



Greater Amberjack – Gulf
Consent Agenda Item #4 –
Proposed Adoption of Federal Standards
June 24, 2015
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management



Version 1

This is a summary of a proposed rule to change the minimum size limit for the recreational harvest of greater amberjack in state waters of the Gulf. This action would make greater amberjack regulations in Gulf of Mexico state waters consistent with federal regulations that were approved at the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) March 30 through April 2, 2015, meeting and are now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

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Background – Gulf Greater Amberjack



- Gulf greater amberjack has been overfished and undergoing overfishing since 2000
 - Stock placed into a rebuilding plan in 2003
 - Stock did not respond to management measures put in place following stock assessments in 2000, 2006, and 2010
- 2014 stock assessment indicated stock remains overfished and is still undergoing overfishing
 - Stock did not meet the goals of the rebuilding plan



Stock assessments conducted in 2000, 2006, and 2010 indicated greater amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico has been overfished and undergoing overfishing since 2000, despite being in a rebuilding plan established in 2003. The management measures implemented following each stock assessment were expected to rebuild the fishery and end overfishing, but the stock did not adequately improve based on these management changes. A detailed management history for the stock in Gulf federal waters can be found on slide 8 of this presentation.

In 2014, a new stock assessment was released and indicated the stock was still overfished and undergoing overfishing, despite previous actions intended to rebuild greater amberjack. In addition, the 2014 stock assessment indicated that the stock did not meet the goals of the 10-year greater amberjack rebuilding plan, which ended in 2012.

Federal Council Action – Gulf Greater Amberjack



- Council approved changes now pending approval by U.S. Secretary of Commerce
 - Modified annual catch limits and catch targets (quotas)
 - Reduced commercial trip limit from 2,000 pounds whole weight to 1,500 pounds gutted weight
 - Increased recreational minimum size limit from 30" FL to 34" FL



In response to the 2014 assessment results, the Council recently approved management changes for greater amberjack to reduce harvest, rebuild the stock, and end overfishing. These changes are now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

The Council set the acceptable biological catch for the stock at levels recommended by the Council's Science and Statistical Committee, which results in 2015 ACLs, or quotas, of 1.25 million pounds for the recreational sector and 464,400 pounds for the commercial sector. ACLs in 2015 are slightly reduced from previous levels in order to end overfishing, but catch limits and annual catch targets gradually increase through 2018. For the commercial sector, the Council reduced the trip limit from 2,000 pounds whole weight (ww) to 1,500 pounds gutted weight (1,560 pounds ww) in an effort to slow down harvest and lengthen the commercial season. Gutted weight refers to the practice of removing the internal organs of the fish before the fish is placed on ice, whereas whole weight means the fish is caught and immediately placed on ice (in whole condition). The Council changed the trip limit from whole weight to gutted weight because the majority of commercial harvesters land their fish in a gutted condition. For the recreational sector, the Council increased the minimum size limit from 30 inches fork length (FL) to 34 inches FL. At 30 inches FL, only 11 percent of female greater amberjack are sexually mature. At 34 inches FL, 85 percent of females are sexually mature. Increasing the minimum size limit allows more fish to reach sexual maturity before potential harvest and would give many of these fish the opportunity to spawn and help rebuild the stock.

Current Greater Amberjack Regulations – Gulf State Waters



Recreational

- Bag limit of 1 per person per day
- Closed June 1 through July 31 each year
- 30" FL minimum size limit

Commercial

- SPL, RS, and federal commercial reef fish permit required
- Closed March 1 through May 31 each year
- 36" FL minimum size limit
- Commercial harvesters follow federal regulations for harvest



Recreational anglers harvesting greater amberjack in Gulf state waters have a bag limit of one fish per person per day. Greater amberjack is closed to recreational harvest each year from June 1 through July 31. These months are closed because other species are available for recreational harvest during June and July, and fishermen requested amberjack be open later in the year. There is a 30 inch FL minimum size limit for recreational harvest, which the Commission will consider modifying today.

