there can be safety concerns. He also mentioned that he supports Representative Miller's Congressional bill that would turn over red snapper management to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

**Jim Green** - He stated that he would like to alleviate pressure on red snapper during the spawning season. He also stated that he would like to implement a tag system for recreational anglers, and he wants the FWC to refine the GRFS program as it moves forward. He noted that increasing the season days by 40 percent could start a race to get more state fishing days in other Gulf States and suggested caution for the state season. Finally, he noted that the needs of private anglers are different from federally-permitted for-hire vessels and sector separation addresses that.

**George Hirst** - He stated his support for the proposed 70-day season. He noted that he is opposed to sector separation. He stated his support for a tag system funded by anglers that provides accountability.

**Note:** John Dyer, Donald Tomaschko, Stone Hansard, Dean Preston, Suzanne Tomaschko, and John Chaney declined to speak but wrote in their support for the 70-day state season proposal.

## **Panama City**

**Jack Conzelman** - He stated his desire for all states to work with the federal government to get a 40 or 50-day season for federal waters. He noted that he likes the 70-day season

proposal for state waters because he is a live bait business owner and last year's 52-day state season helped him keep employees working.

**Mark Kelley** - He stated his opposition for the 70-day state season proposal. He noted that longer state seasons make him more of a supporter of sector separation which would give him the ability to fish in federal waters for more days as a federally permitted for-hire captain. He also noted that longer state seasons means less days fishing federal waters for private recreational anglers.

**BJ Burkett** - He stated his opposition for the 70-day state season proposal.

**Benjamin Kelley** - He stated that all the Gulf States and NOAA need to agree on management of this fishery rather than dividing everyone up. He stated that the recreational season needs to be the same in both state and federal waters.

**Jackie Rinker** - She felt that a way to address the mismanagement of this fishery is to stop buying red snapper from supermarkets and seafood restaurants and buy alternative species instead.

**Pam Anderson** - She stated that federal management of red snapper is broken, but states going inconsistent with the federal season hurts many in the charter for-hire industry. She suggested that the FWC work on communicating more with partners in Washington D.C. to try to get the Gulf States in charge of red snapper in state and federal waters. Finally, she suggested starting the state season on June 1 (the start date of the federal season) for consistency.

**Charles Guilford** - He stated his support for the Commission and the opportunities they provide for recreational anglers. He suggested a two to four-fish bag limit and a state season of at least ten months of the year. He noted that in setting the season, the state doesn't take into account poor weather days, and the strict limits on fishing seasons are killing more red snapper than are harvested when the fishery is open. Finally, he suggested that the FWC take over management of red snapper in state and federal waters.

**Ben Walsh** - He stated that he is a state-permitted charter guide. He noted that in the summer months, the shallow water out to nine miles is too hot and the red snapper are offshore in federal waters where he cannot fish. He suggested opening the state season April 15 and have the season open through Memorial Day. He felt this would let charter captains book up more trips during the year since they are already booked in the summer anyway because of tourists.

**Tom Adams** - He stated that he would like to see the state take over management of red snapper in both state and federal waters.

**Gloria Turner** - She stated that she doesn't fish for red snapper during the federal season because it is too hectic on the water. She noted that while she likes the number of days in the 70-day state season proposal, she would like the state to not have all the fall days be weekends and include some weekdays in the fall for local anglers.

**Rob Coffey** - He noted that the 70-day state season proposal would provide positive economic benefits for coastal communities in the Panhandle. He also stated his desire to have the state take over management of the fishery in both state and federal waters off Florida.

**Matt DeFelix** - He noted that too many anglers have a lot invested in this fishery to see it reduced to nothing due to politics. The Gulf States and the federal government need to work together.

**Bob Zales** - He noted his support of the 70-day proposed state season. He also suggested the state of Florida open every fish closed to harvest in federal waters. He noted that the federal government created this management problem and they can also fix it. He stated that the red snapper fishery is not the problem, and that the problem is the federal government.

**Chris Niquet** - He noted that the federal government has created problems in this fishery. He suggested the state get an aggressive artificial reefing program in state waters. He also noted the problem of having too many anglers throughout the Gulf trying to catch too few fish.

**Tom Putnam** - He noted that the state and federal government have the red snapper season during a period of time when people are out fishing anyway. He suggested the Commission split the season up and start with ten days in the spring and then move to weekends only, then have some continuous days in the summer and return to weekends only in the fall.

**Note:** Will Spann and Dan Stripling declined to speak but wrote in their desire for the Commission to spread out the recreational season over a longer period of time, including more open days in the spring or fall.

