

# GULF POLICY REPORT

*APRIL 2025*

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INSIGHTS INTO THE POLICIES THAT  
MATTER TO YOUR LIFE AND BUSINESS

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# The Shareholders' Alliance Team

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## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR OF REGIONAL POLICY

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Shareholders' Alliance Members,

This last Gulf Council meeting in Gulf Shores, AL, April 4-7, 2025, didn't bring any news about IFQ changes — [Amendments 59A](#), [59B](#), and [60](#) weren't on the agenda. Even though things were quiet on that front, the meeting made one thing clear: dynamics are shifting fast and we've got to pay attention.

With the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) facing big cuts to staff and budget, it's getting harder for them to keep up with research and analysis. That's opening the door for Gulf States to assume more responsibility in fisheries management. Louisiana jumped on this and made a move to explore putting federally permitted charter boats under state control—a big shift that could shape what comes next.

One of our top priorities now is supporting Dr. Mike Allen for the Florida/at-large Gulf Council seat (currently held by Dr. Tom Frazer) and ensuring that this seat remains in Florida. He is a well-respected and fair-minded scientist with a strong ability to translate complex scientific concepts into clear, accessible language for the general public. He also runs a seafood shop in Cedar Key, FL. Since being nominated by Governor DeSantis, he has demonstrated a genuine interest in learning from commercial fishermen and has been remarkably approachable and open to dialogue. **We need that kind of voice at the table**—especially as pressure builds from Western Gulf states to expand state management and private angler access. We're already working with contacts in D.C. to help make it happen.

We also learned that the Gulf Council hasn't received its full budget for the year. As a result, the June 2025 meeting originally planned for four days in Key West will now be a two-day virtual or hybrid meeting in Tampa. We don't yet know what this means for the rest of the year or how it will affect management timelines.

We'll continue to keep you informed as we learn more.



### [ASHFORD ROSENBERG](#)

DIRECTOR OF REGIONAL POLICY AND  
SPECIAL PROJECTS



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# A SUMMARY OF KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **More Red Grouper Likely Coming in 2025:** The Gulf Council is asking NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) to approve an Emergency Rule to raise the red grouper quota next year. If approved, that could mean approximately one million pounds for the commercial fleet that would be available sometime this fall (approximately 48% increase).
- **Longer-Term Red Grouper Plan in the Works:** An Emergency Rule is only effective for 6 months (with the option for one 6-month extension). So, to make the red grouper quota increase more permanent, the Gulf Council has initiated an Amendment that will go into place after the Emergency Rule. This Amendment could include reallocation or other changes in how the fishery is managed. Alternatively, it may only be a codification of the overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), and ACL increase implemented by the Emergency Rule. It's early in the process, but we're watching it closely.
- **Deepwater Grouper Cuts:** For Amendment 58B, no decision was made yet on reallocating fish, but they did make Action 1, Alternative 2 in the document preferred, which would reduce the deepwater grouper quota from just over 1.1 million pounds to about 555,000 pounds. That's a big drop and something to plan around for next year.
- **June 2025 Meeting Changes:** The Gulf Council has only been provided about 40% of its annual budget so far. That means no in-person meeting in Key West this June 2025. Instead, they're looking at a shorter, two-day virtual or hybrid meeting in Tampa that same week. We'll keep you posted on the format.





KEY TAKEAWAYS

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- **Staff Losses at NMFS:** NMFS is struggling to keep staff. So far, the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) has lost around 20 people, and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) is down about 50. This will inevitably begin to slow things down, especially for permit processing and the economic reviews used in management decisions.
- **Budget Reduction Means Harder to Get Fisheries Data.** Between budget cuts, shifting Federal priorities, and staff, we are going to start seeing an impact in the data that NMFS is able to collect to inform management. The Southeast Regional Headboat Survey, one of the longest and most consistent data streams in our region (50 years), will be greatly reduced next year.
- **Deregulation Push:** The Trump Administration has issued Executive Order (E.O) 14192, pushing for more deregulation. NMFS is expected to identify simple rules they can cut or roll back, so we may see some regulatory changes coming aimed at "unleashing prosperity."
- **New Look for the Gulf Council:** The Gulf Council is rebranding and revamping its outreach. This effort has been underway for the last several months, but they also took the opportunity to try and address the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America through E.O. 14172 "Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness." They're rolling out a new logo and website in the next couple of weeks. While the official name "Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council" is written into federal law and can't be changed without a change to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the full name is being dropped from Council materials. From now on, you'll mostly see "Gulf Council" used in logos and outreach.



# EXECUTIVE ORDER 14192 COULD OPEN THE DOOR FOR RULE CHANGES

NMFS Regional Administrator Andy Strelcheck, provided an update on E.O. 14192, known as [“Unleashing American Prosperity,”](#) which directs federal agencies to identify 10 deregulatory actions for every new regulation. This is being referred to informally as the “10-for-1” rule.