Commercial harvesters in Gulf state waters must possess a saltwater products license (SPL), restricted species endorsement (RS), and Gulf federal commercial reef fish permit. Greater amberjack are closed to commercial harvest each year from March 1 through May 31. There is a 36 inch FL commercial minimum size limit for commercial harvest. One condition of the federal commercial reef fish permit is that harvesters must follow federal reef fish rules, even when they are fishing in state waters. This means that when the new federal commercial trip limit takes effect, harvesters in state waters must abide by this rule change and no changes to FWC commercial greater amberjack rules are needed.

The following slide outlines the change that could be made to FWC rules to be consistent with pending federal rules in the Gulf of Mexico.

Proposed Rule



68B-14.0035 Size Limits: Amberjack, Black Sea Bass, Gray Triggerfish, Grouper, Hogfish, Red Porgy, Snapper

- *Set the greater amberjack minimum size limit for recreational harvest at 34 inches fork length for Gulf state waters*
- This change would make state rules consistent with federal rules
- Stakeholder input has been supportive of this change



Chapter 68B-14.0035, FAC, (Size Limits: Amberjack, Black Sea Bass, Gray Triggerfish, Grouper, Hogfish, Red Porgy, Snapper) would be modified to specify a 34 inch FL minimum size limit for greater amberjack recreationally harvested in the Gulf of Mexico.

This change would be consistent with Gulf federal rules recently approved by the Council and pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

Stakeholder feedback received by FWC staff at Council meetings has been supportive of a 34 inch FL recreational minimum size limit for Gulf greater amberjack.

Staff Recommendation



Approve the proposed rule to:

- Set a 34 inch fork length minimum size limit for the recreational harvest of greater amberjack in Gulf state waters

If approved by the Commission, the rule will be noticed and filed without further hearing as allowed under the adopting federal standards provision



Staff recommend approving the proposed rule setting a 34 inch FL minimum size limit for the recreational harvest of greater amberjack in Gulf state waters, using the process of adopting federal standards under Chapter 120.54(6), Florida Statutes. This proposed rule would only be filed for state waters if the 34 inch fork length minimum size limit for greater amberjack in Gulf federal waters off Florida is approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and implemented by NOAA Fisheries.

If the Commission approves the proposed rule amendment, the decision would be final and the rule will be filed without further hearing.

Staff have evaluated the rules under the standards of 68-1.004, FAC, and found them to be in compliance.

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



Greater Amberjack Management History

2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stock assessment released indicated stock was overfished and experiencing overfishing
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater amberjack placed in a rebuilding plan expected to rebuild the stock in 7 years
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated stock assessment indicated stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New regulations established a 30" FL recreational minimum size limit, zero-fish bag limit for captain and crew of for-hire vessels, reduced ACLs, and created accountability measures
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated stock assessment released indicated stock remained overfished and overfishing was occurring 2010 annual catch limits reduced as a result of 2009 quota overrun
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recreational closed season June 1 through July 31 established
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New regulations established a 2,000 pound whole weight commercial trip limit, annual catch limits reduced 18 percent
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated stock assessment released indicating stock remains overfished and overfishing occurring New federal regulations will establish a 34" FL recreational minimum size limit, reduce commercial trip limit to 1,500 pounds gutted weight, modified annual catch limits

