



Scoping Guide

10/15/15

Reef Fish Amendment 41 - Red Snapper Management for Federally Permitted Charter Vessels



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What is Scoping?

The Council's scoping process represents the first stage of amendment development. The Council takes a fishery issue to scoping to identify potential impacts and reasonable alternatives. It is the first and best opportunity for the public to make suggestions or to raise issues and concerns before the Council begins developing the actions and alternatives that will be included in an amendment.

How does scoping affect fishery management?

Comments provided during the scoping process will be reported to the Council and considered in the development of actions and alternatives. Later in the process, as the amendment nears completion, the Council will conduct a series of public hearings to provide another opportunity to comment on the management actions and alternatives under consideration. Your input is an important part of the Council process as it deliberates and chooses the most appropriate management measures.



Introduction

In 2014, the Council reorganized the recreational sector by defining private angling and federal for-hire components for the harvest of red snapper. Each component is allocated a portion of the recreational red snapper annual catch limit, which provides the basis for the development of flexible management approaches tailored to each component.

The Council has expressed interest in further reorganizing the federal for-hire component of the recreational sector and initiated the development of Amendments 41 and 42. These amendments will evaluate management approaches that could be tailored to sub-components of the federal for-hire component of the recreational sector. The management of federally permitted headboats is addressed separately in Amendment 42- Reef Fish Management for Headboat Vessels.

Amendment 41 considers a red snapper management plan for federally permitted charter vessels. The goals of the management plan could include: to provide flexibility, reduce management uncertainty, improve economic conditions, and increase fishing opportunities for for-hire operators and their angler passengers.

Currently, there are 1,318 for-hire vessels with active or renewable federal charter/headboat permits for reef fish. The federal permit does not make a distinction between charter vessels and headboats; it includes all for-hire vessels. For the purpose of this amendment, the primary distinction between charter vessels and headboats is that charter vessels do not have recorded landings histories while, headboats do have recorded landings histories. Of the 1,318 federally permitted for-hire vessels in the Gulf of Mexico, 1,250 are considered to be charter vessels, as these vessels have not been selected to participate in the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey.

Choosing a Management Approach

The Council is considering both a traditional management approach style, such as size, bag, and season limits, and an allocation-based management approach, such as individual or group allocations.

Traditional Management

Use fishing seasons, bag limits, minimum size limits, and accountability measures to constrain harvest.

This approach primarily controls the rate at which fish are caught. It is most effective in fisheries that are not experiencing high fishing pressure and strict catch limits. These management measures may not be sufficient to constrain landings under the existing landings monitoring system.

Size Limit

Minimum size limits can protect smaller fish from being harvested before they can spawn. However, size limits can result in increased discards. A slot limit could also be considered.

Bag Limit

Bag limits place restrictions on the maximum number of fish that can be possessed daily by an angler. Changing a bag limit would be expected to change the length of a season by slowing or raising the rate of harvest. Bag limits may increase discards.

Fishing Season

For red snapper, the length of a fishing season is based on projections that estimate when the allotted harvest is expected to be met. Fishing seasons can be continuous or could be split to encompass segments of the year. Fishing seasons can be used to protect a species during spawning times, or they can be aligned with more socio-economically desirable periods. There may be regional differences in the optimal time for fishing seasons to be open.

Allocation-based Management

In an allocation-based program, the annual catch limit is divided among smaller groups or individuals as allocation. There are a variety of allocation-based programs that differ in terms of how shares and/or allocation can be distributed. Once allocation is distributed, participants could potentially choose when to use that allocation. Several issues would need to be considered if an allocation-based management approach is adopted including:

- Program objectives/outcomes
- Initial distribution of shares and/or allocation
- Transferability provisions
- Use of allocation, including any restrictions
- Referendum requirements

Allocation-based management approaches are effective in constraining harvest to the allowable catch and can provide flexibility to operators. If an allocation-based approach is used to manage charter vessels, the current landings monitoring program would have to be modified or supplemented. The Council is developing an amendment that considers requiring electronic reporting for for-hire vessels.



Group-Based Allocation

- Fishing Cooperative - a self-organizing group of individual charter operators that act together
- Regional Fishing Organization - a group of individual charter operators in a specific geographic area that act together

Individual-Based Allocation

Shares and/or allocation could be distributed to individuals or individual vessels based on passenger capacity, a tiered approach, or some other metric.

- Permit Fishing Quota Program - Shares and/or allocation would be associated with a federal for-hire permit.
- Individual Fishing Quota Program- Shares and/or allocation are held by individuals.
- Fish Tag Program - Physical harvest tags. Tags could be distributed equally among vessels, based on passenger capacity, or using some other criteria.

Scoping Questions:

1. Charter vessels are currently managed using a traditional approach. In what ways does the current approach work or not work?
2. If the Council selects to continue using a traditional approach to management, what measures (size limit, bag limit, fishing season) should be adjusted and how?
3. In what ways might an allocation-based management approach benefit/hinder charter operators and their passenger anglers?
4. If the Council selects an allocation-based management approach which one is most appropriate and why?



Scoping Workshops - Dates & Locations

Monday - October 19, 2015
Courtyard Marriott Gulfport
1600 East Beach Blvd.
Gulfport, MS 39501
228-864-4310

Wednesday - October 21, 2015
Adult Activity Center
26251 Canal Road
Orange Beach, AL
251-981-3440

Thursday - October 22, 2015
Hilton Galveston Island
5400 Seawall Blvd.
Galveston, TX 77551
409-744-5000

Thursday - October 22, 2015
Embassy Suites
570 Scenic Gulf Drive
Destin, FL 332550
850-337-7000

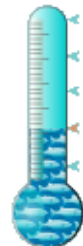
Monday - October 26, 2015
Marriott Clearwater Beach
Sand Key
1201 Gulf Blvd.
Clearwater Beach, FL 33767
727-596-1100

Thursday - October 29, 2015
Webinar
Visit <http://tinyurl.com/ovmpjwg> to register

Tuesday - November 3, 2015
Courtyard Marriott
142 Library Drive
Houma, LA 70360
985-223-8996

All workshops begin at 6 pm local time and will conclude after public input has ended, but no later than 9 pm.

If you are unable to attend a scoping meeting, your input is still important. Submit comments online at: http://gulfcouncil.org/council_meetings/comment_forms/Reef%20Fish%20Amendment%2041.php, or click on the thermometer icon on our home page.



NOTES:



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