## **Key points from the update:**

- The “10-for-1” requirement only applies to rules considered “significant” by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). These are rules that either:
  - Have a major impact on the economy (over \$100 million annually), or
  - Raise major legal, policy, or coordination issues with other agencies or presidential priorities.
- Routine hunting and fishing rules are exempt, which likely includes many Gulf Council actions.
- Agencies are also required to ensure that the total cost of all new regulations in fiscal year 2025 is well below zero, once repeals and removals are factored in.

Although there’s still uncertainty, NMFS believes that most Gulf Council actions won’t meet the “significant” threshold and therefore the Gulf Council will - potentially - not have to strike 10 regulations before implementing one new one; but NMFS continues to seek legal guidance on this. Still, the agency is encouraging the Gulf Council to propose potential deregulatory actions to meet the goals of the E.O.



## DEREGULATION UPDATE

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Some ideas raised thus far include:

- Removing the [20-Fathom Recreational Seasonal Closure for Shallow-water Grouper](#), a long-standing request from charter and recreational industry.
- Eliminating [sea turtle gear requirements](#) for charter/for-hire vessels, which could be considered if the science supports it.



### What's Next?

- We'll continue to monitor how [Executive Order 14192](#) is implemented and whether any Gulf Council actions are considered for deregulation.
- As the process unfolds, we'll stay engaged and share any opportunities that could benefit commercial fishermen.

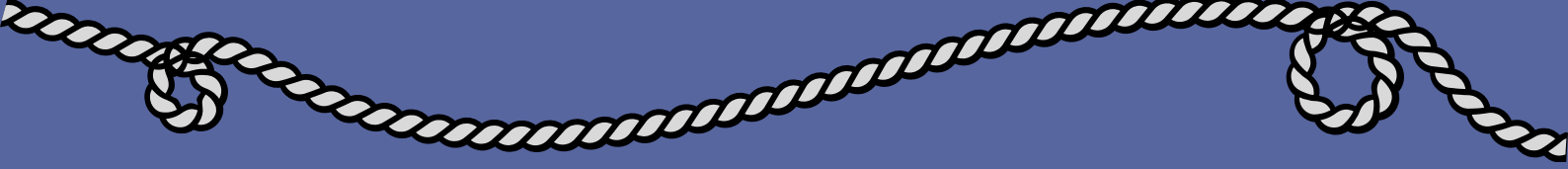


### HAVE AN IDEA?

If you have ideas of regulations that could easily be changed or eliminated through the Gulf Council, please feel free to share them by emailing Ashford.

[EMAIL ASHFORD](#)

# Red Grouper: What's Happening and What's Next?



There's good news: the latest red grouper stock assessment ([SEDAR 88](#)) shows the fishery is improving, which means higher catch limits are on the table. But, as usual, there are some complications behind the scenes.

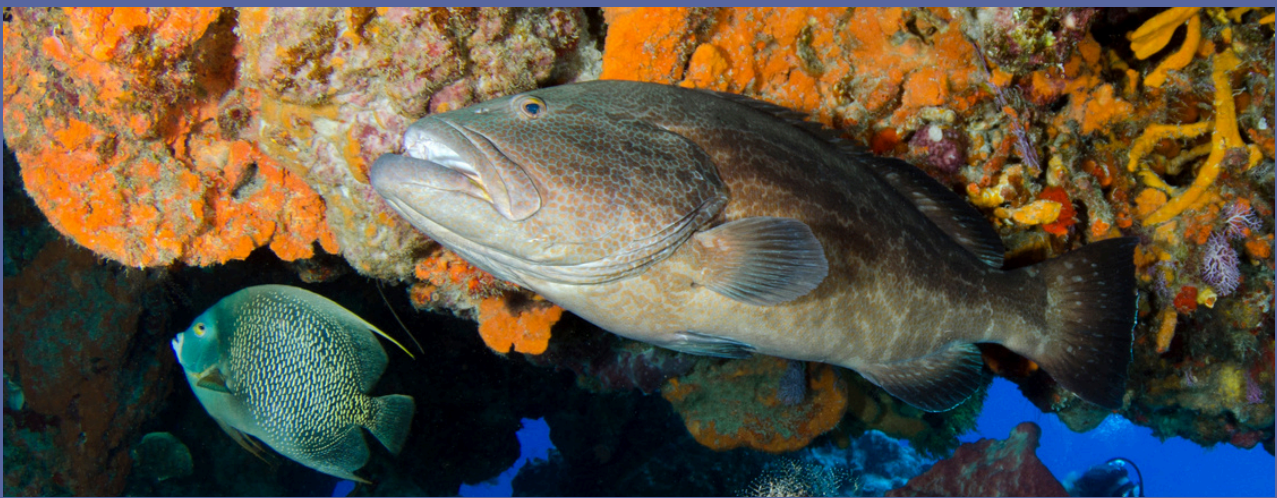
- **Changes in Stock Assessment Parameters:** The SEDAR 88 stock assessment made several key updates compared to the previous assessment (SEDAR 61). It assumed that the red grouper stock is more resilient to red tide and that natural mortality is significantly higher than previously estimated. These revised assumptions, along with other factors, contributed to the substantial recommended increase in catch levels (around 77%). Some members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) have raised concerns that these new inputs may be having an outsized influence on the catch recommendations.
- **Recreational Pressure is Growing:** The recreational and charter-for-hire sectors are pushing hard for an immediate increase in their quota so they can reopen a full-year season.
- **Recreational Data Reopens Allocation Debate:** The stock assessment used Florida's State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS) instead of the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES), which is what was used to take your commercial quota away in [Amendment 53](#). Using SRFS in the stock assessment means that NMFS will have to calibrate recreational data again and will likely use that to re-examine sector allocations. The good news is, based on preliminary information, it looks like the commercial sector could get some fish back under SRFS. We don't yet know exactly how much, but we'll keep you informed as more details become available.
- **Amendment 53 Still in Limbo:** NMFS has still failed to provide the court-ordered economic rationale for Amendment 53, which adds more uncertainty to future allocation decisions.
- **Push to Reopen More Water:** There's also a renewed push to eliminate the 20-fathom closure for recreational red grouper fishing, which would expand where they can fish.



