

# GULF OF MEXICO GROUPER MANAGEMENT IN FEDERAL WATERS

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*February 2010*



### Which species of grouper are managed in the Gulf of Mexico?

- The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) and NOAA Fisheries Service regulate the harvest of 15 grouper species
- The fishery is divided into shallow-water grouper (SWG) and deepwater grouper (DWG) complexes:
  - Red, gag, black, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth, rock hind, and red hind grouper comprise the SWG complex
  - Snowy, yellowedge, speckled hind, warsaw, and misty grouper comprise the DWG complex
  - Nassau and goliath grouper are managed as individual species and are prohibited from being harvested

### How are commercial grouper fisheries managed in the Gulf of Mexico?

Table below shows 2010 Gulf of Mexico grouper commercial regulations

Species	Minimum Size Limit	Closed Season	Annual Quota
Gag	24" TL	The Edges from Jan 1 to April 30	SWG 7.57mp gw  Gag 1.41mp gw
Black Grouper	24" TL		
Red Grouper	18" TL		
Yellowfin Grouper	20" TL		Red Grouper 5.75mp gw  Others Combined 0.41mp gw
Scamp	16" TL		
Yellowmouth, Rock Hind, Red Hind Grouper	None		
Misty, Snowy, Yellowedge Speckled Hind, Warsaw Grouper	None		DWG 1.02mp gw
Goliath and Nassau Grouper	Harvest Prohibited		

gw = gutted weight mp=million pounds TL=total length

- SWG and DWG quotas are managed under an individual fishing quota (IFQ).
- Scamp, Warsaw Grouper and Speckled Hind may be considered either SWG or DWG species under the IFQ program, with some limitations.

**How are recreational grouper fisheries managed in the Gulf of Mexico?**

- Table below shows the 2010 Gulf of Mexico grouper recreational regulations

Species	Catch Target	Minimum Size Limit	Closed Season	Daily Bag Limit	Remarks
Gag	2.14mp gw	22" TL	Feb 1- March 31	4 per person in aggregate of all groupers except Goliath and Nassau grouper. No more than 2 gag per person (counts as part of the 4 grouper aggregate bag limit), and no more than 2 red grouper per person (counts as part of the 4 grouper aggregate bag limit)	Must use circle hooks when fishing with natural baits.  For-hire captain & crew prohibited from retaining bag limits of any grouper while under charter.  Federally permitted for-hire reef fish vessels must comply with the more restrictive of federal or state reef fish regulations when fishing for reef fish in state waters.
Black Grouper		22" TL			
Red Grouper	1.82mp gw	20" TL			
Yellowfin Grouper		20" TL			
Scamp		16" TL			
Yellowmouth, Rock Hind, Red Hind Grouper		None			
Misty, Snowy, Yellowedge Grouper		None			
Speckled Hind, Warsaw Grouper		None			
Goliath and Nassau Grouper		Harvest Prohibited			

gw = gutted weight mp = million pounds TL = total length

## **How is the status of grouper populations determined?**

- The status of grouper and other federally managed fish stocks in the southeastern United States is periodically evaluated through the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process.
- The SEDAR process was initiated in 2002 to improve the quality and reliability of fisheries population assessments and emphasizes constituent and stakeholder participation in assessment development.
- The SEDAR process involves fishermen, scientists, environmental interests, and managers in three separate week-long, public workshops:
  - The first is a data workshop, where participants review all available data and make consensus determinations about which data constitute the best scientific information available on the fishery, and how the data should be used in the assessment.
  - The second is an assessment workshop, where data are evaluated in models to determine the status of the population.
  - The third is a review workshop, where independent scientific experts review the assessment and make a determination about the adequacy of the data and assessment methodology.
- The Gulf Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) also reviews final SEDAR reports and supporting information, and makes a determination supporting or opposing assessment methodologies and findings. This committee is composed of economists, biologists, and sociologists who are knowledgeable about the technical aspects of Gulf of Mexico fisheries. The SSC provides ongoing scientific advice for fishery management decisions .
- For more information about the SEDAR process visit:  
<http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/>.

