



Public Hearing Guide: Framework Action to Modify Red Grouper Recreational Bag Limits and Closed Season

9/30/2014



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What is a Framework Action?

A framework action is a quick way to make management changes to a fishery management plan that is equipped with a framework procedure. A framework procedure is a blueprint that outlines potential management changes and the circumstances under which management actions can be taken without having to initiate a new amendment to the fishery management plan. Typically, once the framework procedure is defined in a fishery management plan, actions are completed in a relatively short time period and involve less opportunity for public input.

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. Comments should focus on possible benefits and drawbacks of the alternatives contained in each action. Suggestions, issues, and concerns expressed during the public hearings will be reported to the full Council for review before final action is taken. Your input is considered as the Council deliberates and chooses the most appropriate management measures to address the issue(s) at hand.

Introduction

The 2013 recreational red grouper annual catch limit was exceeded. As a result, accountability measures were triggered and the bag limit was reduced from 4-fish to 3-fish on April 20th, 2014, and a recreational season closure was established for October 4th, 2014. At its June 2014 meeting, the Council initiated the development of this framework action that considers adjusting the accountability measures, reducing the recreational bag limit, and/or creating a fixed closed season to avoid early season closures.

Purpose and Need for Action:

To modify red grouper recreational management measures such as bag limits and fixed closed season to improve recreational fishing opportunities by extending the number of days in the fishing season while continuing to achieve optimal yield.



Action 1 - Red Grouper Bag Limit

The red grouper bag limit is 4 per person within the 4 grouper aggregate total bag limit. The recreational season is closed if annual catch limit is exceeded. Also, if the annual catch limit is exceeded, an accountability measure reduces the bag limit to 3 red grouper per person for the following year. The Council is considering reducing the bag limit to extend the season and reduce the likelihood that the red grouper annual catch limit is exceeded.

Alternative 1: No action.

Alternative 2: Reduce the red grouper bag limit to 3 fish per person per day.

Alternative 3: Reduce the red grouper bag limit to 2 fish per person per day.

Alternative 4: Reduce the red grouper bag limit to 1 fish per person per day.



Action 2 - Bag Limit Reductions

Currently, if it is determined that the recreational sector has exceeded its red grouper annual catch limit then the bag limit is reduced by one fish. If the following year's annual catch limit is not exceeded then the original bag limit is restored. However, if the annual catch limit is exceeded in the subsequent year then the bag limit is further reduced by one fish. The minimum red grouper bag limit is two fish. This provision was activated for the 2014 fishing season after the annual catch limit was exceeded in 2013. If the annual catch limit is exceeded again in 2014 then, the bag limit will be reduced to 2 fish per person. If the annual catch limit is not exceeded in 2014 then the bag limit will be restored to 4 fish per person.

Alternative 1: No action.

Alternative 2: Retain the current bag limit reduction accountability measure, except allow the bag limit to reduce to one if the annual catch limit is exceeded three years in a row.

Alternative 3: Any bag limit reduction triggered by the annual catch limit being exceeded will be:

Option a. Temporary. The bag limit will return to one fish above the temporary bag limit each of the following years until it is restored to the original bag limit, unless subject to subsequent reduction due to the annual catch limit being exceeded again.

Option b. Permanent, until changed in a rulemaking or subsequent reduction due to exceeding the annual catch limit.

Alternative 4: Eliminate the bag limit reduction accountability measure.



Action 3 - Closed Seasons

Currently, the recreational red grouper season opens on January 1 and remains open throughout the year unless it is determined that the annual catch limit will be exceeded, in which case the regional administrator has the authority to close recreational harvest for the remainder of the year. There is a recreational harvest closure beyond the 20 fathom depth contour from February 1st through March 31st.

2013 was the first year red grouper fishing was allowed inside the 20 fathom depth contour during the months of February and March. The 2013 annual catch limit was exceeded, forcing an early season closure. As a result, the Council is considering establishing a fixed closed season during the fishing year to avoid the in-season closure.

Alternative 1: No action.

Alternative 2: Create a recreational red grouper fixed closed season February 1 through March 31 in all federal waters.

Alternative 3: Create a recreational red grouper fixed closed season February 1 through April 30.

- Option a.** Beyond 20 fathoms
- Option b.** In all federal waters.

Alternative 4: Create a recreational red grouper fixed closed season March 1 through February 1.

- Option a.** Beyond 20 fathoms
- Option b.** In all federal waters.

Alternative 5: Create a recreational red grouper fixed closed season July 1 through July 31.

- Option a.** Beyond 20 fathoms
- Option b.** In all federal waters.

Alternative 6: Do not have a recreational red grouper fixed closed season in any depth waters.

Estimated Season Lengths Based on Combinations of Alternatives

Alt.	Closed Season	Closure eff. < 20 fathoms	Closure eff. >20 fathoms	% ACT harvested Closure date Days	Bag Limit			
					4	3	2	1
1	Feb-Mar	No	Yes	100% 27-Aug - 24-Sep 179-237	99%-100% 30-Aug - 7-Oct 182-251	100% 15-Oct - 17-Dec 238-291	77%-83% No Closure 306	
2	Feb-Mar	Yes	Yes	100% 9-Oct - 20-Nov 222-264	100% 27-Oct - 5-Dec 249-279	96%-100% 3-Dec - None 277-305	65%-74% No Closure 306	
3a	Feb-Apr	No	Yes	100% 9-Aug - 4-Nov 161-218	100% 22-Sep - 19-Nov 175-233	100% 9-Nov - 30-Dec 223-274	69%-79% No Closure 276	
3b	Feb-Apr	Yes	Yes	100% 8-Nov - 8-Dec 222-252	100% 21-Nov - 25-Dec 236-269	91%-100% 28-Dec - None 272-276	61%-68% No Closure 276	
4a	Mar-Apr	No	Yes	100% 27-Aug - 21-Oct 177-232	100% 31-Aug - 5-Nov 181-247	100% 17-Oct - 14-Dec 238-285	72%-83% No Closure 304	
4b	Mar-Apr	Yes	Yes	100% 21-Oct - 25-Nov 232-267	100% 7-Nov - 10-Dec 249-282	95%-100% 11-Dec - None 283-304	65%-72% No Closure 304	
5a	July or August	No	Yes	79%-100% 1-Aug - 24-Oct 212-265	78%-100% 1-Aug - 8-Nov 212-280	100% 18-Oct - 17-Dec 259-319	71%-83% No Closure 334	
5b	July or August	Yes	Yes	100% 16-Nov - 12-Dec 288-314	100% 27-Nov - 26-Dec 299-328	91%-100% 28-Dec - None 330-334	63%-70% No Closure 334	
6	None	n/a	n/a	100% 26-Aug - 18-Oct 237-290	99%-100% 29-Aug - 1-Nov 248-304	100% 12-Oct - 10-Dec 284-343	73%-84% No Closure 365	

To comment, please visit <http://tinyurl.com/redgrouper>, or click on the thermometer icon on our home page at www.gulfcouncil.org.



Notes

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