RED GROUPER

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With all of these factors in play, the Gulf Council chose to move forward with an Emergency Rule to increase red grouper catch levels for 2025 based on SEDAR 88 and lost economic opportunity for the charter sector. We saw some preliminary numbers during the Gulf Council meeting, but final catch level recommendations won't be made until the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) meets in May 2025. Based on what we heard at the meeting, it looks like commercial fishermen could receive approximately one million pounds (or more) on top of the current quota this year.



**EMERGENCY RULES ONLY LAST SIX MONTHS (WITH AN OPTION FOR ONE EXTENSION), SO THE GOAL IS TO GET THIS DONE QUICKLY TO AVOID ANY MARKET DISRUPTIONS LATER IN THE YEAR.**

Immediately after the Emergency Rule, the Gulf Council will begin work on an Amendment that will set red grouper catch levels more permanently. That's when we're likely to see discussions on reallocation and other management changes, including possibly removing the 20-fathom closure.

## RED GROUPER

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### What's Next?

- The SSC will review and approve red grouper catch limits for 2025 at their meeting on May 8, 2025
- NMFS will implement an Emergency Rule based on the SSC's catch level recommendations
- The Gulf Council will also start work on an Amendment that will change catch levels and also consider other management options.

### We want to hear from you.

What are you seeing on the water when it comes to red grouper?

Are you catching more this year than last year?

Are fish, on average, bigger or smaller than in recent years? Or are they the same?

How would a late-year quota increase affect your business?

