

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



January 2020 Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met January 27-30, 2020 in New Orleans, Louisiana. The following is a brief summary of the Council's actions:

Ad Hoc Private Red Snapper Recreational Advisory Panel

The Ad Hoc Private Recreational Red Snapper Advisory Panel was created in 2016 to help the Council design and implement management measures to improve private anglers' access to red snapper fishing opportunities in federal waters, improve recreational data collection programs, and reduce discards. The Council decided to disband the panel because State Management of Recreational Red Snapper (Amendment 50), which allows each Gulf state to manage their private recreational red snapper anglers, will be implemented in 2020.

Greater Amberjack

NOAA Fisheries announced that they expect the recreational greater amberjack season to be open in May 2020. The fishing year begins on August 1st, so the quota is renewed before the August – October fishing season. Preliminary landings show that only 32% of the recreational annual catch limit was harvested through October 2019. The quota that remains can be harvested in the May 2020 recreational fishing season.

The Council reviewed a presentation and a [Recreational Greater Amberjack Decision Tool](#) which allows users to explore a range of potential management alternatives designed to allow more flexibility for anglers with differing needs across the Gulf. The Council decided to stop work on the recreational greater amberjack document until the next stock assessment is completed in early 2021.

Commercial Individual Fishing Quota Program Modifications

The Council reviewed the history of Amendment 36 from 2011 through 2019. Amendment 36B considers requiring some or all individual fishing quota shareholder accounts to be associated with a commercial reef fish permit. The Council added an alternative that would require shareholder accounts opened after October 2, 2019, to be associated with a commercial reef fish permit. For the action addressing share divestment from accounts that would be out of compliance with the permit requirement, the Council added an option to allow shareholders 5 years to obtain a permit or to divest of shares, or the shares will be reclaimed by NMFS. The Council will review a public hearing draft of this document at an upcoming meeting.

In Amendment 36C, the Council discussed the actions that consider development of a quota bank. The Council will continue discussions on the establishment of a third-party quota bank at its next meeting.

Gray Triggerfish

The Southeast Fisheries Science Center informed the Council that the stock assessment of gray triggerfish (SEDAR 62), which was expected in March 2020, will be canceled. The Science Center has recommended that a research track assessment be performed in the future for gray triggerfish to resolve critical data issues. In the meantime, the Science Center will provide the Council with annual interim analyses using the SEAMAP Combined Video Survey as the reference index. The Council asked that the next interim analysis include data through 2019. This analysis, which is expected to be completed in the fall of 2020, will produce catch advice using the current quota monitoring data currency and gauge the health of the stock.

Red Grouper

The Council began working on Reef Fish Amendment 53 which considers modifying red grouper commercial and recreational sector allocations and catch limits based on the results of the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 61). The assessment showed that the red grouper stock is lower than it has ever been. Additionally, the assessment used the new Marine Recreational Information Program's landings and effort estimates which increased the estimates of recreational harvest. The Council decided to add an alternative to the document that would modify the buffer between the red grouper annual catch limits and catch targets to 5% for the commercial sector and 9% for the recreational sector. The Council will continue work on this document at its next meeting.

Recommendations on the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Expansion

The Council discussed proposed changes to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and heard comments from its various Standing and Special Scientific and Statistical Committees, as well as Reef Fish, Coral, Shrimp and the Gulf and South Atlantic Spiny Lobster Advisory Panels. The Council recognizes that the Sanctuary expansion effort is incredibly complex and suggested that the Sanctuary consolidate and clarify the language in the document and enhance supporting justification of its proposed actions. The Council is concerned that many of the proposed changes will negatively impact the fishing industry without achieving the presumed benefits. The Council plans to submit a letter outlining its concerns and will recommend that the Sanctuary provide more opportunity for the Council, stakeholders, and other state and federal agency partners to collaborate with the Sanctuary to ensure the final plan achieves its restoration goals, while minimizing adverse impacts to the community.