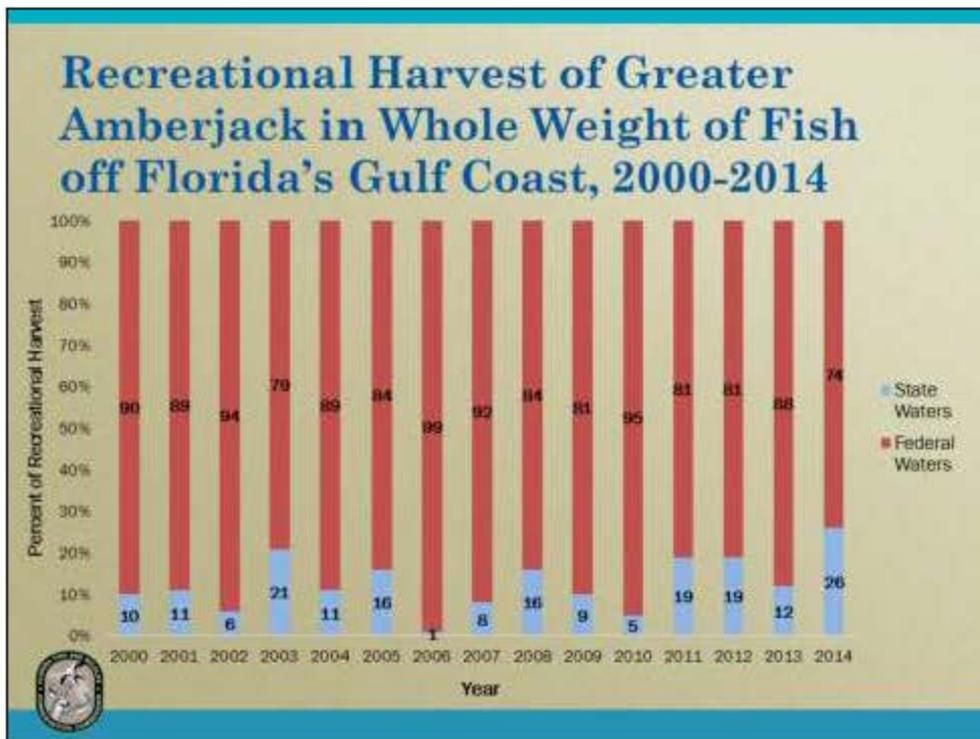


In 2000, a stock assessment indicated that Gulf greater amberjack was overfished and experiencing overfishing. In 2003, greater amberjack was placed in a 10-year rebuilding plan. Management measures enacted in 1997 and 1998 were deemed sufficient to help rebuild the stock, so no new management measures were included with the rebuilding plan.

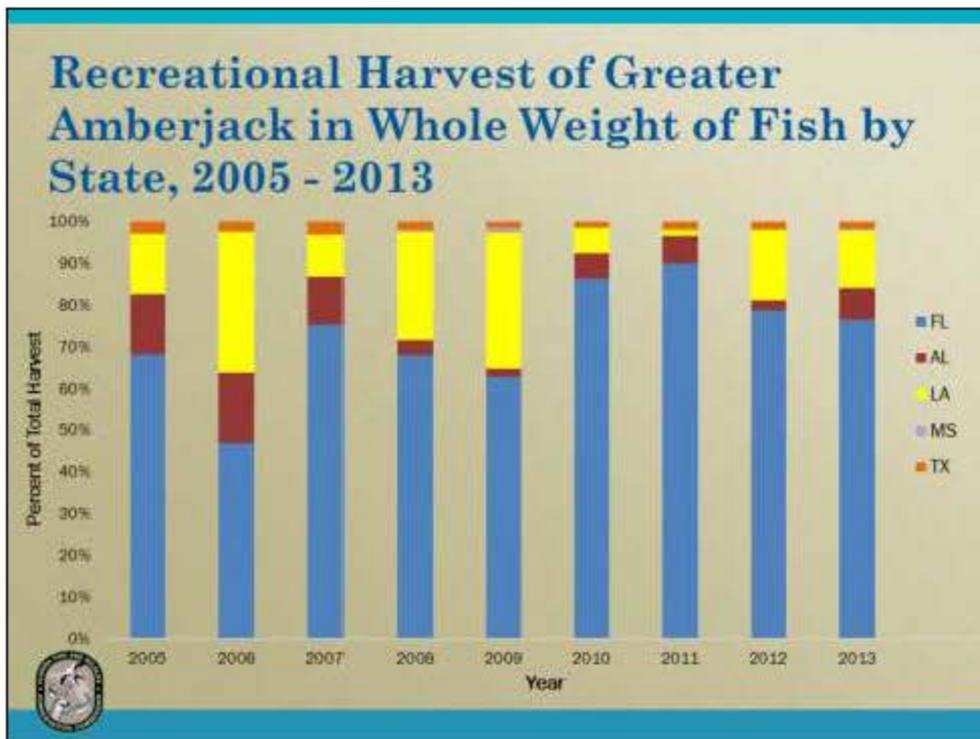
In 2006, an updated stock assessment indicated the stock was still overfished and undergoing overfishing. In response, the Council approved new management measures in 2008, including a 30-inch FL recreational minimum size limit, a zero-fish bag limit for captain and crew of for-hire vessels, reduced ACLs, and new accountability measures for both the recreational and commercial sectors that required quota overages from each sector to be repaid the following year.