## **What is the current status of Gulf of Mexico grouper populations?**

- The status of only two grouper species (red grouper and gag) is known:
  - Red grouper population was analyzed in a SEDAR stock assessment update in May 2009, and found to be not overfished but below target biomass levels.
  - Gag population was analyzed in a SEDAR stock assessment update in May 2009, and found to be overfished and undergoing overfishing, which means the fishery is taking too many fish too quickly to maximize yield over the long term.
- A black grouper assessment is on going and will be available sometime in 2010.
- A yellowedge grouper assessment is scheduled for 2010.
- The status of the remaining grouper species is unknown.

**What management measures have the Gulf Council and NOAA Fisheries Service implemented in recent years to end overfishing of grouper and reduce sea turtle bycatch ?**

- In July 2004, NOAA Fisheries Service implemented regulations intended to reduce red grouper harvest by 9.4 percent and established the two-fish red grouper bag limit within the aggregate five-fish grouper bag limit.
- In August 2005, NOAA Fisheries Service implemented an interim rule that reduced the red grouper bag limit from 2 fish to 1 fish per person per day.
- In July 2006, NOAA Fisheries Service replaced interim regulations with new regulations proposed by the Gulf Council.
  - New regulations included a recreational bag limit of one red grouper per person per day and a rule prohibiting the captain and crew of for-hire vessels from retaining the bag limit of any grouper while under charter.
- In November 2006, NOAA Fisheries Service implemented a February 15 to March 15 recreational seasonal closure after the 2006 gag assessment confirmed the gag population was undergoing overfishing.
- In April 2009, NOAA Fisheries Service implemented regulations that established annual catch limits and accountability measures for gag and red grouper, extended the closed season for the recreational fishery from February 1 to March 31, reduced bycatch of gag and red grouper, and continued Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps marine reserves indefinitely.
- In May 2009, NOAA Fisheries Service implemented an emergency rule prohibiting the use of bottom longline gear in the eastern Gulf of Mexico shoreward of the 50 fathom depth contour from May 18 to October 28, 2009, to reduce sea turtle bycatch.
- In June 2009, NOAA Fisheries Service implemented “The Edges Rule” to establish a four-month closure of the area during the gag spawning season January 1 to April 30.
- In September 2009, the Gulf Council submitted Amendment 31, which contains actions to allow continued operation of the bottom longline component of the reef fish fishery, while providing adequate protection to sea turtles. If approved by NOAA Fisheries Service, regulations stemming from this amendment would establish:
  - An endorsement for the reef fish bottom longline vessels for which 62 vessels are expected to qualify.
  - A prohibition on longlining for reef fish in the eastern Gulf shoreward of the 35-fathom contour during the months of June-August.
  - During other, months longlining would be allowed seaward of the 20-fathom contour.
  - A restriction limiting the number of hooks on board bottom longline vessels to 1,000 of which 750 can be rigged for fishing.

- NOAA Fisheries Service is currently accepting public comment on Amendment 31 and its associated proposed regulations and will decide whether to approve, partially approve, or disapprove the amendment in March 2010 (see link below).
- On October 16, 2009, NOAA Fisheries Service replaced the emergency rule implemented in May 2009 with a rule which prohibits the use of bottom longline gear in the eastern Gulf of Mexico shoreward of the 35-fathom depth contour and restricts the number of hooks allowed onboard vessels with bottom longline gear to 1,000 hooks of which only 750 can be rigged for fishing. This rule will remain in place until permanent regulations stemming from Amendment 31, or other sea turtle mitigation measures can be established.
- On January 1, 2010 an Individual Fishing Quota System (IFQ) for the commercial grouper and tilefish fisheries was implemented.
- NOAA Fisheries Service and the Gulf Council are currently developing Amendment 32 to reduce catch levels for gag and red grouper based on the 2009 stock assessment. This amendment will be distributed for public comment in the spring of 2010.

#### **How can I participate in grouper management?**

- For more information about current regulations and opportunities to become involved in the Gulf Council process, visit: [www.gulfcouncil.org](http://www.gulfcouncil.org)

#### **Related Links:**

- IFQ Webpage:  
<https://ifq.sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/ifq/>
- IFQ Frequently Asked Questions:  
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/pdfs/Am29BeforeImplementationFAQs092209.pdf>
- Amendment 31:  
[http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/esa/BottomLongline\\_GOM\\_reeffish/Amendment%2031\\_FEIS\\_1-19-2010.pdf](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/esa/BottomLongline_GOM_reeffish/Amendment%2031_FEIS_1-19-2010.pdf)