



# ALLIANCE UPDATE

Latest News from the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance



Shareholders' Alliance Members,

We hope you are having a wonderful holiday season and are spending time with family!

As 2023 comes to an end, we are reflecting on what an eventful and successful year it has been for the Shareholders' Alliance and the work we do with your critical support. Just a few highlights include:

1. Commercial and charter fishermen gained a professional and solution-oriented representative on the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council with years of on-the-water experience.
2. Pursued the red grouper reallocation lawsuit into the U.S. District Court of Appeals.
3. Stopped future reallocations based on MRIP-FES for two years.
4. Supported the approval of electronic logbooks to streamline and improve fishery science.
5. Provided red snapper allocation to 20 qualifying fishermen across the Gulf of Mexico through the Reef Fish Quota Bank.
6. Leveled-up the Shareholders' Alliance team with the addition of a new full-time staffer and an intern.
7. Launched the *Faces of the Gulf* video to showcase the people that bring the American public fresh, sustainable, Gulf seafood.
8. Expanded the breadth and depth of the Shareholders' Alliance Board of Directors.

We look forward to what 2024 holds and remain committed to working with you to support sustainability, accountability, and a stable seafood future for the commercial reef fish industry.

Shareholders' Alliance staff are always available to answer questions, so don't hesitate to reach out. We wish you a happy holidays and new year!

Eric, Ashford, and Hugh

---

## In This Newsletter

- Shareholders' Alliance Updates

- [Next Membership Meeting](#)
- [New Board Member](#)
- [Faces of the Gulf](#)
- [New Merchandise](#)
- [Thank you, Devon](#)
- [Congratulations, Hugh](#)
- [Ten Years of the Quota Bank](#)
- Gulf Council Updates
  - [Amberjack](#)
  - [Gag Grouper](#)
  - [Electronic Logbooks](#)
  - [Red Snapper Stock Assessment](#)
  - [January 2024 Gulf Council Meeting](#)
  - [Gulf Council Appointments](#)
- Other Updates
  - [Wind Energy](#)
  - [Return 'Em Right](#)
- [In Memoriam](#)

---

## SHAREHOLDERS' ALLIANCE UPDATES

---

### **Next Membership Meeting**

The next quarterly membership meeting, and last one for 2023, will be Wednesday, December 27 at 9:30 am central/10:30 am eastern on Zoom. The agenda includes:

1. End of Year Summary
2. Gulf Council Updates
3. Federal Policy Updates
4. Quota Bank Update

Zoom information can be found below:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83413486933?pwd=fT9MUVGvbjOn8aWZa8IGcvazD5yQCv.1>

Meeting ID: 834 1348 6933

Passcode: 956484

---

## **Welcome Rachal Hisler to the Shareholders' Alliance Board!**



We are thrilled to welcome Rachal Hisler to the Shareholders' Alliance Board of Directors! Rachal was unanimously elected at the Annual Membership Meeting in October.

Rachal lives in Anahuac, TX with her husband George Hisler II and their son. They are a legacy fishing family with experience in multiple fisheries, including reef fish and shrimp. When Rachal is not working with the family fishing business she enjoys volunteering at her church and serving local veterans.

We welcome her leadership and perspective!

---

## Faces of the Gulf

Earlier this year, we worked with commercial fishermen in Florida and Texas to film and produce *Faces of the Gulf* - a video that showcases first-hand stories of what it's like to be a commercial fisherman. We encourage you to watch it and share it with family, friends, and on social media. A deep thanks to the men and women that helped make this happen



Faces of the Gulf



Gulf of Mexico Re...  
8 subscribers

Subscribe

4



Share



[Watch Video](#)

---

## New Merchandise

Looking for a new hat, shirt, or hoodie for the holidays? Or for any other reason? You're in luck! We have updated our merchandise and these items are available now! Whether for yourself or a gift for a friend, you are our best ambassadors and can showcase our organization by wearing one of these snazzy items.

You can receive one of these limited edition items as a "Thank You" from us with a donation to the organization to support our mission.



[Order Here](#)

---

## Thank you, Devon!

This year, we were extremely fortunate to have Devon Ledbetter join our team as the Shareholders' Alliance Communications Intern. Since April of this year, she has revamped the look of our newsletter, created graphics for our education and policy campaigns, and created the *Faces of the Gulf* video. You have all seen her work and many of you have reached out in support of her work.

Devon graduated from the University of Miami with a double major in Marine Affairs and Communications and a double minor in Psychology and Business Management, and is now pursuing her Master's degree at the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric, and Earth Sciences. In her

“free time” she’s now interning with the Hurricane Research Division at NOAA’s Southeast Fisheries Science Center. We wish her the best of luck!

