

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



August 12-15, 2019

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in New Orleans, Louisiana, August 12-15, 2019. The Council re-elected Dr. Tom Frazer as its Chair and Dale Diaz as its Vice Chair. The following is a brief summary of the Council's actions:

Recreational For-Hire Red Snapper Annual Catch Target Buffer

After hearing public comment, the Council took final action to reduce the buffer between the annual catch limit and the annual catch target for the federal for-hire component for red snapper to 9%. Seasons are set based on the annual catch target and the buffer reduces the chances that the annual catch limit will be exceeded. A previous framework action modified the buffer by reducing it from 20% to 9% for 2019 only. Reducing the buffer for the for-hire component on a more permanent basis is expected to allow greater harvest while continuing to constrain landings to the annual catch limit. The Council will submit this recommendation to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.

Gray Snapper Amendment 51

The Council took final action on Reef Fish Amendment 51, which considers establishing or revising gray snapper status determination criteria and modifying annual catch limits. The Council chose alternatives that minimize buffers and are consistent with the idea that the gray snapper stock is quite resilient.

The Council established an 11% buffer between the Acceptable Biological Catch and Annual Catch Limit. The resulting harvest levels are as follows:

Year	OFL (mp ww)	ABC (mp ww)	ACL (mp ww)
2019	2.59	2.52	2.24
2020	2.58	2.51	2.24
2021+	2.57	2.51	2.23

*million pounds whole weight (mp ww)

The Council also set status determination criteria that define the thresholds where the stock is considered to be overfished or experiencing overfishing. Based on the Council's recommendations, the gray snapper maximum sustainable yield proxy will be set at a spawning potential ratio of 26%. The maximum fishing mortality threshold will be set consistent with the maximum sustainable yield proxy. The minimum stock size threshold

will be set equal to 50% of the biomass at maximum sustainable yield and the optimum yield will be set at 90% of the fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield. The Council will submit these proposed changes to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.

Trip Limits on Multi-Day Federal For-Hire Trips

Anglers on federal for-hire trips may possess two daily bag limits of reef fish and king and Spanish mackerel if, among other things, the trip lasts longer than 24 hours, has two licensed captains onboard, and all anglers are in possession of a receipt showing the duration of the trip. Currently, anglers on such trips may not possess their second daily bag limit until 24 hours have passed. However, this is not how many operators have fished historically. The Council reviewed a Framework Action that considers modifying the possession of the two-day bag limit. The Council selected a preferred alternative that would allow the second daily bag limit to be possessed anytime during a trip that is greater than 30 hours in duration. The Council's Law Enforcement Technical Committee will look at this document before the Council takes final action at its October meeting.

Status Determination Criteria and Optimum yield for Reef Fish and Red Drum

The Council looked at a draft of Reef Fish Amendment 48/Red Drum Amendment 5, which aim to define, and in some cases modify, existing biological reference points for reef fish and red drum. The Council must define a maximum sustainable yield, a maximum fishing mortality threshold, a minimum stock size threshold, and an optimum yield for all managed stocks. 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 reviewed the actions and alternatives and plans to continue work on the document at its next meeting.

Modifications to Commercial Individual Fishing Quota Programs

The Council reviewed a draft of Reef Fish Amendment 36B, which considers modifying the commercial individual fishing quota (IFQ) programs with the intent of assisting small participants and new entrants to the IFQ programs, to reduce discards, and to increase access to shares for actively fishing and eligible commercial fishermen.

The Council decided to address actions that consider requiring a commercial reef fish permit to obtain or hold IFQ shares in a separate amendment. This will allow the Council to expedite a decision on these actions while continuing to develop the remaining actions in the document.

The Council modified the alternatives that consider redistributing reclaimed shares held by NOAA. The Council also removed consideration of a NOAA-administered quota bank and instructed staff to explore the feasibility of establishing a non-NOAA run quota bank. The Council expects to continue work on this amendment at its next meeting.

Recreational Greater Amberjack

The Council worked on a framework action that considers modifying recreational management measures for greater amberjack with the goal of allowing recreational harvest in both spring and fall. Recent recreational management changes modified the fishing year so that the quota renews on August 1 instead of January 1. The fishing season opens in the fall from August – October with the new quota, and then any remaining quota is used to open a May season in the following year. These changes went into effect in 2018, and the entire quota was harvested in the 2018 August – October season, with no May 2019 season. The document includes options that consider changing the fishing year, bag limit, and modifications to the current season structure.

