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## **Gulf of Mexico Red Grouper Quota Instability**

The [Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance](#) today issued the following statement on NOAA Fisheries' two recent actions affecting [red grouper](#) commercial fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico:

On Monday, May 2, 2022, NOAA Fisheries published a [Final Rule](#) for Reef Fish Amendment 53, which [reduced the commercial sector's allocation](#) of the red grouper quota from 76% to 59.3%.

Yesterday, on Tuesday, May 3, 2022, NOAA Fisheries published a [Proposed Rule](#) to Modify Red Grouper Catch Limits that would, if implemented, slightly increase red grouper catch limits based on a new interim analysis (IA) that indicated a slight improvement in the health status of red grouper since 2019.

While a positive step, this latest action doesn't fix the damage caused by Amendment 53. In fact, exacerbates it.

Without the reallocation under Amendment 53, commercial fishermen should be receiving 76% of the new proposed 4.96 million pound annual catch limit (ACL) – which would have been an approximately 600,000 pound increase from the 2021 quota. Instead, under the two actions NOAA Fisheries took this week, commercial fishermen will be limited to a 2.94 million pound ACL and 2.79 million pound Annual Catch Target (ACT). This reduction represents a significant loss in commercial fishing access, millions of dollars in lost revenue to commercial fishing families, and hundreds of thousands fewer grouper servings available for the seafood-consuming public.

Furthermore, this new 2.79 million pound quota is still 210,000 pounds less than the quota level commercial fishermen were operating under prior to Amendment 53.

	<b>Pre-Amendment 53 Lbs. (2021)</b>	<b>Amendment 53 Lbs. (2022)</b>	<b>Proposed Rule Lbs. (date TBD)</b>	<b>Difference Between Proposed Rule (At 76% Commercial) and Pre-Amendment 53 (lbs.)</b>	<b>Proposed Rule Loss Due to Amendment 53 (Lbs.)</b>	<b>Difference Between Proposed Rule and Pre-Amendment 53 (lbs.)</b>
	76% <i>Commercial</i> 24% <i>Recreational</i>	59.3% <i>Commercial</i> 40.7% <i>Recreational</i>	59.3% <i>Commercial</i> 40.7% <i>Recreational</i>	76% <i>Commercial</i> 24% <i>Recreational</i>		59.3% <i>Commercial</i> 40.7% <i>Recreational</i>
Total ACL	4,160,000	4,260,000	4,960,000	4,960,000	-	800,000
Commercial ACL	3,160,000	2,530,000	2,940,000	3,769,600	(829,600)	(220,000)
<b>Commercial ACT</b>	<b>3,000,000</b>	<b>2,400,000</b>	<b>2,790,000</b>	<b>3,581,120</b>	<b>(791,120)</b>	<b>(210,000)</b>

In reality, commercial fishermen have lost even more than that. Reallocation to the recreational sector under Amendment 53 increases dead discards and commercial fishermen are forced to fish under a reduced catch limit to cover those discards. So commercial fishermen are penalized twice: first by the reallocation, and second by lower overall catch limits to offset increased recreational discards. In essence, commercial fishermen now have a smaller piece of a smaller pie as a result of Amendment 53. If the allocation remained 76% commercial, fewer red grouper would be thrown overboard dead, and the catch level increase under the IA would be even larger than what is in this Proposed Rule.

Simply put – Amendment 53 is the “gift” that keeps on taking. Commercial fishermen were penalized in Amendment 53 through a reduction in quota and now they are on the hook for subsidizing an even greater amount of recreational dead discards that could undo the progress this stock has made since 2019. The proportional losses through Amendment 53 will carry on in perpetuity as the recreational sector wastes more red grouper by throwing them overboard dead.

The forthcoming slight quota increase, while generally a positive sign for the red grouper population, does not restore the commercial quota to the level it was in recent years and falls far short of what the commercial sector and seafood consumers would have access to without the reallocation from Amendment 53.

To be clear – we will give credit where credit is due, and we want to thank NOAA Fisheries for conducting this rapid IA in response to repeated concerns by commercial fishermen about the years-long process translating the results of a stock assessment into management, and the need for more real-time data collection and science-based decision making.

But this marginal quota increase does nothing to solve the fundamental reallocation and recreational mismanagement problems (dead discards, lack of census-based reporting) that landed us here in the first place.

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