



Public Hearing Guide

03/2017



Reef Fish Amendment 46
Gray Triggerfish Rebuilding Plan



Photo credit: Alex Bender

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What is a Public Hearing?

A public hearing gives you an opportunity to comment on a fishery management plan or amendment that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) is developing. Public hearings are conducted later in the amendment development process, after the Council has begun selecting preferred alternatives for proposed actions, but before taking final action. Suggestions, issues, and concerns expressed during the public hearings will be presented to the Council for review and consideration before final action is taken. Focusing your comments on the pros and cons of specific alternatives in each action provides the most useful guidance to the Council. If you are unable to attend a public hearing in person, you are encouraged to submit your comments online. For online comment forms, video presentations, and full Amendment documents, visit our website at www.gulfcouncil.org and click the thermometer icon at the center of the homepage.

How does a public hearing affect fisheries management?

Comments provided during the public hearing process are reported to the full Council prior to final action. Your input is considered as the Council deliberates and chooses the most appropriate management measures to address the issue(s) at hand.

How else can I get involved?

There are many ways you can help the Council identify fishery management needs and develop reasonable management alternatives, each dependent on how actively involved you want to become. The first step to becoming involved is to educate yourself about the management process by visiting our website at www.gulfcouncil.org, signing up to receive our communications, and contacting Council members and staff to discuss management concerns. You can attend meetings, serve on panels and committees that advise the Council on fishery issues, and even apply to become a Council member.





Photo credit: Troy Frady

Introduction to the Gray Triggerfish Rebuilding Plan

In 2006, a stock assessment indicated that the gray triggerfish stock was overfished and experiencing overfishing. In response, Reef Fish Amendment 30A, implemented in 2008, established annual catch limits (ACLs), annual catch targets (ACTs), accountability measures, and sector allocations.

In 2012, the Council modified the gray triggerfish rebuilding plan through Reef Fish Amendment 37, after learning through an update stock assessment that the stock continued to be overfished and experiencing overfishing. Amendment 37 reduced the commercial and recreational ACLs and ACTs, established a fixed closed season for both sectors during peak spawning from June 1 – July 31, and reduced the recreational bag limit and established a commercial trip limit. The revisions to the rebuilding plan also added recreational accountability measures, to allow for in-season closure if the quota is expected to be met, and a post-season pay back provision that reduces the following years quota by the amount of the overage.

A recent stock assessment of Gulf gray triggerfish indicated that the stock was not making adequate progress towards rebuilding and that gray triggerfish continues to be overfished. It was also found that despite the overfished condition and the slow rebuilding, the stock is not experiencing overfishing. The Council has two years to prepare and implement a rebuilding plan that rebuilds the stock in 10 years or less.

In this amendment, the Council is considering modifying the gray triggerfish rebuilding plan by establishing a new rebuilding timeline, establishing new ACLs and ACTs, modifying the recreational closed season, bag limit, and minimum size limit, and modifying the commercial trip limit.

Definitions

Overfished – When a fish stock is too small to reproduce itself on a continuing basis.

Overfishing – Fishing at a rate that is too high to allow a fish stock to maintain a healthy population.

Annual Catch Limit –The amount of fish that can be harvested from a stock each year without triggering accountability measures.

Annual Catch Target – A harvest level set lower than the annual catch limit to create a buffer so that overharvest does not occur.

Accountability Measure – measures taken to prevent harvest from exceeding the annual catch limit and, if exceeded, mitigate or correct the overage.



Photo credit: Troy Frady

Action 1: Establish a Rebuilding Timeline

For stocks in an overfished condition, like gray triggerfish, the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires the Council to set a rebuilding timeline that is as short as possible while taking into account the biology of the fish and the needs of the fishing community. The current rebuilding schedule was established in Amendment 37 and aimed to rebuild the stock by the end of 2017. The stock needs to rebuild to a size that can support the harvest of maximum sustainable yield on a continuing basis. For gray triggerfish, this is based on egg production, and to be considered rebuilt, the stock must achieve annual egg production equal to 30% of what annual egg production would be if the stock was totally un-fished (virgin biomass).

Alternative 1 would not fulfill the requirement to rebuild the stock within 2-years of the most recent stock assessment notification. Alternative 2 is the most conservative alternative and would establish a fishing mortality value of zero starting in 2017. Alternatives 3-5 are recommended rebuilding time periods suggested by the Council's scientific advisors and have a 60% probability of rebuilding the stock within the selected time period.

