

Gulf Fishery Management Council

September 2026 Liaison Report



The Gulf Council (Council) met in Biloxi, Mississippi, August 24-27, 2026. The Council commemorated its 50th anniversary alongside the historical successes, milestones, and future challenges all regional Councils and stakeholders will endeavor under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act in the next 50 years.

Three incumbent Council members, Dr. Kesley Banks, Capt. Ed Walker, and Dr. Anthony Overton were inducted for a 3-year term. The Council elected Dr. Kesley Banks as Chair and Mr. Chris Schieble as Vice Chair, each for a one-year term. The following is a summary of the topics addressed during the meeting:

Mutton and Yellowtail Snapper

The Council worked on Reef Fish Amendment 55 and Snapper Grouper Amendment 44, which is a joint amendment being considered with the South Atlantic Council. New stock assessments were completed for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper, which indicated that the stocks were healthy as of 2023, with northward range expansion evident in both regions. The Council followed the South Atlantic Council's lead on actions impacting South Atlantic sector allocations for both species. Current preferred alternatives impacting Gulf management would apportion 15% of the mutton snapper and 17% of the yellowtail snapper ACLs, respectively, to the Gulf. These alternatives are not expected to result in fishery closures. The Councils will gather public comment on this document before taking final action before the end of 2026.

Federal For-Hire Data Collection Program

The Council took final action to establish electronic reporting requirements for vessels with federal for-hire reef fish or coastal migratory pelagic permits. The recommended program will require federal for-hire vessels to submit a trip notification for each for-hire fishing trip and complete electronic logbook reports for each trip before offloading fish. A 'did not fish' report will have to be submitted if no fishing occurs for a week. Additionally, a portion of vessel owners/operators would be selected each year to submit economic data on for-hire fishing activity. The document will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for consideration and implementation as soon as practicable.

Shrimp

The Council decided to postpone work on updating the analysis of the minimum number of federal Gulf shrimp permits needed to achieve optimum yield. Information on bycatch is also being updated, and the industry is facing challenging economic conditions that have contributed to declining fishing effort. As of July 2026, the number of federal shrimp permits was 10 above

the threshold that would trigger the creation of a shrimp permit pool review panel. The Council expects to hear an updated permit count during its October 2026 meeting. In the meantime, the Council will focus on Shrimp Amendment 20, which would update the criteria used to determine stock status for brown, white, and pink shrimp.

Fishery Ecosystem Plan

The Council was presented with a progress report on its project to identify Fishery Ecosystem Issues of concern to support the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan. The Fishery Ecosystem Plan aims to help inform fishery management decisions with consideration for emerging climate and ecosystem pressures. The Fishery Ecosystem Plan guides the use of ecosystem information in management through the identification, prioritization, and examination of individual Fishery Ecosystem Issues. The project team presented results from stakeholder workshops and other approaches to identify Fishery Ecosystem Issues and their impacts to Gulf fisheries.

Red Snapper

Catch Limits and Allocations

In anticipation of the completion of a new red snapper stock assessment, the Council decided to form a working group comprised of staff from the Council, the Gulf States, NOAA Fisheries, and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to facilitate integration of the assessment results into management. The new assessment will incorporate new recreational landings estimates. Additionally, it is anticipated that the stock assessment will update allowable harvest and the current understanding of historical harvest, which will trigger a review of allocations among sectors and states.

Delegation of Federal For-Hire Management

The Council continued work on Reef Fish Amendment 64, which considers delegating federal for-hire management authority for red snapper to the Gulf States. The Council decided to expand allocation alternatives and to also consider managing by region. The Council decided not to consider a sunset provision that would end delegation after a predetermined amount of time. The Council will continue work on this document at a future meeting.

Federal For-Hire Management Flexibility

The Council is developing options for delegating authority for modifying specific management measures for federal for-hire red snapper to the Southeast Regional Administrator of NOAA Fisheries. The goal of the document is to maintain a core for-hire red snapper fishing season by allowing other regulations to be modified to achieve that season. The Council plans to review options at a future Council meeting.

Recreational Post-Season Accountability Measures

The Council reviewed options for modifying the post-season accountability measures for private recreational red snapper to allow more flexibility without compromising the effectiveness of state management. Presently, if a Gulf state's landings exceed its state-specific annual catch limit (ACL) in a fishing year, then in the following year, that state's ACL will be reduced by the amount of the overage in the previous year. The Council chose a preferred alternative that would only trigger a payback of an overage to a state's ACL if the state landings exceed that ACL by more than 10%, if the state exceeds its ACL more than once in three years, or if the state has an

overage of any amount while the total private recreational landings from all states exceed the total private angling component ACL. The Council plans to gather public input on this issue before taking final action during its October 2026 meeting.

Commercial Individual Fishing Quota Program Permit Requirements

The Council continued work on Reef Fish Amendment 59A, which addresses participation requirements in the IFQ programs. Previously selected preferred alternatives would require shareholder accounts to be associated with a valid or renewable federal commercial reef fish permit to obtain annual allocation and obtain and maintain IFQ shares. The Council suggested that potential exemptions from permit requirements for non-profit organizations operating quota pools or other quota distribution programs could only apply to entities established before August 26, 2026. The Council will continue work on this amendment at a future meeting.

Louisiana Recreational Greater Amberjack Exempted Fishing Permit

Louisiana presented a draft Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) that would allow recreational fishing for greater amberjack outside of the established federal recreational season. Louisiana would like to open its recreational season in federal waters from June 1 through July 31 to measure effort, catch rate, landings, releases, and biological composition while testing Louisiana's ability to manage landings. The Council expects to review the final EFP proposal and make a recommendation to NOAA Fisheries on whether to approve it during its October 2026 meeting.

Cownose Rays

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission indicated that since cownose rays are declining in abundance and are particularly vulnerable to fishing pressure because of their biology and behavior, it intends to extend management measures for cownose rays into the federal waters. To allow for this, the Council will draft a letter confirming that it does not consider cownose rays to currently require federal conservation and management in federal waters.