

# Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



## August 2022 Council Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Corpus Christi, Texas August 22 – 25, 2022. Re-appointed members Dr. Tom Frazer and Mr. Troy Williamson were inducted alongside new member, Mr. Michael McDermott. These members are appointed to serve on the Council for a 3-year term. The Council re-elected Mr. Dale Diaz as Chair and Dr. Greg Stunz as Vice Chair for a 1-year term. The following is a summary of the Council's actions:

### **Joint Efforts with South Atlantic Council**

#### **King Mackerel**

The South Atlantic Council will review CMP Amendment 33 and the Joint CMP Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Objectives at its September 2022 meeting and will be asked to consider changes to the FMP Objectives proposed by the Gulf Council. Afterwards, CMP Amendment 33 will be presented to the Gulf Council at its October 2022 meeting and to the South Atlantic Council at its December 2022 meeting for approval for public hearings. Contingent upon approval by both Councils, public hearings for CMP 33 would be held in early 2023.

#### **Electronic Reporting for Commercial Logbooks**

The Council began work on a joint amendment with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council that considers requiring commercial reef fish and coastal migratory pelagic permit holders to submit logbooks electronically, rather than mailing paper logbooks. The Council will convene the appropriate Advisory Panels to review the proposed modifications before continuing work on this document.

#### **Yellowtail Snapper**

After hearing recommendations from a joint meeting of the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees, the Gulf Council decided to resume work on Reef Fish Amendment 55 which considers modifying yellowtail snapper catch limits and the jurisdictional allocation between the Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils. Work on this amendment was previously paused, along with a concurrent amendment by the South Atlantic Council (Snapper Grouper Amendment 44) until an interim analysis, which updated landings through 2020, could be completed. Staff will update the document with the new data and present it to the Council at a future meeting.

## **Gulf Council**

### **Greater Amberjack**

The Council continued work on Reef Fish Amendment 54 which considers modifying greater amberjack catch limits and sector allocations. The most recent greater amberjack stock assessment (SEDAR 70 2020) determined that greater amberjack is both overfished and experiencing overfishing. Additionally, new recreational catch estimates collected using the Marine Recreational Information Programs (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES) indicated that recreational landings are greater than previously estimated; however, the stock remains overfished and undergoing overfishing. Thus, the Council is obligated to end overfishing and revise the rebuilding plan for greater amberjack by spring of 2023.

During this meeting, the Council has not yet selected a preferred alternative for sector allocations and the corresponding catch limits. The Council did choose a preferred alternative that would apply the annual catch limit/annual catch target control rule to revise the buffer between the annual catch limits and annual catch targets. This would create a 17% buffer for the recreational sector and 7% for the commercial sector between the catch limit and catch target. The Council will take this issue to in-person and virtual public hearings before the October Council meeting it is expected to go to final action.

The Council also initiated development of a framework action that will consider modifying commercial and recreational management measures to ensure that fishing regulations such as seasons, bag limits, and trip limits constrain greater amberjack harvest to the new catch limits. Finally, the Council decided to begin developing a document that will consider state management of greater amberjack for the recreational sector.

### **Gag**

The Council began to work on an amendment that considers revising catch limits, sector allocations, accountability measures, and other management measures for gag grouper. The most recent gag grouper stock assessment (SEDAR 72 2021), which included new recreational landings data and an ecosystem-based red tide analysis, determined that gag grouper is overfished and experiencing overfishing. Additionally, the assessment identified that the proportion of males in the gag grouper population is less than 2%, which negatively impacts the stock's ability to reproduce. The Council is obligated to end overfishing and develop a rebuilding plan by 2024 for gag grouper, which will dramatically reduce catch limits during the rebuilding period. The Council will continue work on this document at its next meeting.

### **For-Hire Trip Declaration Requirements**

The Council continued to work on a Framework Action to modify for-hire trip declaration requirements. This document aims to reduce the burden on federally permitted for-hire vessels making multiple trip declarations (hail-outs) when moving the vessel for non-fishing trips. The Council decided to add an option to the document that will only require for-hire owner/operators to submit a trip declaration when engaging in a fishing or charter trip. The Council plans to collect public comment on this document before taking final action at a future meeting.