---

## **Congratulations, Hugh!**

Hugh Cipparone joined the team back in April as our Fisheries Policy Fellow. He did such a great job that we extended him an opportunity to come onboard full time - and he accepted! We are excited to welcome him as our Fisheries Finance and Policy Analyst. In his new role, he will be focusing on Quota Bank work and innovative initiatives to advance community quota and permit banking regionally and nationally.

---

## **Ten Years of the Reef Fish Quota Bank**

In 2024, we will be celebrating a decade of the Reef Fish Quota Bank!

The Quota Bank was started to help grouper fishermen reduce red snapper discards. Since that time, thanks to support of our Board, members, and Quota Bank participants, the program has grown to also include support of the next generation of commercial fishing leaders. We help more than 20 commercial fishermen each year secure access to more than 70,000 pounds of red snapper allocation in a way that’s sustainable, profitable, and accountable.

The Reef Fish Quota Bank is the only program of its kind in the Gulf of Mexico, and one of only a few programs in the country.

The Shareholders' Alliance is incredibly proud of how this program has grown over the last ten years. We look forward to working with our members to continue to evolve the Quota Bank so that it is an effective, impactful program for commercial fishermen and fishing communities.

---

## **GULF COUNCIL UPDATES**

---

# Greater Amberjack Commercial Trip Limit Reduction



This week, NOAA announced an [Emergency Action](#) reducing the greater amberjack trip limit from 1000 pounds per trip to seven fish per trip starting January 1, 2024.

This stems from the Final Action taken by the Gulf Council at its October 2023 meeting to implement this measure. However, once the Gulf Council takes Final Action, it can take at least six months (or more) before a regulation becomes final and enforceable on the water.

Had NOAA not used its Emergency Action authority to fast-track this rule change by January 1, 2024, the commercial fishery would've continued at a 1,000 pound trip limit, overshot its quota before NOAA could respond, closed the fishery in early 2024, and incurred an overage (that would need to be paid back the following year) so large that there would have very likely been a full commercial fishery shutdown in 2025.

Faced with this reality, we advocated for the Emergency Action trip limit reduction in 2024 in order to keep the fishery open in 2025.

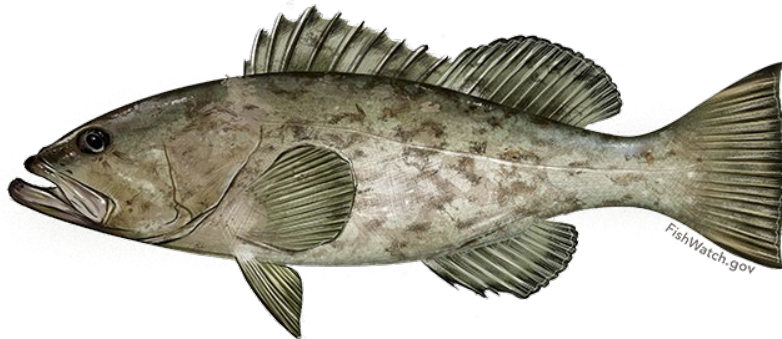
We continue to press the Gulf Council to fix the broken amberjack management system to include real-time science, better management options, and true accountability for the recreational sector that is responsible for 95% of all discards in the Gulf of Mexico.

[Read Emergency Rule Announcement](#)



---

## Gag Grouper Quota Holdback



On January 1, 2024 NOAA will [withhold a portion](#) of the commercial gag grouper quota in anticipation of a quota reduction later in 2024.

Earlier this year, the Gulf Council took Final Action on Amendment 56, which made a suite of changes to gag grouper management. Most notably, it reallocated commercial quota to the recreational sector based on revised recreational landings from Florida's State Reef Fish Survey, changing the commercial/recreational allocation split from 61% recreational to 39% commercial to 65% recreational/35% commercial. It also reduced the quota in an attempt to rebuild the fishery, and to account for more discards by the recreational sector under the new allocation.

The Final Rule for Amendment 56 won't be available until later in 2024. In anticipation of the reduced quota, NOAA can - and will - withhold commercial IFQ allocation so that there are no quota overages.

The new quota in 2024 will be 147,000 pounds (a 25% reduction from 2023 levels), and that is the amount of gag allocation that will be distributed by NOAA on January 1.

In alignment with our work on Amberjack, we continue to press the Gulf Council to fix the broken gag management system to include real-time science, better management options, and true accountability for the recreational sector that is responsible for more than 99% of all discards in the Gulf of Mexico.

