



March 13, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

Management of the red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico continues to be a major challenge with increasing dissatisfaction among anglers and serious calls for restructuring the Gulf red snapper management system. As a result, a number of proposals and various drafts of legislation for changing this system have emerged. Recognizing that significant changes are being considered, the marine fisheries directors from the five Gulf States have been engaged in an effort to develop and document an alternative to the current management strategy that has mutual agreement and support. Together, we have developed a framework for cooperative state-based management of Gulf red snapper; the enclosed document outlines the conceptual elements of that plan.

Under this alternative concept, the Gulf States would coordinate management of red snapper throughout the Gulf of Mexico through a new, independent body called the Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority (GSR SMA). The GSR SMA would be comprised of the principle marine fisheries managers from each Gulf States, and the management authority for Gulf red snapper would no longer reside within the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

The GSR SMA framework outlines a straightforward process that would allow states to use flexible management approaches to manage red snapper to meet local needs as well as Gulf-wide conservation goals. Each state would be responsible for all management of red snapper in their respective state and adjacent federal waters. The GSR SMA would approve each state's management plan, coordinate population assessments, provide consistent accountability measures, and distribute federal funding for research, assessment, and management.

Each state fisheries management agency places great value in working together in partnership and collaboration to ensure we have a robust, sustainable, and accessible red snapper fishery in the Gulf. The states recognize the importance of the red snapper fishery to the fabric and identity of local communities throughout the Gulf as well as the tremendous economic impact that it provides each state.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you the GSRMSMA concept agreed upon by each state. If there are any questions or comments about the concept, please do not hesitate to contact any of us directly.

Sincerely,



Robin Riechers
Director of Coastal Fisheries
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department



Randy Pausina
Assistant Secretary, Office of Fisheries
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and
Fisheries



Jamie Miller
Executive Director
Mississippi Department of Marine Resources



Chris Blankenship
Director, Marine Resources Division
Alabama Department of Conservation and
Natural Resources



Jessica McCawley
Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Enclosure

Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority (GSRMSA)

This document outlines elements of a plan in which the Gulf States would coordinate management of red snapper throughout the Gulf of Mexico through the Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority (GSRMSA).

Management

The governing body of GSRMSA would be comprised of the principal fisheries manager (or his/her proxy) from each of the five Gulf States. There would be a rotating chair serving a two-year term. All actions of GSRMSA would be by majority vote. The primary function of the GSRMSA would be approval of each state's or group of states' Red Snapper Fisheries Management Plan (hereafter referred to as the Plan) which would address all components (commercial and recreational) of the Gulf States red snapper fishery. The Plan may extend to multiple years with annual review of specific components to include, but not limited to: assessment methodology, data collection, annual management measures and timelines.

The Plan would include an initial three-year prohibition on any actions that might affect individual fishing quotas or management structure of the commercial fishery, effective from date of adoption by GSRMSA. During this period, NOAA Fisheries through the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council would continue to manage the commercial fishery under existing regulations.

Each state would be responsible for the management of the fishery in their respective state territorial sea and adjacent exclusive economic zone (EEZ) water using the best available science and information. The states would be required to ensure overfishing will not occur through the full range of management and assessment strategies available to each state or group of states acting in concert. These strategies would not be limited to those based on total allowable catch. The GSRMSA, as a whole would annually review and approve the red snapper management actions of an individual state or groups of states acting in concert. If the status of the fishery in each state is in equilibrium or expanding, no change in management actions may be required. If the status of the fishery is below equilibrium or declining, the responsible state or states would be required to take appropriate action to revise existing management actions to establish equilibrium, and those actions would have to be approved by the GSRMSA.

The GSRMSA or each state would be required to prepare an annual report on the status of the fishery based on the individual states (or states acting in concert) management strategies and assessment methodologies. The GSRMSA will conduct a periodic gulf-wide population review of red snapper on a schedule not to exceed every 5 years.

Assessment

Each individual state or group of states would conduct an assessment of the status of red snapper populations within their adjacent waters. The full range of assessment methodologies would be available to each state or group of states using the best available science to inform management actions.

Assessments would be conducted periodically on a timeline determined by the GRSMA. Assessment methodologies and data collection strategies for both fisheries dependent and independent data would be approved by the GRSMA. The GRSMA would be required to conduct a periodic and Gulf-wide population review of the health of the fishery and status of red snapper on a schedule not to exceed five years between such assessments.

Accountability

Each Gulf state would formally agree to comply fully with management measures developed through the GRSMA-approved Plan under a memorandum of agreement. The GRSMA could request additional accountability actions through the Secretary of Commerce if a Gulf state or group of Gulf states adopted management measures or regulations significantly inconsistent from the red snapper management framework identified in the Plan when such inconsistent measures could negatively impact the interests of other Gulf states with regard to red snapper management.

