

# Gulf Fishery Management Council

## November 2025 Liaison Report



The Gulf Council met in Biloxi, Mississippi, from November 3-6, 2025. The Council began by adopting [Council Committee assignments](#) for the year. The following is a summary of the Council's actions:

### Regulatory Items: Final Action

#### **Venting Tools and Descending Devices**

The Gulf Council took final action to require commercial and recreational fishermen to possess a venting tool or descending device that is rigged and ready for use when fishing for reef fish in the federal waters of the Gulf of America. These requirements will replace regulations required by the DESCEND Act, which is scheduled to expire in January 2026. The use of descending devices or venting tools reduces release mortality of many reef fish, resulting in increased conservation and sustainability of reef fish stocks. This Amendment will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for consideration and implementation as soon as practicable.

#### **Shrimp**

The Gulf Council took final action on Shrimp Amendment 19, to extend the moratorium on the issuance of new federal Gulf commercial shrimp permits until October 26, 2036. The 10-year extension is expected to maintain biological, social, and economic benefits currently achieved under the moratorium while also promoting stability and efficiency in the fishery. This Amendment will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for consideration and implementation as soon as practicable.

### Regulatory Items: Council Status Update

#### **Mutton and Yellowtail Snapper**

Recent stock assessments for mutton and yellowtail snapper showed that both stocks are healthy and not considered to be overfished or experiencing overfishing. Both stocks are jointly managed by the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils. During its November meeting, the Gulf Council worked on joint Gulf Reef Fish Amendment 55 / South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Amendment 44, which considers modifying the catch limits and the allowable harvest apportioned to each Council, and sector allocations for the South Atlantic Council only. The

Gulf Council reviewed actions and alternatives in the document and did not make any changes to the document. The South Atlantic Council will continue work on it during its December 2025 meeting.

### **Essential Fish Habitat**

Essential fish habitat (EFH) is the waters and substrate necessary for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth of species throughout their life. The Council is required to conduct periodic reviews of EFH for the species it manages based on the best scientific information available. The Council selected a preferred alternative that would update descriptions and [maps](#) of EFH using contemporary research documented in the literature. The Council plans to finalize this EFH review as soon as practicable.

### **Red Grouper**

The most recent red grouper stock assessment indicates that red grouper is not overfished or experiencing overfishing, and the resulting catch advice is a substantial increase from the current catch limits. The Council worked on draft Reef Fish Amendment 62, which addresses catch limits and allocations by incorporating historical recreational landings in Florida's State Reef Fish Survey units and results in new catch limit recommendations. The amendment also considers eliminating the February-March recreational closed season for shallow-water grouper in federal waters seaward of 20-fathoms. The Council approved the public hearing draft with preferred alternatives that would phase in total annual catch limit increases over a three-year period, establish 68.2% commercial and 31.8% recreational sector allocations, maintain the current buffers between the annual catch limits and annual catch targets of 5% for the commercial sector and 9% for the recreational sector, and eliminate the recreational shallow-water grouper closure beyond 20-fathoms from February 1 – March 31. The Council plans to gather feedback on the proposed changes through a series of virtual public hearings before taking final action in January 2026.

The Council also received a presentation on a new document Reef Fish Amendment 63, that considers establishing a pilot program to set aside a portion of the commercial red grouper quota and distribute it in a manner that aids new entrants in the IFQ fishery.

### **Federal For-Hire Red Snapper Management**

The Council heard a presentation on delegating management authority for the federal for-hire red snapper component to the Gulf states. After discussion, the Council decided to start an Amendment to further explore state management to assess options for sector separation and the allocation among the Gulf states. The Council will review a draft at a future meeting.

### **Shallow-Water Grouper**

The Other Shallow-Water Grouper complex includes scamp, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, and black grouper. The complex can no longer be managed in this way because a stock assessment and catch recommendations were completed for scamp and yellowmouth grouper separate from the remaining species. Catch limit recommendations for scamp and yellowmouth grouper represent a considerable decrease in allowable harvest, while catch limit recommendations for black grouper and yellowfin grouper remain unchanged.

The Council reviewed Amendment 58A and selected preferred alternatives for actions that did not have one and retained the preferred alternatives for the remaining actions from the previous meeting. The preferred alternatives would transition the existing shallow-water grouper complex into two new complexes (scamp and yellowmouth grouper, and black grouper and yellowfin grouper) and set biological reference points and status determination criteria, catch limits, and sector allocations for both complexes. Commercial individual fishing quota program shares would be distributed proportionally based on existing other shallow-water grouper share percentages. Preferred alternatives would also establish a recreational closed season for scamp and yellowmouth grouper from January through June and set the recreational annual catch target 14% below the annual catch limit. For black grouper and yellowfin grouper, the Council selected a preferred alternative that would establish a post-season recreational accountability measure which would be implemented if the previous year's harvest exceeds both the recreational annual catch limit and the complex annual catch limit. The Council plans to gather public comment on proposed shallow-water grouper changes before taking final action during its January 2026 meeting.

## **Non-Regulatory Items: Council Status Update**

### **Regulatory Streamlining**

The Council received the preliminary results of a review of other Regional Fishery Management Councils regulatory processes from contractors. This project aims to identify efficient processes used in other regions that could improve climate readiness and regulatory streamlining in the Gulf. Upon receipt of the final report, the Council plans to review its current management plans and determine which strategies used by other Councils could be developed and incorporated into Gulf Council processes.

### **Fishery Ecosystem Plan**

The Council reviewed a draft Gulf Fishery Ecosystem Plan, a non-regulatory document that guides the use of ecosystem information in Gulf fisheries management. The Council will continue to work toward operationalizing the Fishery Ecosystem Plan, which will begin with stakeholder workshops to identify ecosystem issues of concern in early 2026.

### **Commercial Vessel Telecommunication Requirements**

Based on current regulations, Starlink is not an approved emergency radio telecommunication method. In recognition of the fleet's growing use and positive experiences with Starlink, the Council wrote a letter to the U.S. Coast Guard requesting that Starlink be certified as an acceptable satellite communication device. The Coast Guard response indicated that Starlink does not meet the communication equipment carriage requirements established by the Federal Communications Commission. The Council decided to ask the Council Coordinating Committee, which consists of leadership from all eight Fisheries Management Councils across the nation, to draft a letter encouraging the U.S Coast Guard to work with the Federal Communications Commission to find a pathway to approve Starlink as an acceptable satellite communication device.