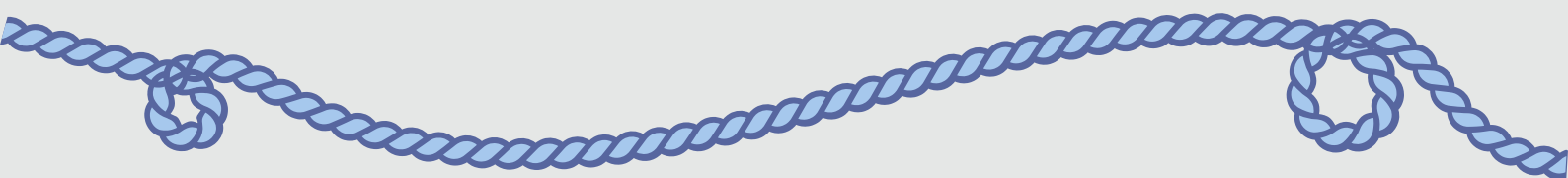


**Your feedback matters and helps inform the management process.**

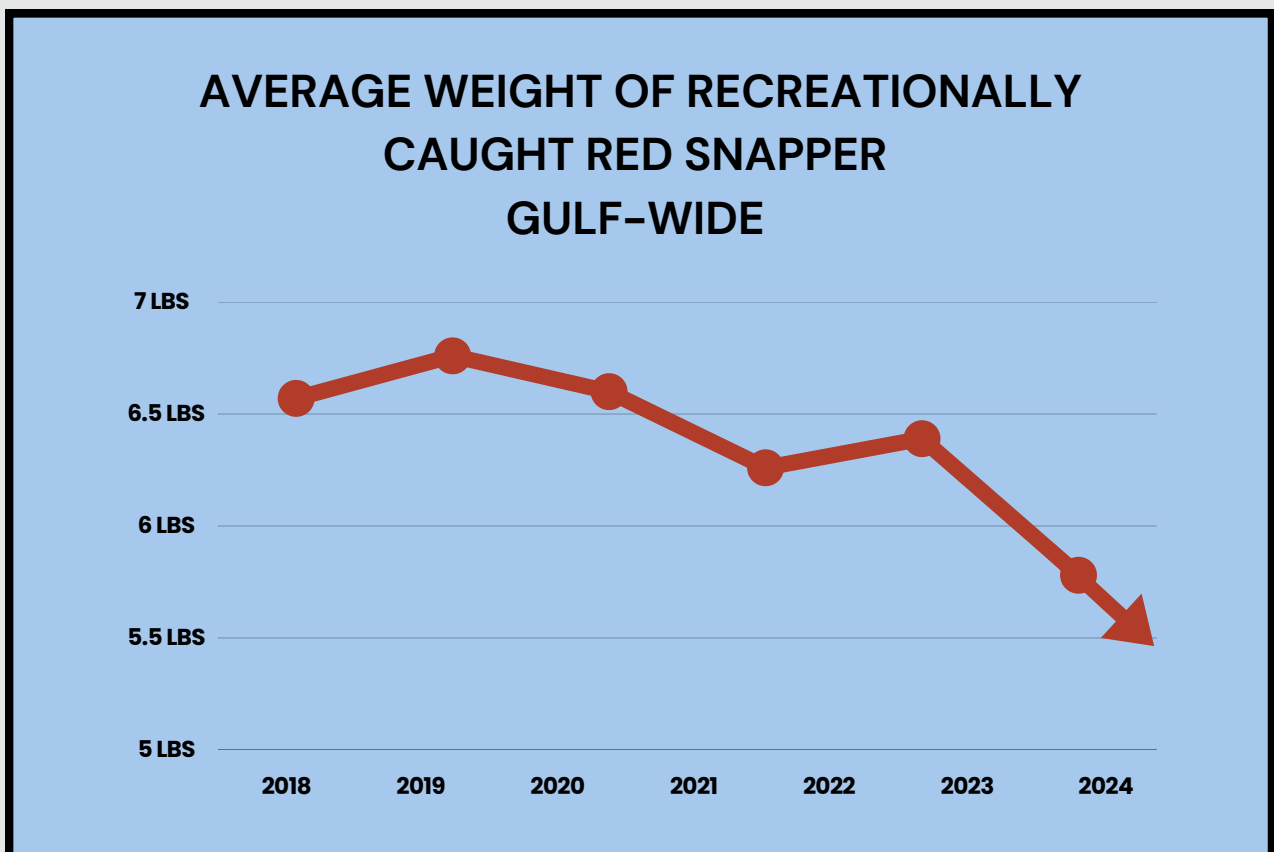
**[EMAIL ASHFORD](#)**



## RED SNAPPER: STATES PUSH FOR MORE CONTROL



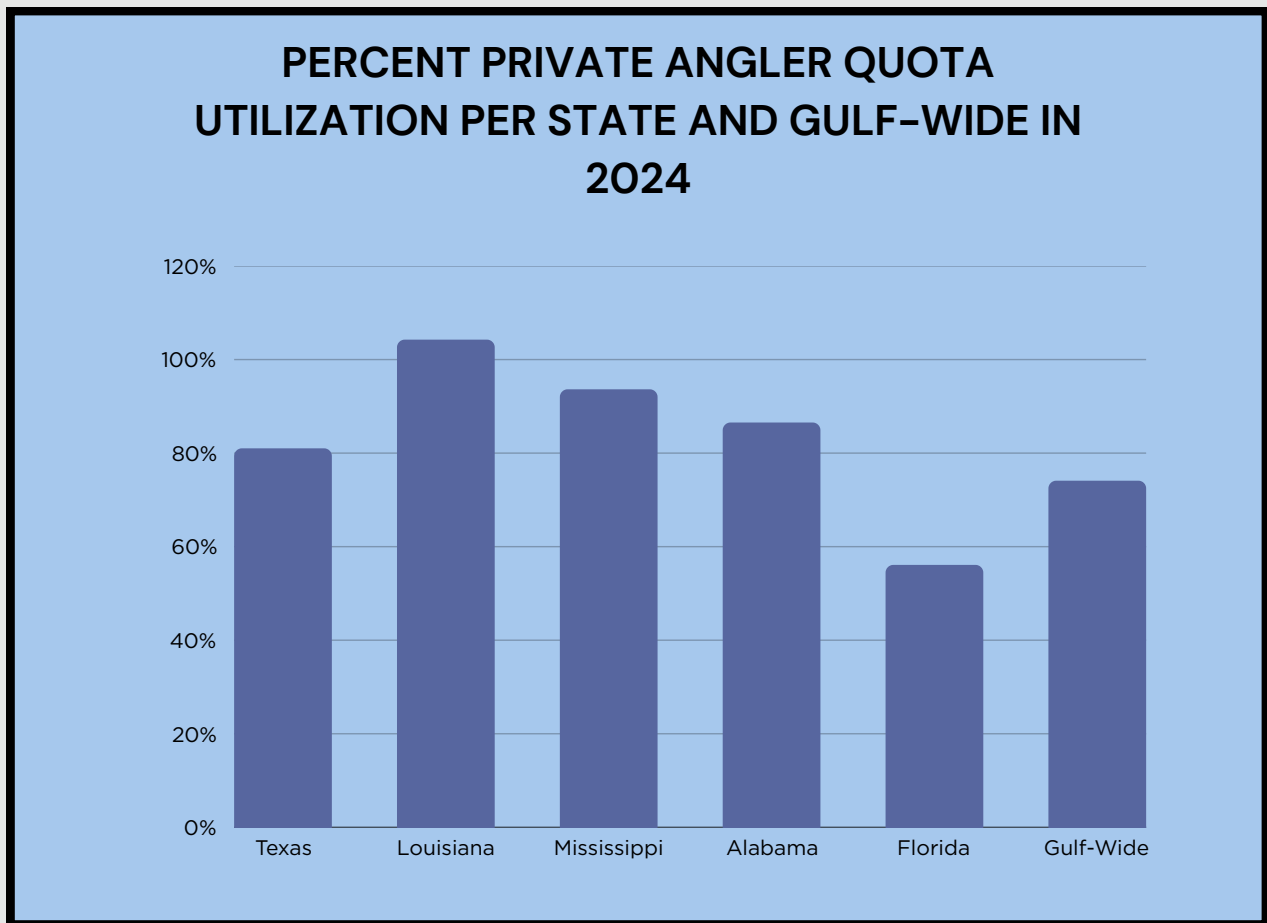
At the April 2025 meeting, each Gulf state presented its final numbers from the 2024 private angler red snapper season—things like landings, average fish size, and quota usage. Not surprisingly, the data showed that red snapper are getting smaller on average, and the private angler sector still isn't catching its full share of the quota even with record long seasons.