The Council added an alternative that would consider opening the season July 1 through September 30, and again May 1 through May 20th. The Council also added an alternative that would reduce the possession limit on multi-day for-hire trips to 1 per person. Finally, the Council decided to consider managing recreational amberjack with different zones across the Gulf. The Council plans to continue work on this document at a future meeting.

Red Snapper Allocation

The Council briefly worked on a Draft of Amendment 52, which considers modifying the allocation of red snapper between the commercial and recreational sectors. The Council decided to delay further work on the amendment until January 2020. This delay will allow the Council's Government Accountability Office report on allocation to be published, and the Marine Recreational Information Program data recalibration efforts to progress further before the Council continues work on the amendment.

General Discussion on Allocation Issues

The Council's Sustainable Fisheries Committee had a conversation about general allocation issues in anticipation of upcoming allocation review requirements. The Council has identified timelines and triggers that would initiate allocation reviews and is now further exploring the general process of re-allocation. The Committee discussed that not all desired information that could be used to support allocation decisions will be easily measurable or available for many stocks. When information that would support allocation decisions is not available, the Committee should consider what a metric would look like for items that cannot be easily quantified. The Committee noted the need to recognize information gaps and develop a process that will incorporate these issues. In addition, recognition of these information gaps can impact research priorities and data needs.

Release Mortality Symposium

The Council plans to host a Release Mortality Symposium in Saint Petersburg, Florida on October 7-9. The first two days will be devoted to a Science Workshop which will begin with presentations on the magnitude of discard mortality, current release mortality

science in the Gulf, and a case study exemplifying a success story from the Pacific Coast. A panel of invited fisheries managers, scientist, and stakeholders will be asked to create an action plan that promotes the use of barotrauma mitigations tools, guides data collection efforts, and incorporates results into stock assessments and management. The third day of the symposium will be a meeting of the Council's Outreach and Education Technical Committee who will be tasked with drafting an outreach plan to promote the widespread, proper use of venting tools. The symposium will focus on the recreational fishing sector and the outcomes of the meeting will be submitted to the Natural Resource Damage Assessment Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group, which is responsible for distributing \$30 million to reduce post-release mortality in the Gulf.

Federal For-Hire Electronic Reporting Requirements

NOAA Staff reported that the Gulf for-hire reporting requirements would be delayed. Roll-out is expected to occur in two phases. Phase one, which includes the hail-out and electronic logbook requirements, should be implemented in early 2020. Phase two, which will require federally permitted vessels to have a location monitoring device on each vessel is expected to implement later in 2020. The Council and NOAA will continue to work together to communicate these new requirements, and anticipates sending informational packets to permit holders after a final rule is published. We're also planning to host a second set of outreach meetings before phase one is implemented.

Almaco Jack

The South Atlantic Council approved the establishment of a 20-inch fork length commercial minimum size limit for almaco jack, and the State of Florida implemented commensurate measures in state waters on July 1, 2019. During the June 2019 Gulf Council meeting, they decided to request that the Council's SSC reviewed biological data on almaco jack during its July 2019 meeting. Due to the number of data gaps the SSC and Council decided not to initiate any action on almaco jack at this time. The Council requested that staff develop a hot sheet for this species to be added to the website.

African Pompano

In June 2019, the Council heard public comment asking the Council to consider taking on management of African pompano in the federal waters of the Gulf. Staff presented the Council with a hot sheet about African pompano to the Committee, which summarized available biological information and recent landings data in the Gulf. African pompano is more frequently caught in federal waters by the recreational sector with the majority of these landings in Alabama and Florida. Life history and reproduction data for this species are limited. Florida is the only Gulf state with fishing regulations for African pompano, with a 2-fish vessel limit and a minimum size limit of 24 inches fork length. These limits apply in federal waters adjacent to Florida for the recreational fishery only. A Committee member asked that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission consider adding a transit provision to Florida African pompano regulations to clarify that state commercial limits do not apply in federal waters.