

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Update and Liaison Report



Spring/Summer 2021 Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met virtually from April 12-15, 2021. The Council made initial selections to populate its Reef Fish and Shrimp Advisory Panels. Potential appointees will be subject to background checks before final appointments are made during the June Council meeting. The Council heard a presentation on the portions of Executive Order: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad that impact Gulf fisheries.

Costal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 32 for Cobia

A recent update stock assessment for cobia showed that the stock is not overfished but is currently experiencing overfishing. The assessment used the new Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES) estimates which increased the estimates of recreational catch and effort. Based on the assessment, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committees recommended new overfishing limits and acceptable biological catch levels for 2021-2023 and beyond. While the assessment projections appear to allow for increased harvest, they actually represent an approximate 30% reduction from the current allowable harvest. The Council is obligated to end overfishing and consider updating cobia annual catch limits.

During the April Gulf Council meeting they worked on a draft of Costal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 32, which considers modifying cobia catch limits; apportionment between the Gulf and Florida East Coast (FLEC) Zones; sector allocations in the FLEC Zone; and, management measures including possession limits, vessel/trip limits, and minimum size limits. The Council modified a preferred alternative so the Gulf Zone cobia daily possession limit would be 1-fish per person for the recreational sector and 2-fish per person for the commercial sector. The Council also selected preferred alternatives for South Atlantic actions that concur with those chosen by the South Atlantic Council. The Gulf Council also selected a preferred alternative to expand the responsibilities of the South Atlantic Council in the management of FLEC Zone cobia. The South Atlantic Council should review the updated actions, alternatives, and provide feedback to Gulf Council when reviewing the document and its June meeting. .

The Gulf Council will review another draft of this document at its June meeting, and potentially review a public hearing draft at its August meeting and the South Atlantic Council's September meeting.

Draft Amendment 33: Modifications to the Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group King Mackerel

Gulf Council staff will present draft options during its June meeting to be considered in CMP Amendment 33, which examined Gulf migratory group king mackerel (Gulf king mackerel catch limits and sector allocations). The SEDAR 38 Update assessment found Gulf king mackerel to be healthy (not overfished and not undergoing overfishing), and CMP Amendment 33 was initiated by the Gulf Council in response to that stock assessment. The document includes actions to consider modifying catch levels and sector allocations to incorporate MRIP-FES data into management. The Gulf Council is planning to convene the CMP Advisory Panel for feedback on the proposed actions and alternatives. A draft of this Amendment is expected to go to the South Atlantic Council later this year.

Red Snapper

The Council took final action on two Framework Actions. The Council chose to increase the 2021 red snapper overfishing limit (OFL) to 25,600,000 pounds whole weight, and the 2021 acceptable biological catch (ABC) to 15,400,000 pounds whole weight, as recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The revised 2021 red snapper catch limits are as follows:

Catch Limit Type	Current Catch Limits	Calculation
OFL	25,600,000	SSC Recommendation from GRSC
ABC	15,400,000	39.8% less than OFL
Total ACL	15,400,000	ACL = ABC
Commercial ACL	7,854,000	51% of ABC
Recreational ACL	7,546,000	49% of ABC
Federal For-Hire ACL	3,191,958	42.3% of Recreational ACL
Federal For-Hire ACT	2,904,682	9% less than For-Hire ACL
Private Angling ACL	4,354,042	57.7% of Recreational ACL
Florida ACL	1,951,569	44.822% of Private Angling ACL
Alabama ACL	1,145,026	26.298% of Private Angling ACL
Mississippi ACL	154,568	3.55% of Private Angling ACL
Louisiana ACL	832,493	19.12% of Private Angling ACL
Texas ACL	270,386	6.21% of Private Angling ACL

The Council also plans to have its Scientific and Statistical Committee review red snapper catch advice as soon as the final results of the Great Red Snapper Count (GRSC), additional information from a fishery-independent combined video survey, and a report from Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries can be considered. The Council specifically requested its SSC to consider the existing Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule and National Standard Guidelines during its deliberations.

The Council also decided to apply state-specific calibration ratios developed by the Gulf States and NOAA’s Office of Science and Technology to allow state survey data to be converted to MRIP-CHTS ‘currency’. This will ensure that the data used to monitor harvest can be compared to the data used to set the annual catch limits. The calibration ratios are as follows:

State	Ratio of state landings to MRIP- CHTS landings
Florida	1.0602
Alabama	0.4875
Mississippi	0.3840
Louisiana	1.06
Texas	1*

*No calibration adjustment is made to Texas’ data.

The Council recommended that NOAA Fisheries delay implementation of this framework action until January 1, 2023. The Council will submit the proposed changes to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation as soon as practicable.

Texas Shrimp Closure

The Council approved the annual Texas shrimp closure for 2021. 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 from mid-May to mid-July to allow shrimp to reach a larger and more valuable size prior to harvest.

Shrimp Effort Data Collection

Cellular electronic logbook units stopped transmitting shrimp effort data at the end of 2020. Those units on vessels are still collecting data, but shrimp permit holders will have to transfer effort data by mailing SanDisk cards to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission in 2021, while a long-term solution for electronic transmission of data is being developed. After hearing a summary of an industry-led pilot program which would use P-Sea WindPlot to collect and report effort data, and hearing alternative options including traditional Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) or cellular based units, the Council initiated a Framework Action to set up reporting requirements and transition to a new platform to replace the expiring cellular electronic logbook program.

Red Grouper

The Council continued working on Reef Fish Amendment 53, which considers modifying red grouper commercial and recreational sector allocations and annual catch limits based on the results of the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 61 2019). The assessment showed that the red grouper stock size is smaller than it has ever been. Additionally, the assessment used the new Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES) landings and effort estimates, which increased the estimates of recreational catch and effort. Current preferred alternatives would revise allocations between commercial and recreational sectors based on

average landings during the years 1986-2005 using MRIP-FES data. This would adjust the current 76% commercial and 24% recreational allocation split to a 59.3% commercial and 40.7% recreational allocation split. The Council also intends to maintain the current commercial buffer between the annual catch limit and annual catch target at 5% and use the ACL/ACT Control Rule to revise the buffer between the recreational annual catch limit and annual catch target from 8% to 9%. The Council will take this document to public hearings to solicit public comment before taking final action.

Commercial Electronic Logbooks

The Council heard feedback from its Reef Fish and Coastal Migratory Advisory Panels on the development of an electronic logbook program for commercial fishing vessels in the Gulf of Mexico. The goal of electronic logbooks is to improve the accuracy and timeliness of the data reported by commercial fishermen. However, the panels voiced concerns about the increased burdens to the fleet. The Council emphasized that more engagement with the commercial fleet is appropriate to ensure that the industry has ample opportunity to provide input during program development.

Electronic Reporting

The Council was presented with an update on the Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program. NOAA Fisheries reported that location monitoring requirements are scheduled to be implemented in December of 2021. The Council discussed concerns about what to do when location monitoring equipment fails. The Council initiated a framework action to allow for compliance in the event of equipment failures to ensure that for-hire and commercial trips are not delayed or canceled.