Despite these trends, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries representative, Chris Schible, insisted that Louisiana could manage their federally permitted charter boats better than NMFS, and that the Gulf Council should reconsider including that fleet in state management of red snapper.

RED SNAPPER

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But not everyone agreed. Florida’s reps (Dr. CJ Sweetman, John Sanchez, Ed Walker, and Dr. Tom Frazer) and Captain Troy Frady (AL) reminded the Gulf Council how messy this issue was during past debates—especially during Amendment 50. Most federally permitted charter captains across the Gulf were strongly against being lumped in with state programs. Reopening that fight didn’t sit well with them.

Despite the pushback, the Gulf Council passed a motion (14-3) to start exploring this idea again. The plan? Staff will now begin preparing options for turning over management of federally permitted charter boats to each of the five Gulf states. States would have the option to opt out, in which case federal rules would still apply for federally permitted charter boats in that state.

This move could lead to major changes in how red snapper are managed and how access is divided up. If you fish commercially or operate a federally permitted charter boat, this is one to keep your eye on.

# AMENDMENT 58B: MODIFICATIONS TO DEEP WATER GROUPER MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Gulf Council is continuing work on [Amendment 58B](#), which focuses on yellowedge grouper and the deep water grouper complex. Because yellowedge is currently classified as overfished, federal law requires the Gulf Council to “end overfishing immediately.”

As with the red grouper stock assessment that led to Amendment 53, the stock assessment for yellowedge ([SEDAR 85](#)) used MRIP-FES recreational landings data, which has raised concerns across the commercial sector. This data often results in higher recreational catch estimates and is now being used to “justify” potential quota reductions and reallocation.

As expected, recreational representatives on the Gulf Council are advocating to increase their deep water grouper allocation from approximately 4% to 10%. However, several Gulf Council members expressed concern about reallocating based on uncertain recreational data and questioned the reliability of using that information to make long-term policy decisions.

For now, the Gulf Council has not selected a preferred allocation alternative. A full range of options will be reviewed when the public hearing draft of Amendment 58B is presented at the June 2025 Gulf Council meeting.





## DEEP WATER GROUPER

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### HERE'S A SUMMARY OF THE CURRENT ALLOCATION ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative	ACL (lbs)	Comm Quota	Comm Allocation	Rec Quota	Rec Allocation
1	555,026	514,176	96.5%	Undefined	Undefined
2**	555,026	514,176	96.5%	19,426	3.5%
3	555,026	478,411	89.79%	56,649	10.21%
4	555,026	496,380	93.10%	37,964	6.84%

\*\*Currently there is no recreational sector allocation on the books. The commercial ACL is 96.5% of the complex ABC, the commercial quota is calculated at 4% below the commercial ACL and the recreational sector is “apportioned” the rest. Alternative 2 formally establishes a 96.5% commercial allocation and a 3.5% recreational allocation.

### Recreational Accountability Measures

Amendment 58B also includes updates to accountability measures (AMs)—the rules that determine whether a sector faces consequences for exceeding its quota.