Alternative 1: No Action. Maintain the current 5-year rebuilding time period that began in 2012 and ends in 2017.

Alternative 2: Establish a rebuilding time period equal to the minimum number of years (T_{min}) to rebuild the stock based on a constant fishing mortality rate equal to zero starting in 2017. Using the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) selected recruitment scenario the gray triggerfish stock is projected to recover in 6 years, by the end of 2022.

Alternative 3: Establish a rebuilding time period of 8 years or by the end of 2024.

Preferred Alternative 4: Establish a rebuilding time period of 9 years or by the end of 2025.

Alternative 5: Establish a rebuilding time period of 10 years or by the end of 2026.



Photo credit: Jim Green

Action 2: Establish Annual Catch Limits and Annual Catch Targets

The Magnuson-Stevens Act was reauthorized in 2006 to include requirements to end and prevent overfishing through the use of ACLs, and optionally, ACTs. The current ACLs and ACTs were set in Amendment 37. The Council selected to use the more conservative ACTs for gray triggerfish to reduce the likelihood of exceeding the ACLs and triggering post-season accountability measures. The stock ACL is allocated 21% commercial and 79% recreational to create sector specific catch limits for gray triggerfish. After the most recent stock assessment, the Council's scientific advisors suggested new yield streams, so the Council is considering modification of the current ACL's and ACT's.

The Council's current preferred alternative in Action 1 would establish a 9-year rebuilding timeline. The ABC associated with a 9-year rebuilding timeline is 409,333 pounds whole weight, but the Council is maintaining a more conservative approach by selecting the preferred alternative that would maintain the current ACLs and ACTs (Alternative 1), because the stock is not rebuilding as quickly as expected.

Preferred Alternative 1: No Action. Retain the gray triggerfish sector ACLs and ACTs developed in Amendment 37 and in effect since 2012.

ABC	Commercial ACL	Recreational ACL
305,300 pounds	64,100 pounds	241,200 pounds
	Commercial ACT (quota)	Recreational ACT
	60,900 pounds	217,100 pounds

Alternative 2: Set sector ACLs and ACTs for gray triggerfish at zero pounds until a new stock assessment has been completed.

Alternative 3: Use the SSC recommendation of mean ABC yield streams (constant catch) for 2017 through 2019 for each of the rebuilding periods (8, 9, and 10 years). Use the ACL/ACT control rule buffer for each sector based on landings from 2012 through 2015. This results in an 8% buffer between the ACL and ACT for the commercial sector and a 20% buffer between the ACL and ACT for the recreational sector.

Option a. Corresponds with the mean ABC projections to rebuild the stock in 8 years or by the end of 2024.

Option b. Corresponds with the mean ABC projections to rebuild the stock in 9 years or by the end of 2025.

Option c. Corresponds with the mean ABC projections to rebuild the stock in 10 years or by the end of 2026.

Options	Time (years)	ABC Mean (2017-2019)	Comm ACL	Comm ACT (quota)	Rec ACL	Rec ACT
Option a	8-yrs	225,333	47,320	43,534	178,013	142,410
Option b	9-yrs	409,333	85,960	79,083	323,373	258,698
Option c	10-yrs	551,667	115,850	106,582	435,817	348,654

Action 3: Recreational Management Measures

Since the implementation of Amendment 37 in 2013, the recreational sector has exceeded its ACLs and ACTs. The recreational sector is closed throughout 2017 because 2016 landings are estimated to be 433,986 pounds whole weight, which is 215% of the ACL. The pay-back accountability measure that reduces the following year's ACL by the amount of the overage has resulted in a 2017 ACT that is too low to allow for any federal season. In the following three sub-options, the Council is considering modifying the recreational fixed closed season, bag limit, and minimum size limit, to avoid additional season closures and post-season overage adjustments.

Action 3.1: Modify the Recreational Fixed Closed Season

The current fixed closed season from June 1 through July 31 was established in Amendment 37 and sought to slow the rate of harvest and close the fishery during peak spawning months (June 1 – July 31). Gray triggerfish is managed with an in-season accountability measure and the sector can be closed to fishing when the recreational ACT is expected to be met. The Council is considering modifying the current fixed season to further slow the rate of harvest and protect fish during spawning, thus allowing for fishing opportunities later in the year.

Alternative 1: No Action. Do not modify the recreational fixed closed season (June 1 through July 31) for gray triggerfish.