## **Carrabelle**

**Note:** Because this was a small workshop, most of the time was centered on discussion between meeting attendees and FWC staff. Meeting attendees had mixed views on the 70-day state season proposal, with some feeling the state season wouldn't benefit anglers in the area due to the lack of red snapper in state waters off Carrabelle, and others felt a 70-day state season would benefit the local economy. Others themes throughout the discussion

included the need for artificial reefs in state waters off Carrabelle and the importance of the GRFS in getting better recreational data.

**Jim Zubrick** - He stated that he is glad the recreational sector is trying to figure out how to manage the fishery and be accountable using the Gulf Reef Fish Survey. He noted that in the future, recreational anglers could go to a tag system for red snapper.

## **St. Pete**

**Bill Tucker** - He stated that he doesn't support an extended season. He suggested the state be consistent with federal season because non-compliance hurts the fishery. He noted that there are more recreational fishermen than fish to catch, and we need to build the fishery to its maximum biomass. He noted his disappointment in seeing the states trying to take over management of red snapper from the federal government without public input.

**Eric Mahoney** - He suggested the state stick with the status quo season. He felt that southwest Florida is ignored, and he also expressed concern over the plan for state directors to agree to take over management of red snapper from the federal government.

**Brad Gorst** - He expressed displeasure at the Gulf states' plan to take over management of red snapper. He stated that the state needs to go compliant or stick with the status quo season. He stated his desire for a data collection system pilot for the charter for-hire industry, and noted that southwest Florida is better off with a longer federal season.

**Mike Colby** - He stated that is he not in favor of the 70-day state season proposal, and suggested the state keep the season status quo which would be fair for everyone. He voiced concern over the Gulf States' plan to take over management of red snapper. Finally, he noted electronic data collection for the charter for-hire fishery is an opportunity for better science that could be funded by fishermen.

**Dennis O'Hearn** - He noted that the Gulf states are fighting back in light of NOAA Fisheries overestimating recreational landings. He stated that he understands that charter for-hire fishermen are fighting to keep their businesses afloat. He also noted that people would be upset about the state extending red snapper season if the red snapper stock was in any sort of trouble. He suggested having a ten month gag season and a six month red snapper season. Finally, he noted that the Gulf States' plan to take over management of red snapper could be problematic.

**TJ Marshall** - He recommended the status quo season option for 2015. He suggested that the Commission look at GRFS data and discuss any potential fall opening at their June meeting.

**William Earle** - He noted that he makes special trips to target red snapper and the stock seems to be plentiful. He also noted that the state and federal government view the status of red snapper differently and feels that's a problem because recreational data collection is not sufficient to estimate recreational catch. He stated that there needs to be accountability from the state and the federal government and wants to see the science behind the logic of the recreational seasons. Finally, he noted that he is opposed to sector separation.

**Ray Yount** - He noted his agreement with William Earle's comments. He also made comments on the gag grouper season noting that gag is not open until July but they are everywhere now which creates a problem with dead discards.

**John Schmidt** - He stated that he wants to see a thriving recreational fishery, but we need confidence in recreational harvest data and enforcement. He would like the state to make logical decisions about management on how to provide opportunities for all fishermen in all parts of Florida. He stated his desire for the state and federal government to work together and get the most benefit out of this fishery. He noted the problem lies with more fishermen trying to catch a limited number of fish. Finally, he suggested there is inaccurate information about gag grouper because the commercial fishery is not coming close to the commercial quota.

**Steven Candileri** - He stated his desire for the state to not extend the state season in 2015. He also noted that the FWC should have had more meetings on the state season proposal in southwest Florida.

**Brian Lewis** - He stated that he doesn't support the 70-day state season proposal, which takes away from the commercial industry. He noted that he is in favor of sector separation. He noted that he was originally opposed to the IFQ program but being able to track commercial landings data in real time in accountability, which is something the recreational sector needs.

**Joseph Abdo** - He stated his desire for a thriving recreational fishery. He noted that he is opposed to the 70-day state season proposal that will encourage overharvest of the red snapper stock.

**Tom Tomalo** - He noted that he runs a fishing business for commercial, charter, and recreational fishermen. He also noted that less recreational boats going offshore now due to more regulations, but private fishermen are the biggest inputs of capital. He stated that many boat building businesses in Pinellas County are gone. He stated that the red snapper fishery doesn't need this much protection, and the extended gag season has helped local businesses since most recreational boats in the area aren't big enough to get to red snapper offshore.