



PUBLIC HEARING GUIDE

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Modifications to Charter Vessel and Headboat Reporting Requirements



Cover photos courtesy of: Scott Hickman, Chris Phillips, Mary Ochello-Jackson, Mark Miller

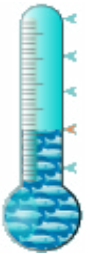
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What is a Public Hearing?

A public hearing gives you an opportunity to comment on a fishery management plan or amendment that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council 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 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management 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.

Introduction to Charter Vessel and Headboat Reporting

The for-hire component of the recreational sector harvests a substantial portion of the recreational annual catch limit for several federally managed fish species in the Gulf of Mexico. Accurate fisheries information about catch, effort, and discards is necessary to ensure we are harvesting the amount of fish that achieves the greatest economic, social, and biological benefits. Additionally, improving data reporting could reduce the likelihood that annual catch limits are exceeded and accountability measures are triggered.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is considering changing the method, frequency, and required data reported by for-hire operators to improve charter vessel and headboat fishery data used for management, monitoring, and compliance of federally permitted for-hire vessels in the Gulf of Mexico.



Definitions

ACL - Annual Catch Limit - a harvest level set at or below the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) to further reduce the likelihood that the annual catch will exceed the ABC and Overfishing Limit (OFL). The ACL is also the limit of annual catch for a stock that, if exceeded, triggers accountability measures.

AM - Accountability Measure - Management controls to prevent ACLs from being exceeded and to correct or mitigate overages of the ACL if they occur.



Summary of Actions

Action 1: Modify Frequency and Mechanism of Data Reporting for Charter Vessels

Charter vessels generally have a capacity for six or fewer passengers and carry anglers that have paid to charter the entire vessel. Charter vessel harvest is monitored using the Marine Recreational Information Program. This program measures harvest using the combination of a dockside intercept survey and a monthly phone survey of 10% of the federally permitted charter vessels in the Gulf.

Alternative 1: No action.

Alternative 2: Require federally permitted charter vessels to submit fishing records weekly via electronic reporting by the Tuesday following each fishing week.

Alternative 3: Require federally permitted charter vessels to submit fishing records daily via electronic reporting by noon the following day.

Preferred Alternative 4: Require federally permitted charter vessels to submit fishing records for each trip via electronic reporting before arriving at the dock.

Action 2: Modify the Frequency and Mechanism of Data Reporting for Headboats

Headboats have an angler capacity of 15 or more and are characterized by a fee structure where anglers pay individually. Their harvest is monitored using the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey which requires operators to submit completed fishing records for every trip via electronic logbooks on a weekly basis. Reports must be postmarked no later than 7 days after the end of each week.

Alternative 1: No action.

Alternative 2: Require headboats to submit fishing records weekly via electronic reporting by the Tuesday following each fishing week.

Alternative 3: Require headboats to submit fishing records daily via electronic reporting by noon the following day.

Preferred Alternative 4: Require headboats to submit fishing records for each trip via electronic reporting prior to arriving at the dock.

Action 3: Modify Reporting Requirements to Require Vessel or Catch Location Reporting

Currently, if a charter vessel is selected to participate in an MRIP survey they are required to report whether they fished inshore, in state waters, or in federal waters. Headboats report latitude and longitude in degrees and minutes of the areas they fished.

Alternative 1: No action.

Preferred Alternative 2: Require federally permitted for-hire vessels to use a NMFS approved electronic device to record vessel location at specified time intervals:

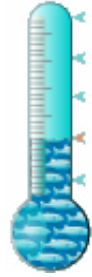
Preferred Sub-Option a: Headboats

Preferred Sub-Option b: Charter vessels

Send us your Comments

The Council would like your input on this proposed amendment. If you would like to see the full text document and analysis of each action, visit <http://tinyurl.com/pgu4qpr>.

Submit your comments online by visiting <http://tinyurl.com/q5kw67p>, or click on the thermometer icon on our homepage, www.gulfcouncil.org.



Additionally, we are hosting a public hearing online via webinar beginning at 6 p.m. December 17, 2015. To register, visit <http://tinyurl.com/ovsk020>.



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