### **Individual Fishing Quota Focus Group**

The Council was presented with a summary of the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program Focus Group meeting. The Focus Group is tasked with reviewing the current IFQ programs' goals and objectives, and to recommend their replacement and/or retention. The Focus Group is also expected to define the changes needed to improve the Red Snapper and Grouper-Tilefish IFQ programs to specifically address minimizing discards, fairness and equity, and new entrants' issues. The Council decided to convene the Focus Group for a second two-day meeting.

### **Sector Separation**

The Council initiated work on a document that will consider separating the recreational annual catch limit into separate private angling and federal for-hire components for greater amberjack, gray triggerfish, gag grouper, and red grouper. Creating separate annual catch limits for each component of the recreational sector would allow the different fleets to pursue separate management measures, such as seasons or bag limits, to achieve their individual annual catch limits.

### **Florida Pompano**

The Council directed its staff to develop a presentation that will inform consideration of including Florida pompano in federal management.

### **Gray Triggerfish**

The Council initiated work on a document that will consider increasing the gray triggerfish commercial trip limit. In recent years, the commercial sector has not harvested its annual catch limit and fishermen have asked the Council to increase the 16-fish per trip commercial limit.

### **Wenchman**

Wenchman landings associated with the commercial butterfish mid-water trawl fishery have increased in recent years. Wenchman is part of the mid-water snapper complex which also includes queen snapper, blackfin snapper, and silk snapper. The mid-water snapper complex was subject to early closure in 2021 when the stock annual catch limit was met. The Council requested that the Gulf States Marine Fishery Commission with the 5 Gulf states to compile historical landings for wenchman, butterfish, scad and other associated species from the mid-water trawl fishery so the Scientific and Statical Committee can review the historical data and better understand wenchman landings.

### **Indicators of Stock Health Between Stock Assessments**

The Council decided to request that NOAA's Southeast Fishery Science Center identify metrics for red snapper, greater amberjack, gag grouper, and other targeted species that could indicate changes in stock health between stock assessments. These metrics could be, but are not limited to, catch-per-unit-effort, length frequency distributions, weight distributions by region, or other information.

### **Red Snapper**

The Council took final action on a framework action to modify red snapper catch limits. The Council chose to decrease the overfishing limit and increase the acceptable biological catch, annual catch limits, and annual catch targets from its previously submitted, but not yet implemented, framework action transmitted in June 2021. The state-specific private angling

annual catch limits are calculated based on the assumption that the Framework Action to calibrate state recreational landings data and recreational catch limits is approved and implemented by the Secretary of Commerce. The catch limits are expressed in pounds whole weight as follows:

<b>Catch Limit Type</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Newly Recommended</b>
<b>Overfishing Limit</b>	15,500,000	18,910,000
<b>Acceptable Biological Catch</b>	15,100,000	16,310,000
<b>Total Annual Catch Limit</b>	15,100,000	16,310,000
<b>Commercial Annual Catch Limit</b>	7,701,000	8,318,100
<b>Recreational Annual Catch Limit</b>	7,399,000	7,991,900
<b>Federal For-Hire Annual Catch Limit</b>	3,130,000	3,380,574
<b>Federal For-Hire Annual Catch Target</b>	2,848,000	3,076,322
<i>Private Angling Annual Catch Limit</i>	<i>4,269,000</i>	<i>4,611,326</i>
<b>Private Angling Annual Catch Target</b>	3,415,200	3,689,061
<b>Florida Private Annual Catch Limit</b>	1,913,451	2,066,889
<b>Alabama Private Annual Catch Limit</b>	1,122,662	1,212,687
<b>Mississippi Private Annual Catch Limit</b>	151,550	163,702
<b>Louisiana Private Annual Catch Limit</b>	816,233	881,686
<b>Texas Private Annual Catch Limit</b>	265,105	286,363

Note: the private angling annual catch target, set 20% below the private angling annual catch limit, is not used so long as Regional Management (Reef Fish Amendment 50) is in effect.

This Framework Amendment to modify catch limits for red snapper will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation as soon as practicable.

### **Shrimp Bycatch Reduction Device Exempted Fishing Permit**

The Council decided to recommend approval of an Exempted Fishing Permit application that would allow for the testing of new bycatch reduction devices in the Gulf of Mexico federal shrimp fleet. This project is a collaborative project between Texas Sea Grant, Louisiana Sea Grant, and NOAA Fisheries.