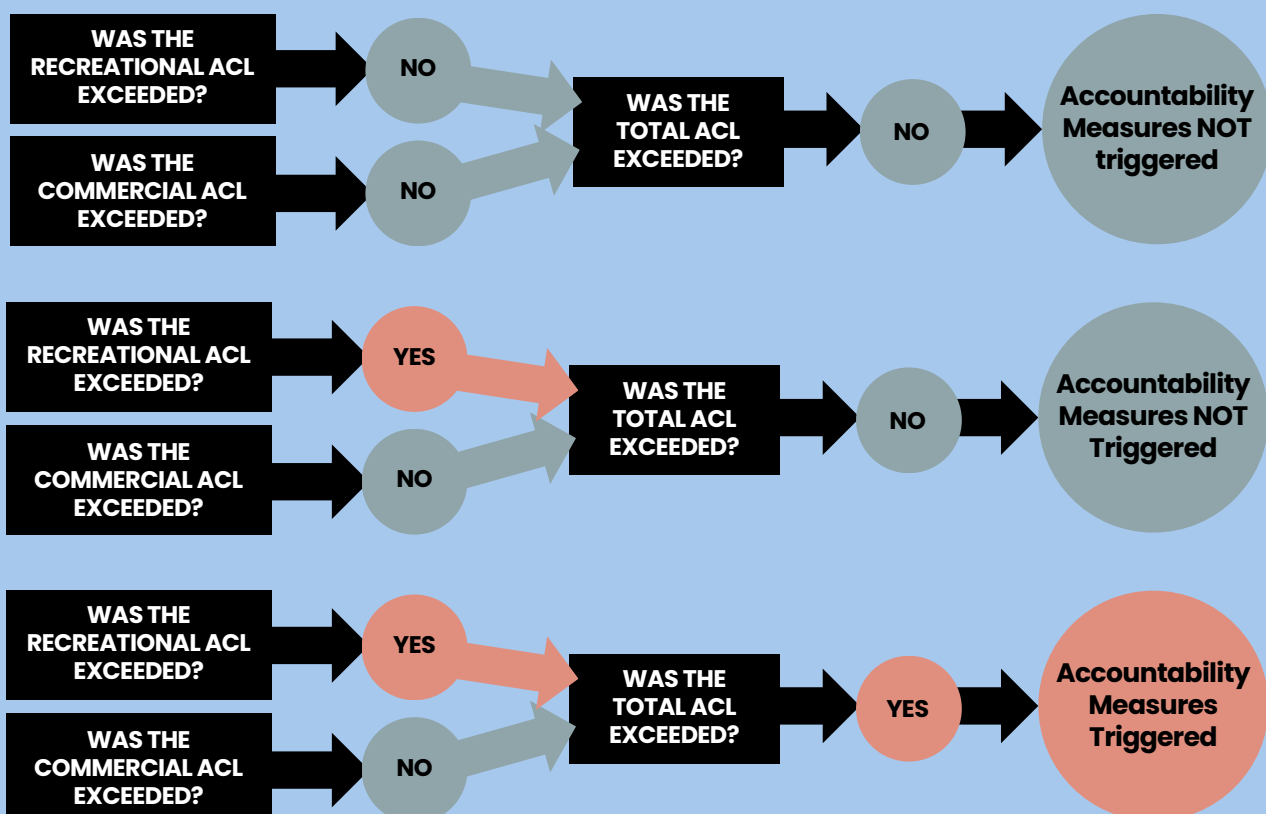
Originally, recreational AMs would only be triggered if recreational landings alone exceeded their ACL **over a three year period**. However, at the recommendation of NOAA legal counsel, the Gulf Council added an alternative where commercial landings could influence whether the recreational sector faces penalties.

## Here's How That Would Work

Here's how that would work:

- If the recreational fleet exceeds its quota over a three year period, but the combined commercial and recreational ACL is not exceeded, then no accountability measures would apply.
- In this case, low commercial landings could effectively “buffer” the overage, shielding the recreational sector from consequences.

### Scenarios for Triggering Accountability Measures (This is over a three-year period)



While commercial fishermen are not penalized directly under this change, it sets up a scenario where commercial landings could help protect the recreational sector from being held accountable for exceeding their limit.

## DEEP WATER GROUPER

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### What's Next?

Here's how that would work:

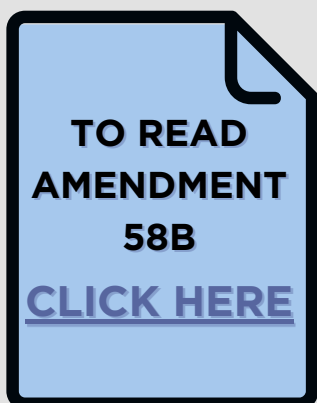
- A public hearing draft of Amendment 58B will be presented to the Gulf Council in June 2025.
- Public hearings—both in person and virtual—will likely take place in July 2025. We'll share details as soon as they're available.
- The Gulf Council is expected to take final action in August 2025.
- New regulations are expected to take effect in 2026.



If the final rule is not published by January 1, 2026, NMFS has the authority to withhold commercial quota in anticipation of a reduction. Either way, commercial fishermen should prepare for a reduction in deep water grouper quota next year.

**We strongly encourage commercial fishermen to engage in this process.** Whether you target deep water grouper or catch them as bycatch, these changes could directly impact your business.

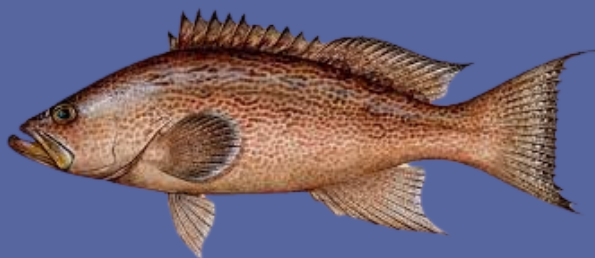
- Do you believe the data being used for reallocation is reliable?
- How would a reduced quota affect your operation?
- Should recreational overages be buffered by low commercial landings?





