



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Robert L. Shipp, Chairman  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council)

FROM: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.  
Regional Administrator

JAN 21 2010

SUBJECT: January 2010 Regional Administrator's Report

**Status of Actions under Review by NOAA Fisheries Service**

Reef Fish Amendment 29/Red Snapper Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Supplemental Rule:  
NOAA Fisheries Service implemented an IFQ program for grouper and tilefish on January 1, 2010. NOAA Fisheries Service published a supplemental rule on December 10, 2009, to remove the trip limit restrictions for the various grouper components of the fishery, to clarify landing location criteria, to define "offloading," and to request comment on two Council suggestions for future IFQ modifications, as well as to integrate the red snapper IFQ program into a single program. The comment period on the proposed changes ended January 11, 2010, and a final rule is under development to implement these changes.

Reef Fish Amendment 31: The intended effect of Amendment 31 is to reduce the take of sea turtles by the bottom longline component of the reef fish fishery. Actions in the amendment include a seasonal area closure for bottom longlines fished in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, a restriction that would allow continued participation by only those longline vessels that have a substantial historical activity in the reef fish fishery, and a restriction on the amount of longline gear that can be fished. The Council approved the amendment for review by the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) at its August 2009 meeting. NOAA Fisheries Service published a rule establishing an area closure for bottom longlines in the eastern Gulf of Mexico under the authority of the Endangered Species Act on October 16, 2009. This rule will remain in effect until Amendment 31 is implemented. On December 31, 2009, NOAA Fisheries Service announced the availability of Amendment 31 for public review and comment. On January 15, 2010, the proposed rule published. Both comment periods will end on March 1, 2010, and the Secretary must approve, disapprove, or partially approve the amendment by March 31, 2010. If approved, NOAA Fisheries Service expects to publish a final rule in mid-April, 2010, effective in mid-May.

Red Snapper Quota Regulatory Amendment: Based on the 2009 red snapper Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review stock assessment update, the overfishing level established by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) was 9.26 million pounds (mp). The SSC



recommended an allowable biological catch of only 6.945 mp, based on scientific uncertainty regarding the assessment outputs.

### **Fishery Openings, Closings, and Landings Summary**

#### ***Recreational:***

The following recreational landings and percentages are based only on the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey for January through August 2009, and do not include headboat or Texas landings for 2009.

Red Snapper: Federal waters opened June 1 and closed August 15, 2009. Through August, 3.581 mp were landed of the 2.45 mp quota (146 percent). NOAA Fisheries Service will take these landings into account to project when the quota will be filled and the fishery may close in 2010.

King Mackerel: 2.406 mp whole weight of the 6.94 mp allocation (35 percent) had been landed through August.

Greater Amberjack and Gray Triggerfish: Through August, 1.414 mp whole weight of the 1.368 mp greater amberjack quota (103 percent) had been landed. The fishery was closed on October 24, 2009. For gray triggerfish, 319,347 pounds (lb) whole weight, or 90 percent of the 356,000 lb catch target had been landed. Given there were four more months in 2009 after the last reported landings, this quota may have been exceeded by the end of the fishing year. Accountability measures to adjust quota overruns include shortened seasons the following year. NOAA Fisheries Service will announce any projected shortened seasons early in 2010.

Gag and Red Grouper: For gag, 1.036 mp gutted weight, or 50 percent of 2.06 mp catch target, had been landed through August. For red grouper, 0.787 mp, or 43 percent of 1.82 mp catch target had been landed. NOAA Fisheries Service does not anticipate these catch targets or catch limits (which are slightly higher) will be exceeded, which would trigger accountability measures. Recreational fishing for gag, black, and red groupers will be closed February 1 through March 31 in 2010.

#### ***Commercial: (commercial landings are updated twice a month on the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) web site).***

Red Snapper: For 2009, allocations were issued to 524 accounts. For the year, 2.2374 mp gutted weight was landed of the 2.297 mp quota (97 percent). As of January 18, 2010, a very small percentage of the 2010 quota had been landed. Up-to-date landings can be tracked on the SERO's Reef Fish IFQ Web page at <https://ifq.sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/ifq/>.

King Mackerel: The 2009-2010 fishing year for the Gulf migratory group of king mackerel began on July 1, 2009. The 1.01 mp quota for the western Gulf of Mexico was met and the fishery was closed on September 12, 2009. The northern sub-zone of the eastern Gulf of Mexico closed October 24, 2010. Beginning November 1, the boundary between the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic groups of king mackerel shifted from the southwest coast of Florida to the northeast coast of Florida, thus creating the Florida East Coast sub-zone for Gulf migratory king mackerel. Through January 17, 2010, the Florida East Coast sub-zone had taken 75 percent of its quota.

The eastern Gulf of Mexico southern sub-zone gillnet fishery opened on January 19, 2010; the southern sub-zone hook-and-line fishery is just beginning to report landings from their area.

Greater Amberjack and Gray Triggerfish: In 2009, 113 percent of the greater amberjack quota and 56 percent of the gray triggerfish quota was landed. The commercial greater amberjack fishery was closed on November 7, 2009. Accountability measures for greater amberjack will reduce the 2010 quota by the amount of the overage. A commercial closure for greater amberjack will be in effect from March 1 through May 31, 2010.

Shallow-Water Grouper (SWG): During 2009, 55 percent of the 7.48 mp SWG quota was landed; 57 percent of the 5.75 mp red grouper quota was landed; and 43 percent of the 1.32 mp gag quota was landed. To reduce sea turtle takes, longlining for SWG was closed in the eastern Gulf of Mexico (east of Cape San Blas, Florida) inshore of the 50-fathom contour on May 18, 2009, through emergency rulemaking. This rule was replaced on October 16, 2009, by a rule prohibiting bottom longlining for reef fish inshore of a line approximating the 35-fathom contour, until regulations proposed in Amendment 31 can be implemented.

Deepwater Grouper (DWG) and Tilefish: The 440,000 lb commercial quota for tilefish was met on May 15, and the fishery closed. The 1.02 mp quota for DWG was met on June 27, and the fishery closed. With the closure of the DWG component of the fishery, longlining for reef fish in the eastern Gulf of Mexico was prohibited through the emergency rulemaking discussed above. These fisheries reopened on January 1, 2010, under the grouper-tilefish IFQ.

#### **Permits Status**

The following represents permits issued or renewed within the last 12 months, which can be used to fish in the appropriate fishery. It does not represent activity in the fishery, nor include permits which have expired but are renewable. Active permits as of January 19, 2010:

- 1,548 moratorium Gulf shrimp permits and 277 royal red shrimp endorsements
- 1,276 for-hire coastal pelagic moratorium permits; 37 historical captain permits
- 1,461 commercial king mackerel moratorium permits (includes South Atlantic)  
(22 commercial king mackerel gillnet)
- 1,589 commercial Spanish mackerel permits (includes South Atlantic)
- 1,247 for-hire reef fish moratorium permits; 36 historical captain permits
- 915 commercial reef fish moratorium permits
- 172 commercial spiny lobster permits and 334 tailing permits (includes South Atlantic)