



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Managing Fishery Resources in the U.S. Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico

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Gulf Council Update – April 2016

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Austin, Texas, April 4 - 7, 2016, to discuss a number of fishery issues, such as Red Grouper Catch Limit Increases, Charter and Headboat Reporting Requirements, Changes in King Mackerel Allocation, Stock Boundaries, and Sale Provisions, and the Hogfish Annual Catch Limit, Minimum Size Limit, and Stock Definition.

Recreational Red Snapper 2016 Season

The Council received an update from NOAA Fisheries Service on the red snapper season projections for 2016. Both the private recreational season and federal charter for-hire season will open on June 1. National Marine Fisheries predicts a private recreational season of 6-9 days and a federal charter for-hire season of 38-56 days. The final 2016 recreational red snapper season closing dates will be announced in May prior to the start of the season. To read more about how the season was calculated, visit <http://gulfcouncil.blogspot.com/>.

Red Snapper Management for Federally Permitted Charter Vessels – Amendment 41

The Council reviewed the updated Reef Fish Amendment 41 including input received from the Ad Hoc Red Snapper Charter For-Hire Advisory Panel. This amendment considers creating a red snapper management plan for federally permitted for-hire vessels fishing under the for-hire component of the recreational red snapper allocation. The Council provided guidance to staff on developing the draft amendment and agreed to reconvene its Ad Hoc Red Snapper Charter For-Hire Advisory Panel to continue work on the design of an allocation-based management plan for red snapper. Additionally, the Council requested that the Advisory Panel discuss a harvest tag program that provides recreational anglers with annual allocation distributed in the form of harvest tags which may be used on the charter vessel of their choice, and to evaluate the pros and cons of such a program. The Council will review a revised draft of the amendment in June.

Federal Reef Fish Headboat Management – Amendment 42

The Council reviewed a revised draft of Reef Fish Amendment 42 which considers creating a management plan for federally permitted headboats fishing for reef fish in the Gulf of Mexico. The Council asked National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to publish a control date of December 31, 2015, for participation in the reef fish headboat program. A control date provides notice to affected fishermen that if the Council chooses to further restrict participation in the fishery, and if it chooses to use that date in specifying eligibility to participate in any limited access program, then persons entering the fishery (obtaining a permit) after that date may not be able to participate in the program. The Ad Hoc Reef Fish Head Boat Advisory Panel will meet in early May to review the amendment, and its recommendations will be presented to the Council in June.

Extend or Eliminate the Red Snapper Sector Separation Sunset Provision – Amendment 45

The Council selected a preferred alternative to extend the separate management of the federal for-hire and private angling components for an additional three calendar years – effective through the end of the 2020 fishing year. Public hearings on the amendment will be held around the Gulf coast this summer.

Framework Action to Modify Commercial Gear Requirements and Recreational/Commercial Fishing Gear for Yellowtail Snapper

The Council took final action on this Yellowtail framework action which addresses inconsistencies between Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' circle hook requirements for yellowtail snapper commercial fishing in Gulf waters and increases the operational efficiency of the commercial yellowtail snapper fishery. The Council chose to remove the circle hook requirement for yellowtail snapper when commercial fishing with natural bait south of 25° 09' north latitude on the west coast of Monroe County, Florida (Cape Sable) south to the Gulf Council jurisdictional boundary. The Council also modified both the commercial and recreational fishing years to August 1 through July 31. The framework action will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.

Framework Action - Modify Red Grouper Annual Catch Limit

After hearing a summary of public comments, recommendations of the Reef Fish AP and supporting rationale for a framework action to modify the red grouper annual catch limit, the Council chose an alternative that establishes catch limits using the constant catch OFL and ABC recommended by the SSC, but set the ACL and ACT below the constant catch OFL and ABC, and to base the ACL and ACT on the minimum ABC of 10,770,000 pounds gutted weight from the declining yield stream. The resulting limits and targets are as follows:

| Year | Mean OFL | Mean ABC | Commercial I ACL | Commercial ACT/Quota | Recreational ACL | Recreational I ACT |
|-------|------------|------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 2016+ | 14,160,000 | 13,920,000 | 8,190,000 | 7,780,000 | 2,580,000 | 2,370,000 |

*Effective Stock ACL is 10,770,000

This increase in catch limits is expected to be sufficient to prevent a recreational season closure from occurring in 2016 if implemented in time. Without the increase, NMFS projected that the recreational ACL would be reached and the season closed sometime between September and December. The framework action will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.