# Framework Action: Shallow Water Grouper Catch Limits

The Gulf Council is moving forward with reducing catch limits for shallow water grouper (SWG) through a [Framework Action](#)—a process that allows quicker management changes without a full Amendment. Final action is expected at the June 2025 meeting, with the new quotas taking effect by January 2026.



The Gulf Council's preferred Alternative in Action 1, (Alternative 2), would cut the total ACL for shallow water grouper by 54.7%, resulting in a commercial quota of 245,410 pounds.

These reductions are being put in place due to a new stock assessment ([SEDAR 68](#), which used MRIP-FES for recreational landings).

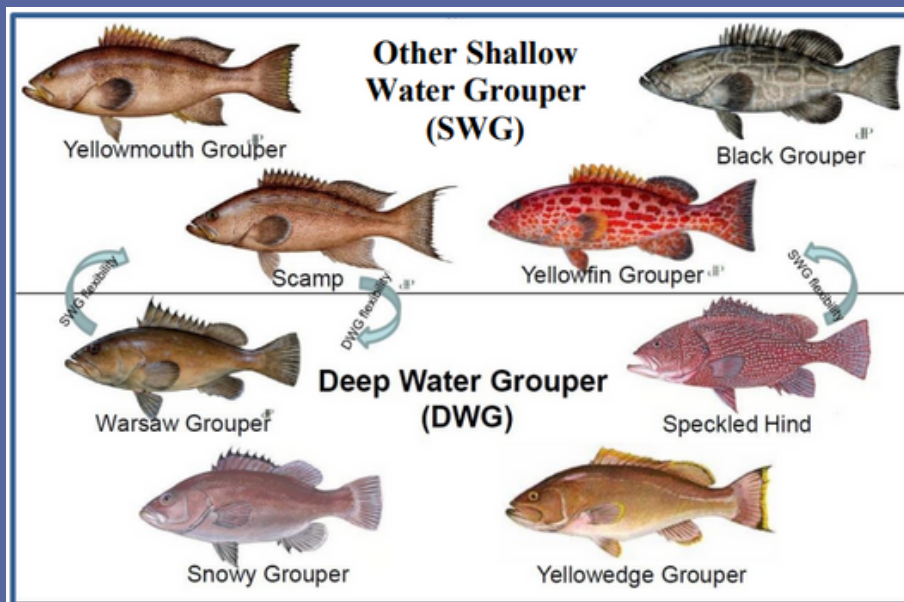
	ABC (lbs gw)	ACL	Comm ACL (lbs gw)	Comm Quota (lbs gw)
Alternative 1 (Status Quo)	710,000	710,000	547,000	525,000
Gulf Council Preferred	322,000	322,000	245,636	245,410

\*\*Currently the recreational ACL is undefined.

## SHALLOW WATER GROUPE

### What's Next?

- Once this Framework Action is complete, the Gulf Council plans to resume work on [Amendment 58A](#). That amendment includes:
  - Reallocation of SWG quota from the commercial sector to the recreational sector
  - Splitting SWG into two new share categories
  - Eliminating the 4% buffer on DWG quota (which is in place to account for flexibility measures between SWG and DWG)



From Reef Fish Amendment 59A: Modifications to Shallow Water Grouper Management Measures.

### How to Provide Input

Because this is a Framework Action, public input opportunities are limited. Comments can only be submitted through:

- The Gulf Council's online [Public Comment Portal](#)
- A (pending) public comment webinar.

**TO COMMENT ON THE  
FRAMEWORK ACTION**  
[CLICK HERE](#)

## GREATER AMBERJACK: STATE CONTROL ON THE TABLE

The Gulf Council is beginning to explore new options for managing greater amberjack, including the possibility of state or regional management for the recreational sector. Gulf Council staff recently presented a list of decision points to consider if the states take on more control.

State directors—along with representatives from the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA)—are showing strong interest in

bringing greater amberjack under state management, especially since the fishery continues to struggle and fail rebuilding targets. They also point out that Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama will soon all use the same recreational survey system, which they say makes coordinated state management more feasible and reduces the difficulty of calibration between state and federal recreational data.

There's still a lot to sort out, and nothing has been decided yet. However, this process presents an opportunity for the charter/for-hire sector to push for sector separation in greater amberjack management.





## GREATER AMBERJACK

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### Challenges and Uncertainty Ahead

Even with all the interest in new management approaches, progress is likely to be slow. The next stock assessment for greater amberjack won't begin until 2026, and there's still no update on the much-anticipated Greater Amberjack Count.

In the meantime, the reality remains the same: greater amberjack continues to fail to rebuild, despite changes in how every sector has been managed. That's why, alongside discussions about recreational reforms, this could also be a key moment to new ideas forward.