In 2010, another greater amberjack stock assessment indicated the stock was overfished and overfishing was still occurring. In 2011, the Council established a recreational closed season during June and July. This closed season was expected to extend the recreational season by preventing recreational harvest during the time of year that historically has the largest amount of recreational fishing effort. In 2012, the Council reduced ACLs by 18 percent and established a 2,000 pound ww commercial trip limit.

In 2014, the most recent Gulf greater amberjack stock assessment indicated the stock remains overfished and experiencing overfishing. In response, the Council approved increasing the recreational minimum size limit from 30 inches FL to 34 inches FL to allow more fish to reach sexual maturity before potential harvest to help rebuild the stock. For the commercial sector, the Council approved reducing the commercial trip limit from 2,000 pounds ww to 1,500 pounds gutted weight in an effort to slow down harvest and lengthen the commercial season. Finally, the Council approved modified ACLs for both the recreational and commercial sectors. These changes are now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

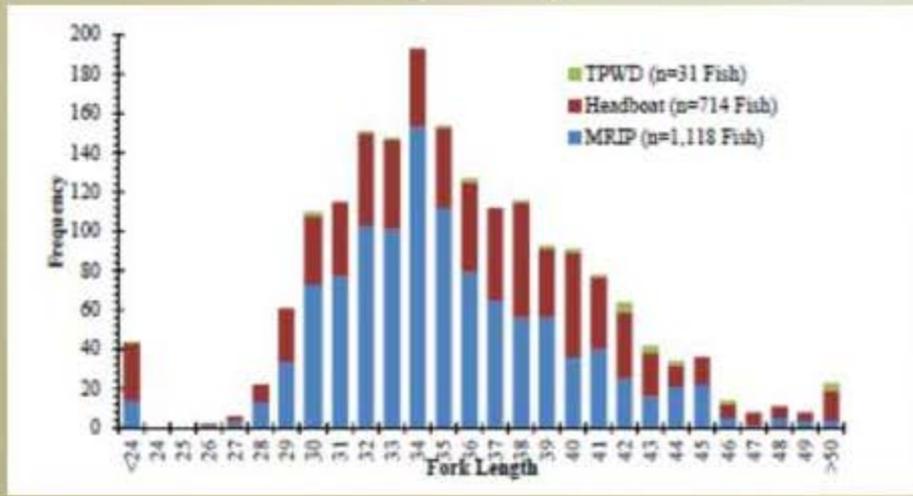


Since 2000, approximately 13 percent of Florida's recreational harvest of greater amberjack from the Gulf of Mexico has occurred in state waters. Harvest of greater amberjack in federal waters accounted for 87 percent of Florida's recreational harvest from the Gulf of Mexico.



The above graph shows total recreational landings of greater amberjack in whole weight by state for the years 2005-2013. Florida landings are shown in blue at the bottom of the graph. In general, recreational landings from Florida have been increasing, accounting for a larger portion of the overall Gulf harvest later in the time series.

Gulf Greater Amberjack Recreational Harvest Size Frequency, 2012-2013



The above graph shows the size distribution of fish that were landed recreationally between 2012 and 2013 and sampled through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Division creel survey (green), the Southeast Headboat Survey (red), or the Marine Recreational Information Program (blue). Based on the 1,863 fish that were sampled, the most common size of greater amberjack recreationally harvested was 34 inches fork length.

Source: Figure 2.2.1 from the Council's Framework Action to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico - Modification to Greater Amberjack Allowable Harvest and Management Measures.