In fact, recent analyses indicate that private recreational anglers catch and discard roughly nine gag grouper to keep one; with an assumed 12% discard mortality rate, private anglers are essentially killing and discarding dead one gag grouper for each one taken home.

Commercial fishermen should not be penalized for the failure of the recreational management system, and we will continue to fight this - at the Gulf Council, in Washington DC, and in the courts - until we prevail.

[Read Announcement from NOAA](#)

---

## **Commercial Electronic Logbooks**

In a rare win for commercial fishermen, the Gulf Council approved a joint amendment with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council that authorized the use of electronic logbooks on commercial vessels. This allows you to move away from pen and paper and will streamline some of the reporting you have to do for each trip, and is one more example of the type of accountability that the commercial sector takes on while the recreational sector continues to sidestep.

The timeline for implementation is still unclear, but will be discussed at the January 2024 Gulf Council meeting. Shareholders' Alliance staff continues to be in contact with NOAA and Gulf Council staff so that we can keep you updated as this goes through the rulemaking process and becomes implemented on the water.

---

## **SEDAR 74 - Red Snapper Stock Assessment**

Earlier this month, a draft of [SEDAR 74](#) was published. An independent panel spent four days reviewing the stock assessment, which included data from the Great Red Snapper Count. Ultimately, the peer review panel determined the stock assessment model should **not** be used for the upcoming red snapper Operational Assessment, which is supposed to generate new catch advice.

The peer reviewers have three weeks to publish their reports which will go into more detail as to why they rejected the assessment. This will likely be discussed at the January Gulf Council meeting, and at the Scientific and Statistical Committee meeting, which isn't until February.

We will keep you updated as we learn more.

---

## January 2024 Gulf Council Meeting

The next Gulf Council meeting will be January 29-February 2, 2024 in New Orleans, Louisiana. The agenda can be seen [here](#), but some of the higher priority topics include:

- Continuing issues with FES data uncertainty. NOAA recently published that the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES) - which is the survey they have been using to rewrite history and justify reallocating quota away from commercial fishermen to the recreational sector - may be *overestimating* recreational effort by as much as 30-40%. Furthermore, unusually large estimates of landings from FES are what drove the recreational closure of red grouper this year.
- Recreational red grouper closure. For the third year in a row, and in another example of NOAA's inability to constrain private angler landings to its quota, the recreational sector has exceeded their annual catch limit [by 600,000 pounds](#), causing an early season closure. This continues to highlight the uncertainty associated with FES, and the immense impact of recreational landings.
- Continued discussion on IFQ Programs. The Gulf Council has spent the last year reviewing the IFQ programs, and evaluating and modifying their goals and objectives. As part of that, they will be exploring requirements for obtaining an IFQ account and holding and obtaining shares and allocation.

- [Southeast Regional Office Q&A](#). On Tuesday, NOAA and the Gulf Council will host a question and answer session that will be open to the public, both in-person and via webinar.

[View Full Agenda](#)

---

## **Gulf Council Appointments**

In 2024, there are five seats up for appointment/reappointment to the Gulf Council:

- JD Dugas (Louisiana/recreational - eligible for reappointment)
- Billy Broussard (Louisiana/"commercial" - eligible for reappointment)
- Bob Gill (Florida/commercial - eligible for reappointment)
- Susan Boggs (Alabama/charter/for-hire - eligible for reappointment)
- Dale Diaz (Mississippi/"other" - final term, not eligible for reappointment)

There are two rounds a person must go through before getting appointed to the Gulf Council. First, they must be selected by the governor of their state and recommended to the Secretary of Commerce as a viable candidate. Governors typically submit lists of three to four names to the Secretary. The Secretary then selects one person from each governor's list. The Shareholders' Alliance is very engaged in this process, and writes letters of support for candidates to governors and to the Secretary of Commerce, and this year will be no different.

With so many seats up for grabs this year, and the continued shortage of commercial and pro-conservation voices, we will be aggressively promoting candidates that have commercial fishing experience and a history of supporting conservation. We will need your help