The procedures established as part of the Striped Bass Act, Sec. 5153 - Monitoring of Implementation and Enforcement by Coastal States would serve as a model for developing procedures for action through the Secretary of Commerce specific to the red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. Federal action to provide accountability and ensure consistency would be limited to the federal waters adjacent to the state(s) that adopted inconsistent management measures or actions. Under no circumstances would federal authority or action supersede that of an individual state within designated state waters. The following link provides greater detail on the procedures used by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in regards to management of striped bass:
http://www.asmf.org/uploads/file/Striped_Bass_Act.pdf

State regulation of red snapper would extend seaward from a state's shoreline to the 200 mile limit (Figure 1). Individual states would enforce regulations within their boundaries under licensing to that state or with agreement and appropriate licensing in other adjacent states. State regulations related to red snapper under the Plan would apply to all fishing

activities associated with red snapper landed in a given state, not just state registered vessels.

State waters for all Gulf States would extend to nine nautical miles for the purpose of uniform enforcement and management actions related to red snapper.

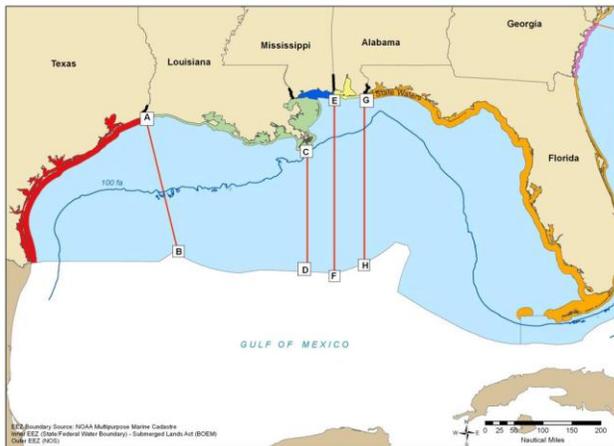
Funding

Federal funding specific to red snapper now going to federal research, assessment and management would be appropriated to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and passed through to the states for use and distribution under the GRSMA.

Federal funding of enforcement that is currently provided to the Gulf States for fisheries enforcement shall not be reduced because of transfer of red snapper management to GRSMA. Federal agents will work in concert with deputized state agents to enforce state regulations approved by the GRSMA.

The National Marine Fisheries Service will continue to provide access to all fisheries data and services available before transfer of red snapper management under the same arrangements and conditions after the transfer of management authority to GRSMA.

Figure 1. Jurisdictional boundaries designated for enforcement purposes at a state level. These boundaries may be adjusted based on state(s) exercising the option to work in concert on regulations with each other.



Statutory Provisions

In order to establish the GRSMA, the management of red snapper must be vacated from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan and any provisions that have been established for red snapper with that plan or any amendments to that plan.

Additionally, this Act and any provisions of this Act regarding management and enforcement of any regulations and management provisions to the extent that there is any conflict will take precedence over the MSA and any portions of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan.

Key Provisions

Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority (GSRMSA)

This document provides a summary of the key elements of a plan in which the Gulf states would coordinate management of red snapper throughout the Gulf of Mexico through the proposed Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority (GSRMSA).

Management & Assessment

- The governing body for the GSRMSA would be comprised of the principal fisheries manager (or his/her proxy) from each of the five Gulf States.
 - Primary function of the GSRMSA would be approval of each state's Red Snapper Fisheries Management Plan which would address all components of the fishery.
 - Within each Plan there would be an initial three year prohibition on actions affecting individual fishing quotas.
- Using the best available science, each state would be responsible for the management of the fishery in their respective state territorial sea and adjacent exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters to ensure that overfishing would not occur.
- Reporting requirements will include an annual report on the status of the fishery from each state(s) and a gulf-wide population review will be conducted at least every 5 years.

Accountability

- Each state would formally agree to comply fully with management measures developed through the GSRMSA-approved Plan.
- The GSRMSA could request additional accountability actions through the Secretary of Commerce if a Gulf state or group of Gulf states adopted management measures or regulations significantly inconsistent with the Plan.
- Any accountability action based on a request to the Secretary of Commerce would be limited to federal waters adjacent to the state or states that adopted measures inconsistent with the Plan.
- State regulations and enforcement of those regulations for red snapper would extend seaward from a states shoreline to the 200 mile limit.
- State waters for all Gulf States would extend to nine nautical miles for the purpose of uniform enforcement and management actions related to red snapper.

Funding

- Federal funding for research, assessment and management of red snapper would be appropriated to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and passed to the states.
- Federal funding for fisheries enforcement shall continue at current levels and NMFS will continue to share fisheries data and other data necessary for management after transfer of authority.

Statutory Provisions

- Provisions of this Act will take precedence over the MSA and any portions of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan.