



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 – January, 2016

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Orange Beach, Alabama, January 25 – 28, 2016, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including electronic reporting for for-hire vessels, regional management for recreational red snapper, and the shrimp permit moratorium.

Regional Management of Recreational Red Snapper – Reef Fish Amendment 39

After reviewing Reef Fish Amendment 39 and public hearing summaries, the Council postponed further discussion of the Amendment as other options for recreational red snapper management are explored. Amendment 39 was developed to divide the recreational red snapper quota among regions to allow region specific management measures.

Reef Fish Amendment 43 - Hogfish

The Council reviewed a document that proposes to set a management boundary between Gulf and South Atlantic hogfish stocks near the Cape Sable area of South Florida. The amendment also considers setting status determination criteria, revising the annual catch limit, and increasing the minimum size limit. The Council will review a public hearing draft of the document during its April, 2016 Council meeting. Public hearings will be held sometime after the April meeting.

Yellowtail Snapper Framework Action to Modify Gear Restrictions

This framework action addresses inconsistencies between Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' circle hook requirements for yellowtail snapper commercial fishing in Gulf waters and increase the operational efficiency of the commercial yellowtail snapper fishery. The Council added a new action to the document that looks at modifying the fishing year for Gulf yellowtail snapper. For this action, the Council chose alternatives that would establish commercial and recreational seasons of August 1 – July 31.

Two public hearings are scheduled: one in Key West March 1, 2016, and the other in Sarasota March 2, 2016.

Reef Fish Amendment 36 – Red Snapper IFQ Modifications

The Council reviewed potential management actions and decided to divide Amendment 36 into two Amendments in an effort to expedite items that can be addressed quickly.

Amendment 36A will include actions related to the enforcement of commercial reef fish trips, inactive shareholder accounts, and mid-year quota changes and could apply to both the red snapper and grouper/tilefish IFQ programs.

Amendment 36B will address issues such as eligibility requirements, caps on the use or possession of IFQ shares and allocation, and other issues.

Reef Fish Amendments 41 and 42

The Council heard summaries of the scoping meetings and public comments for Amendments 41 and 42. For Amendment 42, the Council selected gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, and red grouper, in addition to red snapper and gag, as preferred alternatives. An alternative to establish a fishing cooperative program was moved to the 'considered but rejected' section of the document. The Council also requested the addition of an action to Amendments 41 and 42 that would allow both charter and headboat owners/operators to opt-out of the proposed programs.

New Reef Fish Actions

The Council initiated a new amendment to examine extending or eliminating the sunset provision on sector separation created by Amendment 40.

Amendment 40 established a red snapper federal for-hire component that includes all for-hire operators with a valid or renewable federal reef fish for-hire permit and a private angling component that includes all other for-hire operators and private recreational anglers. It also established separate red snapper season closure provisions for the two components.

The Council also initiated work on two new reef fish framework actions. One would adjust the red grouper annual catch limit. The other would develop a mechanism to allow the recreational red snapper season to reopen in the event that the annual catch limit is not met during the regular season.

Data Collection

The Council reviewed a proposed amendment to modify the frequency and method of reporting for charter and headboats fishing for reef fish and coastal migratory pelagics in the Gulf of Mexico. After reviewing public comments on the amendment, the Council decided to postpone taking final action. Instead, the Council requested that the Southeast Fishery Science Center develop a flowchart illustrating alternatives for implementing electronic reporting in the federally permitted for-hire component. Alternatives will be presented to the Council during its April, 2016 Council meeting.

Shrimp

The Council took final action on Shrimp Amendment 17A to extend the shrimp permit moratorium for ten years and maintains the endorsement requirement for royal red shrimp. Amendment 17A will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics (Mackerel)

The Council reviewed and chose preferred alternatives for a public hearing draft of Amendment 26 which considers making modifications to allocations, stock boundaries, and sale provisions of king mackerel. Public hearings will be held February 22, 2016 – March 3, 2016. The Council is expected to take final action during the April Council meeting.

The Council also decided to start a framework action to remove the prohibition on retaining the recreational king mackerel bag limit on a vessel with a commercial king mackerel permit or a dually permitted charter vessel, when the king mackerel commercial season is closed but while the king mackerel recreational season is open.

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.

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.