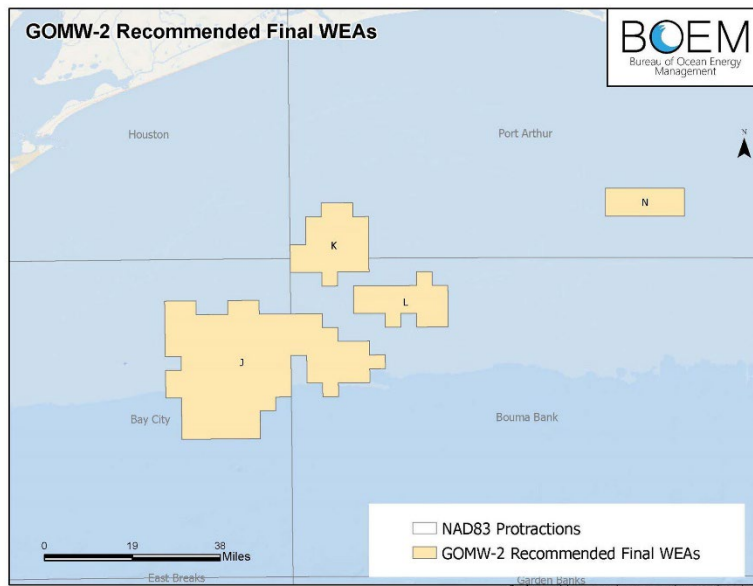
---

## **OTHER UPDATES**

---

# Wind Energy in the Gulf of Mexico

In October, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management finalized four “Wind Energy Areas” or WEAs in the Gulf of Mexico. All four sites are off the coast of Texas, primarily between Galveston and Port Arthur.



Earlier this year, BOEM also announced a provisional winner of the call for bids for offshore wind lease areas off Lake Charles, LA (also called GOM Wind 1). The provisional winning bid was for \$5.6 million and is projected to power 435,000 homes. That company must now submit outreach plans to BOEM once the lease is finalized. BOEM must approve those outreach plans before any more activity on that lease can occur.

BOEM will hold an auction at some point in the future for "GOM Wind 2" - the areas off Texas - but a date hasn't been set yet.

---

## Return 'Em Right Best Practices Manual



Return 'Em Right, a widespread outreach campaign focused on reducing barotrauma in reef fish, has released a [Best Practices Manual](#).

In December of 2021, key experts from the recreational fishing community identified the best strategies to reduce mortality of released reef fish at a two-day workshop. The manual, a product of this workshop, guides recreational anglers through choices they make during a fishing trip to maximize the chances of fish surviving release.

[Return 'Em Right](#) is an angler-driven program that provides training and free release gear to Gulf of Mexico reef fish anglers who are committed to using best release practices and helping the future of the fishery. To date the program has reached nearly 30,000 offshore anglers.

Education is a critical tool in reducing discards, and we support measures like this that help address this threat to our fisheries.

---

## **In Memoriam**

The commercial fishing industry lost three icons this year. Wayne Werner, Buster Niquet, and Charlie Bergmann will be sorely missed by our community.

Wayne Werner was a founding member of the Shareholders' Alliance and a proud member of the Board of Directors. His impact on the fishery is immeasurable - from his decades of time on the water, to his public testimony at Gulf Council meetings that included his boat's anchor and even a sombrero. He was a staunch advocate for better data and regularly collaborated with scientists. He was also respected not only by fishermen, but by local and federal policy makers and regulators for his innovative ideas and constant willingness to share his experiences.

Buster Niquet was a staple at Gulf Council meetings. He began fishing in the 1950s on a charter vessel, and then commercially fished on a longline for many years. He had immense knowledge and was always ready to share his experience in the fishery and provide valuable context to decisions in front of the Gulf Council. Right up until the end, he could be seen handwriting his testimony and delivering it to the Gulf Council at the microphone.

Charlie Bergmann was another familiar face in the industry and at Gulf Council meetings. His love for fisheries was evident and appreciated by the industry - from his work at Lunds Fisheries, career at NOAA, and service in the management process in the Mid-Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and internationally. His wife, Kay Williams, is a former Gulf Council member. His straight-faced humor and broad historical knowledge were always welcome.

The passing of these three men leaves a big hole in the fishing and scientific community, and a loss of immense amounts of knowledge about the history of fisheries in the Gulf. They are gone, but not forgotten.

---

## Become a Member

Know a commercial fisherman, seafood business owner, or seafood enthusiast? Encourage them to [join the Shareholders' Alliance](#) by sending a [membership form](#)! We can't do what we do without the support of members like you and welcome new additions. [Join us today!](#)

[Membership Form](#)

---

*The Shareholders' Alliance is the largest organization of commercial grouper and snapper fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico.*

*We work hard to ensure that our fisheries are sustainably managed so our fishing businesses can thrive and our fishing communities can exist for future generations.*

*We are the harvesters that provide much of the American public with a reliable source of domestically caught wild Gulf seafood, and we do this through a philosophy that sustainable seafood and profitable fishing businesses depend on healthy fish populations.*

[www.shareholdersalliance.org](http://www.shareholdersalliance.org)

Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance  
1902 Wharf Road  
Galveston, TX | 77550 US

[Facebook](#) · [Unsubscribe](#)