Modify the recreational fixed closed season for gray triggerfish to be:

Alternative 2: June 1 through August 31

Alternative 3: January 1 through July 31

Preferred Alternative 4: January 1 through the end of February and June 1 through July 31

Alternative 5: January 1 through January 31 and June 1 through July 31

Action 3.2: Modify the Recreational Bag Limit

Gray triggerfish has a 2-fish per angler per day bag limit and is part of the 20-reef fish aggregate bag limit. Based on recreational landings from 2013 through 2015, approximately 10% of trips landing reef fish harvest 2-gray triggerfish within the 20-reef fish aggregate bag limit. Since a majority of reef fish trips don't harvest the current bag limit, reducing the bag limit is expected to reduce the recreational landings by 15% without affecting a majority of fishermen.

Alternative 1: No Action. Do not modify the recreational daily bag limit of 2 gray triggerfish per angler per day within the 20-reef fish aggregate bag limit.

Preferred Alternative 2: Reduce the recreational daily bag limit to 1 gray triggerfish per angler per day within the 20-reef fish aggregate bag limit.



Photo credit: Troy Frady

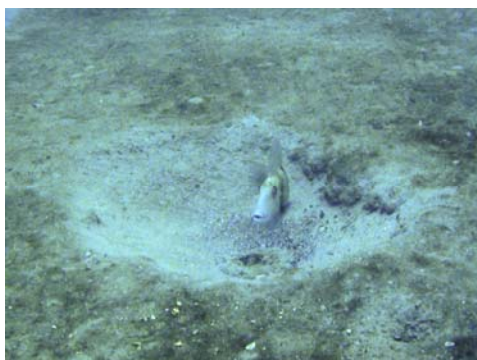


Photo credit: Carrie Simmons

Action 3.3: Modify the Recreational Minimum Size Limit

Typically, when considering the most effective minimum size limit for a reef fish species, the Council considers the size and age a fish reaches reproductive maturity, and the discard mortality. Gray triggerfish first mature at 10 inches fork length (FL). Thus, increasing the minimum size limit could potentially benefit the stock by allowing mature fish more opportunities to spawn before they reach harvestable age. Gray triggerfish have very low discard mortality in comparison to other reef fish, so increasing the minimum size limit isn't expected to significantly increase dead discards.

Alternative 1: No Action. Do not modify the gray triggerfish recreational minimum size limit of 14 inches FL.

Preferred Alternative 2: Increase the recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish to 15 inches FL.

Alternative 3: Increase the recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish to 16 inches FL.

Action 4: Modify the Commercial Trip Limit

The current 12-fish commercial trip limit was put in place in 2013. Since then, commercial landings for 2014, 2015, and preliminarily for 2016 have been 31%, 23%, and 4% below the ACT. Increasing the commercial trip limit would provide a better opportunity for the commercial sector to achieve the quota. However, the Council must carefully consider an increase, since the rebuilding plan has not made adequate progress towards rebuilding the overfished stock.

Alternative 1: No Action. Maintain the commercial trip limit of 12 gray triggerfish per trip.

Alternative 2: Decrease the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 10 fish per trip.

Alternative 3: Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 14 fish per trip.

Preferred Alternative 4: Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish 16 fish per trip.

Alternative 5: Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 18 fish per trip.



Photo credit: Stephen Cone

Send us your comments

The Council would like to hear your input on this proposed amendment before taking final action.

We are hosting the following public hearing workshops beginning at 6 p.m. local time:

Mon, March 6, 2017, 6 - 9 pm
Five Rivers Delta Resource Center
30945 Five Rivers Boulevard
Spanish Fort, AL 36527
(251) 625-0814

Mon, March 6, 2017, 6 - 9 pm
Hilton Garden Inn
6717 S. Padre Island Drive
Corpus Christi, TX 78412
(361) 991-8200

Tue, March 7, 2017, 6 - 9 pm
Destin Community Center
101 Stahlman Avenue
Destin, FL 32541
(850) 654-5184

Tue, March 7, 2017, 6 - 9 pm
Courtyard Marriott
9550 Seawall Blvd.
Galveston Island, TX 77554
(409) 497-2850

**Wed, March 8, 2017,
6 - 9 pm EST**
Webinar:
[https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/
register/2003305067287307265](https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2003305067287307265)

Thu, March 9, 2017, 6 - 9 pm
Hilton Carillon Park
950 Lake Carillon Drive
St. Petersburg, FL 33716
(727) 540-0050

Submit comments online before March 28, 2017:

<http://tinyurl.com/Triggerfish2017>



Public Hearing

Notes:



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