We want to hear from commercial fishermen who target amberjack or catch it as bycatch:

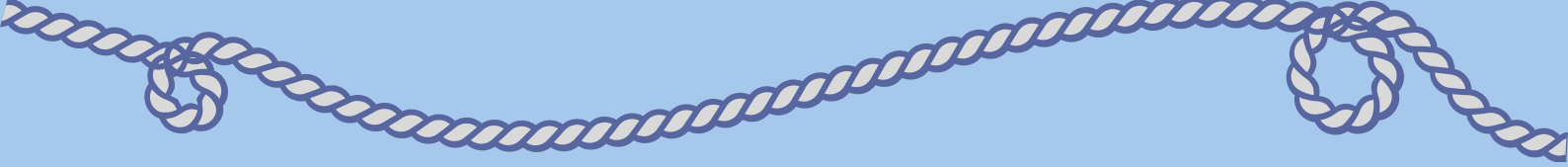
- What are you seeing on the water?
- What ideas do you have for improving commercial management of this fishery?
- Are there other factors not being considered that are preventing this fishery from rebuilding?

Your insights are critical as these discussions take shape. If you have ideas you want to share, reach out—we're here to help.

[EMAIL ASHFORD](#)



# GAG GROUPE RECREATIONAL EMERGENCY RULE



The recreational sector continues to exceed its gag grouper quota, even after the implementation of Amendment 56. These overages have triggered payback provisions, which shorten the season year after year—creating growing frustration among both private anglers and charter operators.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) raised concerns that if this pattern continues, the fishery could become “discard-driven,” much like what has happened with red snapper in the South Atlantic. That means fewer fish being harvested and more being thrown back—making it even harder to rebuild the stock.

To try to prevent another overage in 2025 and reduce the risk of a shorter season in 2026, the Gulf Council passed a motion requesting that NMFS implement an emergency rule to set a 1-fish recreational bag limit for the 2025 season only.

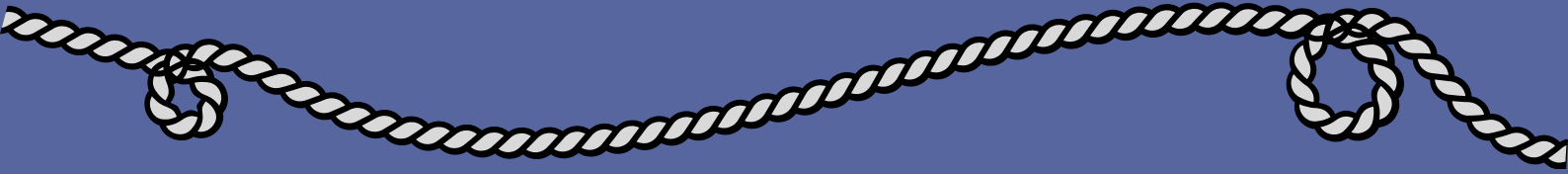
This is likely to be an unpopular move among anglers, but the Gulf Council’s intent is to slow down landings in the short term, avoid a payback provision next year, and potentially allow for a longer and more stable season in 2026.

## What’s Next?

- NMFS will begin work on the Emergency Rule so that the one fish bag limit will be in effect for the 2025 recreational gag grouper season.



# DESCEND ACT AND GULF COUNCIL ACTION



The DESCEND Act—officially called the Direct Enhancement of Snapper Conservation and the Economy through Novel Devices Act of 2020—was signed into law in 2020 to help reduce release mortality in reef fish fisheries like red snapper. It requires anglers fishing in federal waters of the Gulf to carry a descending device or venting tool, rigged and ready to use.

However, the law includes a sunset clause—and unless action is taken, the requirement will expire in 2026.

Descending devices have received lots of positive public PR, between the Return ‘Em Right campaign and efforts in Congress. Effectively venting or descending fish with barotrauma does have positive conservation benefits, but CCA and groups like them will probably use this to “get credit” for the fish they save and push for higher red snapper catch limits.

The Gulf Council passed a motion to begin work on a new document that would replace and enhance the DESCEND Act requirements. This could lead to a new regulation developed through the Council process, which may or may not continue the existing mandates.



**What This Means For You.**

While the DESCEND Act was primarily aimed at the recreational sector, its rules apply to all vessels, and the Gulf Council's Amendment to continue mandating venting tools or descending devices will likely do the same.

**What's Next?**

- We'll continue to track how this new amendment develops through the Gulf Council process and monitor any related legislation in Congress.
- As discussions move forward, we'll keep an eye on how proposed changes could affect commercial operations and share updates as they become available.



From Return 'Em Right

## A blue rope with two knots, one on the left and one on the right, connected by a long straight section. The rope is depicted with a thick blue outline and a lighter blue fill, showing a twisted texture. The knots are simple reef knots (square knots). The rope starts from the left edge, forms a knot, extends straight, forms another knot, and ends on the right edge.

## VIEW GULF COUNCIL ESTIMATED ACTION SCHEDULE

[illegible]

Next Gulf Council Meeting  
June 3-4, 2025  
Virtual and Hybrid  
Tampa, FL

# YOUR VOICE, OUR STRENGTH: JOIN US TODAY

Our strength comes from you—our members. Whether you're a fisherman, a seafood enthusiast, or simply someone who cares about the future of sustainable fisheries, your support makes all the difference. We can't do the work we do—advocating for healthy fisheries, supporting fishing communities, and protecting the Gulf of America—without you. Memberships start at just \$25 per year, so join us today and become a vital part of our mission to ensure a thriving future for Gulf fisheries!



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