

June 30, 2010

## **Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council June Update**

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Gulfport, Mississippi the week of June 14, 2010 to address a host of fishery issues, including the red snapper season and the overfished status of gag. During the weeklong meeting, the Council took the following actions:

### Red Snapper

The recreational season for red snapper is June 1 – September 30, but because excessive catches in state waters, the recreational season will end at midnight, July 23. Additionally, because of the oil spill crisis and the resulting fishing area closures, effort may be down and this year's quota potentially may not be met. Therefore, the Council requested that NOAA Fisheries implement an emergency rule to allow the Regional Administrator to reopen the recreational red snapper season after the September 30 closure if the recreational quota has not been met.

### Gag

Gag is one of the four species under the management of the Gulf Council that is overfished, and the Council is developing an amendment to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan – Reef Fish Amendment 32 - to end overfishing and rebuild the stock within ten years.

In the meantime, a 71% reduction in gag removals is needed for 2011, and with Amendment 32 not scheduled for implementation until mid-late 2011, the Council requested an interim rule that will reduce the commercial quota for gag from 1.41 million pounds in 2010 to 390,000 pounds in 2011. The rule will also close the recreational harvest of gag for the first half of 2011. The Council intends to allow a limited recreational harvest of gag during the second half of 2011. These measures will help to minimize regulatory discards and reduce overfishing of gag until Amendment 32 can be completed and implemented.

### Red Grouper

The Council also requested that the interim rule suspend red grouper multi-use individual fishing quota (IFQ) shares. Suspending the red grouper multi-use shares will prevent a possible overrun of the gag annual catch limit by preventing the use of red grouper IFQ shares to harvest gag. Without a suspension, potentially up to 172,800 pounds of gag could be harvested with red grouper shares resulting in a total commercial grouper harvest of up to 562,800 pounds, exceeding both the commercial gag annual catch target and annual catch limit, thereby triggering accountability measures on the commercial sector.

The Council also approved and submitted to the Secretary of Commerce a regulatory amendment for red grouper that sets the 2011 total allowable catch at 5.68 million pounds, gutted weight. Based on the current allocation of red grouper, that makes the

commercial quota 4.32 million pounds and the recreational allocation 1.36 million pounds. The total allowable catch will remain at this level until modified by an amendment or framework action. No changes to recreational management measures are proposed in the regulatory amendment, inasmuch as recreational landings have been below this level in recent years.

#### Greater Amberjack

Greater Amberjack is also overfished, and last year the recreational season was closed October 24, after the quota of 1.368 million pounds was exceeded. The Council is now considering a regulatory framework action that could result in a recreational season change for greater amberjack. The intent is to avoid in-season quota closures during peak fishing months and maximize social and economic benefits. The Council chose a recreational seasonal closure of June 1 through July 31, as its preferred alternative. Final action was deferred until the August meeting in Pensacola, Florida.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council prepares fishery management plans designed to manage fishery resources in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico.

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