Hogfish Annual Catch Limit, Minimum Size Limit, and Stock Definition

The Gulf Council reviewed a public hearing draft of an amendment that considers setting a management boundary between the west Florida stock of hogfish, which is located entirely in the Gulf of Mexico jurisdiction, and the east Florida/Florida Keys stock, which occurs primarily in the South Atlantic but extends partially into the Gulf Council's jurisdiction in the Florida Keys. The draft amendment also looks at defining overfished and overfishing thresholds, setting an annual catch limit and increasing both the commercial and recreational minimum size limit for hogfish. The Council selected a preferred alternative that would raise the minimum size limit of hogfish to 16 inches fork length. Public hearings are scheduled as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Monday, May 9, 2016 Holiday Inn Express & Suites 1785 5 th Avenue South Naples, FL | Tuesday, May 10, 2016 Holiday Inn Express 2171 54 th Street North St. Petersburg, FL |
| Wednesday, May 11, 2016 Webinar Click here to register! | All in-person meetings begin at 6:00 pm local time and end no later than 9:00 pm local time. Webinars begin at 6:00 pm Eastern Time. |

King Mackerel

The Council took final action on Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 26. Amendment 26 modifies allocations, stock boundaries, and sale provisions for king mackerel in the Gulf and South Atlantic. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the amendment will establish a single, year-round, boundary on the eastern edge of the mixing zone and delegate management to the Gulf Council. The amendment will also allow retention and sale of Atlantic king mackerel caught incidentally with a gillnet on boats that have both a federal king mackerel permit and shark commercial permit; and allocate the Atlantic Southern Zone into two split season quotas:

| Season | Quota |
|--|-------|
| March 1 – September 30 (Season 1) | 60% |
| October 2 – End of February (Season 2) | 40% |

The resulting Gulf commercial zone quotas are as follows:

| Zone | % Allocation |
|------------------------|--------------|
| Western Zone | 40% |
| Northern Zone | 18% |
| Southern Zone Handline | 21% |
| Southern Zone Gillnet | 21% |

Finally, the recreational bag limit will increase to three fish per person in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Council also asked staff to begin developing an amendment to address the utilization of uncaught quota and associated accountability measures for king mackerel. The Council intends to explore this “allocation sharing” approach independently of other pending actions for Gulf king mackerel, with the purpose of identifying more ways to allow fishermen to access the totality of the Gulf king mackerel ACL.

Shrimp

The Council approved the annual Texas shrimp closure for 2016. The closure is part of a cooperative seasonal closure with the State of Texas and runs concurrent with its mid-season closure. The shrimp fishery is closed annually off Texas to allow brown shrimp to reach a larger and more valuable size prior to harvest and to prevent waste of brown shrimp that might otherwise be discarded due to their small size.

The Council also continued work on Shrimp Amendment 17B which considers shrimp permit issues such as setting a minimum threshold number of Gulf shrimp vessel permits and whether to create a Gulf shrimp vessel permit reserve pool, specification of optimum yield, and issues about transiting in federal waters. In addition to reviewing the draft document the Council also considered reports from the Shrimp Working Group and Shrimp Advisory Panel (AP). The Council made several modifications to the document, and a revised draft will be presented to the Council in June.

More Information

For more information about any of the amendments discussed during the Council meeting, visit http://gulfcouncil.org/fishery_management_plans/scoping-thru-implementation.php and scroll down to the amendment of interest to find the draft document, video, guide, and other information.

Also, remember to join the Gulf Council staff for a wrap-up of the April Council meeting. Learn what actions the Council took, what new issues are on the table, and get answers to your questions. The webinar is scheduled for April 18, 2016 beginning at 6:00 pm eastern time. The meeting will end no later than 9:00 pm. Visit <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3457390497527000068> or call 888- 833-1844 to register for the webinar.

About the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional Fishery Management Councils established by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council prepares fishery management plans which are designed to manage fishery resources within the 200-mile limit of the Gulf of Mexico.