

April 2026 Council Meeting Summary

For Immediate Release

April 14, 2026

The Gulf Council met in Mobile, Alabama from April 7-9, 2026. During the meeting, the Council made preliminary appointments to its Coastal Migratory Pelagic and Red Drum Advisory Panels. Potential appointees will be subjected to a fishery violation background check before final appointments are made during the June Council meeting. The Council also named the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission's officers, Kyle Yurewitch and Matthew Rubenstein, as the 2025 Law Enforcement Team of the year and plans to honor them during the June 2026 Council meeting. The following is a summary of the other issues addressed during the meeting:

Lane Snapper

The Gulf Council took final action on an Abbreviated Framework Action to increase lane snapper catch limits in pounds whole weight as follows:

	Overfishing Limit	Acceptable Biological Catch	Annual Catch Limit
Current	1,116,331	1,088,873	1,088,873
Recommended	1,336,443	1,304,917	1,304,917

The results from underwater video surveys indicated that the population could support additional harvest, so the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee recommended an increase of a little more than 200,000 pounds. With this increase, and the increase to a 10-inch total length minimum size limit, the fishing season is expected to last all year, without early in-season closure. This document will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for consideration and implementation as soon as practicable.

Red Grouper

The Council continued work on Reef Fish Amendment 63 which considers developing a 3-year pilot program to set aside a portion of the red grouper commercial quota for distribution to participants of the Grouper/Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program. The quota pool would be established using a percentage of the quota increase that is expected to be distributed when Reef Fish Amendment 62 is implemented. The Council selected a preferred alternative to establish a quota pool beginning in 2027 if the

commercial annual catch target is above 4,280,000 pounds. That quota pool would be populated with 20% of the quota increase scheduled for distribution in Amendment 62 and would be distributed as non-transferable annual allocation to commercial reef fish permit holders that have landed at least 500 pounds of red grouper in the past two years. Half of the quota pool would be distributed to active red grouper fishermen without red grouper shares and half would be distributed to active fishermen with red grouper shares; both would receive distributions proportionally based on red grouper landings. Public comment will be solicited and the Ad Hoc Red Snapper / Grouper Tilefish IFQ Advisory Panel will provide feedback to the Council before it takes final action during the June 2026 meeting.

During this meeting, the Council took final action on an abbreviated framework action that would withhold a maximum of 408,000 pounds of red grouper commercial quota in 2027 in anticipation of the implementation of Reef Fish Amendment 63. On its current timeline, if the Council decided to create a quota pool in Reef Fish Amendment 63, it would not be implemented until after quota is distributed in 2027. This holdback would make implementation later in the year possible. If Reef Fish Amendment 63 is not implemented by May 1, 2027, the withheld quota will be distributed to shareholders. This document will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for consideration and implementation as soon as practicable.

Shrimp

The Council was presented with stock assessment results for Gulf brown, white, and pink shrimp. The assessments, which indicated that Penaeid shrimp stocks are healthy, resulted in updated status determination criteria recommendations from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee. The Council initiated work on a document to update status determination criteria for penaeid shrimp and will also consider, within the same document, modification of the minimum threshold number of federal Gulf shrimp permits to promote stability and economic efficiency in the fishery.

Texas Closure

The Council approved the annual Texas federal closure for shrimp in 2026. The closure is part of a cooperative seasonal closure with the State of Texas that aims to allow shrimp to reach a larger and more valuable size prior to harvest. The closure historically goes into effect from June 1 through July 15.

Proposed NOAA Shark Regulation Changes

The Council heard a presentation on NOAA's Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS)

[proposed rule](#) that considers commercial and recreational measures for several shark species. The Council does not have management authority over HMS but does submit comment on proposed changes that impact Gulf fishermen or Council managed species. The proposed commercial changes would affect the management boundary and retention limit for black nose sharks in the Atlantic region and remove commercial management group quota linkages. Modifications to the recreational measures would modify minimize size and retention limits for several species, including a change from the current one per person per trip to one per vessel per trip possession limit for Atlantic sharpnose sharks and bonnethead sharks. The Council decided to send a comment letter indicating that the Council does not support modifying the recreational size or retention limit for Atlantic sharpnose and bonnethead sharks. The Council also asserts that the proposed dynamic range of potential size and retention limits is confusing and may not align with timelines for receiving stock assessment results. The Council suggests that NOAA HMS set stable and species-specific size and retention limits.

Red Snapper

Private Recreational Accountability Measures

The Council began work on a document that considers modifying carryover provisions, accountability measures, and allowing transfer of un-used landings among states for private recreational red snapper. Currently, the private angling component of the recreational red snapper fishery is subject to an accountability measure that requires each state to pay back any overage to their state-specific annual catch limit in the following year. The document considers ways to increase flexibility in cases where there are state-specific overages, but the total private recreational annual catch limit isn't exceeded. The Council decided to make modifications to accountability measures in a separate document to address this issue and will continue work on the document addressing carryover and transfer provisions at a future meeting.

For-Hire State Management of Red Snapper

The Council began work on Reef Fish Amendment 64 which considers delegating federal for-hire management authority for red snapper to the Gulf States. The Council expanded the alternatives that would allocate the federal for-hire annual catch limit among the states, added an action considering state specific post-season accountability measures, and added an action that would consider including a sunset provision on delegation. The Council will continue work on this document at a future meeting.

Recreational Reporting of Deep-Water Grouper

The Council discussed potential methods for developing a reporting system for the recreational deep-water grouper fishery to reduce uncertainty in estimates used to make management decisions. The Council decided to explore the feasibility of identifying the universe of recreational anglers targeting deep-water grouper using a permit to better characterize catch and effort for these species. The Council also plans to review the mandatory recreational reporting program for tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic and will continue work on recreational deep-water grouper reporting at a future meeting.

Recreational Gag Season

NOAA Fisheries indicated that the recreational gag season will open September 1 and is expected to remain open for 25-34 days. Preliminary recreational landings for 2025 indicated that the annual catch limit was not exceeded in the 14-day season, so the 2026 season will be based on the rebuilding plan implemented in Amendment 56 resulting in an unadjusted 2026 recreational annual catch target of 399,000 pounds.

Recreational Greater Amberjack Season

NOAA Fisheries indicated that the 2026 recreational greater amberjack season will open on September 1 and is expected to remain open for 40-45 days.