Status Determination Criteria

The Council continued work on Reef Fish Amendment 48/Red Drum Amendment 5 which aims to define or modify maximum sustainable yield, a maximum fishing mortality threshold, a minimum stock size threshold, and an optimum yield for several reef fish species and red drum. These reference points are the basis for determining the health of each stock and are required under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and National Standard 1 guidelines. The Council selected preferred alternatives that would set the maximum sustainable yield proxy for goliath grouper and the following complexes: shallow-water grouper, deep-water grouper, tilefishes, jacks, mid-

water snapper, cubera snapper, lane snapper, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper. For red drum, the Council selected to define maximum sustainable yield using a yield based on an escapement rate of juvenile fish. The Council selected to set the maximum sustainable yield proxy equal to the yield produced by the fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield or proxy that is recommended by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee in the future. The Council also selected alternatives that would set the maximum fishing mortality threshold equal to the fishing mortality at the maximum sustainable yield proxy for the aforementioned stocks. Finally, the Council chose a preferred alternative that would set the minimum stock size threshold at 75% of the biomass at maximum sustainable yield. For stocks assessed across both Gulf and South Atlantic jurisdictions, the Council chose to use the South Atlantic Council's current definition of minimum stock size threshold. The Council plans to continue work on this document at its next meeting.

Modification of Fishing Access in Eastern Gulf Marine Protected Areas

The Council took its first look at a draft Framework that considers prohibiting all fishing activity in the Steamboat Lumps and Madison-Swanson marine protected areas (MPA). Fishing activity is limited in Steamboat Lumps and Madison-Swanson to protect gag grouper spawning aggregations. Currently, no bottom fishing is allowed in those areas, but surface trolling is permitted during part of the year. It is difficult to enforce the no-bottom-fishing regulation when surface trolling is allowed, and the Council heard concerns that illegal recreational bottom fishing is occurring in the MPAs. The Council decided to add an alternative for consideration that would prohibit the possession of any Gulf reef fish species in the MPAs year-round. The Council will review an updated draft of this document at its next meeting.

Fishery Management Measures of the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2018

The Council agreed to establish a joint Council Committee with the South Atlantic Council to coordinate Council efforts to address Section 102 of the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2018. This section of the Act addresses the potential for using alternative management measures in recreational fisheries including extraction rates, fishing mortality targets, harvest control rules, and cultural practices of native communities. The Councils will host an initial meeting of this Committee via webinar.

Red Snapper Allocation

The Council discussed Reef Fish Amendment 52 which considers reallocating the red snapper annual catch limit between the recreational and commercial sectors. The Council decided to delay consideration of this document until the next red snapper stock assessment is complete.

African Pompano

The Council heard public comment requesting that the Council consider managing African Pompano in federal waters. Fishermen expressed concerns about the current two fish per vessel limit imposed by the State of Florida, which has extended its management measures into adjacent federal waters in the absence of federal management of African Pompano. In response, the Council decided to write a letter to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission outlining these concerns and requesting they consider removing the vessel limit in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Lane Snapper

The Council was presented with the results of updated yield projections for lane snapper (based on SEDAR 49). The assessment uses the new landings and effort data from the Marine Recreational Information Program and allows for a significant increase in the acceptable biological catch level. The Council initiated work on a document that will revise the lane snapper annual catch limits, after the Scientific and Statistical Committee reviews these values during its March 2020 meeting.

Uncaught Commercial Quota

Previous consideration of carryover for stocks not managed under individual fishing quota programs showed that payback provisions would need to be in place to balance any carryover of additional quotas. After the Southeast Fisheries Science Center demonstrated that they can perform interim analyses that would allow for annually adjusted catch limits in lieu of carrying over uncaught harvest, the Council decided to postpone work on the Generic Carryover Amendment. However, at its January 2020 meeting, the Council directed staff to add to the agenda of a future meeting an evaluation on the possibility of carrying over uncaught commercial quota by adding it to the next fishing year's commercial annual catch limit.