

**Managing
Our Nation's
Fisheries 3**
Advancing Sustainability



*The Gulf of Mexico
Fishery Management Council*

Located in Tampa, Florida

Jurisdiction: EEZ off Texas,
Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama,
and the West Coast of Florida
(246,583 square miles)

Manages 42 species under eight
fishery management plans

Council has 17 voting members
and 24 permanent advisory bodies



*The challenge of
rebuilding red
snapper*

*A successful
catch share
program*

Up until 1976, when the Regional Fishery Management Councils were formed, federal fishery management was almost non-existent and was limited to only 12 miles off our nation's coasts. Massive foreign fishing fleets, fishing in what are now U.S. federal waters, were a huge contributor to the overexploitation of the fisheries.

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Act (MSA) aided in the development of the domestic fishing industry by extending federal waters out to 200 miles and phasing out foreign fishing. The MSA also established eight Regional Councils, including the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, to manage the fisheries and promote conservation.

Spanning more than 246,583 square miles, the U.S. Gulf of Mexico is home to some of the most productive fisheries in the world. In 2011, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reported 1.8 billion pounds of commercial fish and shellfish were harvested from the Gulf – \$818 million in revenue.

The Gulf of Mexico is also a haven for the millions of recreational anglers who fish its waters, inshore and offshore, from Texas to Florida. According to the NMFS 2011 report *Fisheries Economics of the U.S.*, over 3 million recreational anglers took 23 million fishing trips in the Gulf of Mexico region in 2011.

Reef Fish

Regionally, Gulf of Mexico reef fish are the most sought after fish by both commercial and recreational fishermen, and red snapper is arguably the most prized fish in the entire Gulf.

In 1984, the Gulf Council implemented a Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan to rebuild declining reef fish stocks, including red snapper. Since that time, the plan has undergone 38 full amendments and numerous regulatory or framework actions. Many of those amendments were specific to red snapper, including one that established the very first commercial Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program in the Gulf of Mexico.

The red snapper Commercial IFQ program was implemented in 2007 to address problems resulting from overcapacity and derby fishing in the commercial fishery. Under the program, qualified commercial fishermen were assigned IFQ shares, based on historical landings, to harvest a percentage of the commercial quota.

Within the first years, the program reduced capacity of the commercial fishing fleet; helped to keep commercial harvest below the annual quota; and reduced bycatch of both red snapper and other fish species. Today, the race to fish has ended, and the commercial red snapper fishery is more economically viable.





Under the IFQ program, safety at sea has also improved, and consumers can now enjoy fresh red snapper year-round. Meanwhile, the commercial and recreational quotas have increased 60% since 2008.

While increases in the total annual quota have been consistent, recreational anglers continue to experience shorter seasons each year. Though seemingly counterintuitive, these shorter seasons are a sign that the stock is successfully rebuilding. As the stock rebuilds, anglers encounter not only more fish, but larger fish. As a result, anglers are catching more pounds of fish per trip, so the quota is filled faster, with less effort and fewer individual fish.

A red snapper stock assessment is underway and will be completed in the summer of 2013. Based on the assessment results, the Council will make appropriate adjustments to the fishery management plan.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics

King and Spanish mackerel are part of the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan and are managed jointly by the Gulf and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils.

In the 70s and early 80s, with no regulations in place, both the commercial and recreational harvest of these fish exceeded the stock's ability to reproduce at a sustainable level. This led to overfishing.

A rebuilding plan that included harvest controls was put in place in 1983. Since then, quotas, bag limits, and trip limits have also been established, and in 1990, the use of drift gillnets was prohibited.

The rebuilding plan was a success, and today, the mackerel stock remains a viable one for both commercial and recreational fishermen.

Shrimp

The Gulf of Mexico commercial shrimp fishery is one of the nation's largest and most valuable fisheries. Shrimp has higher landings revenues than any other species or species group, averaging \$371 million between 2002 to 2011.

Finfish bycatch, particularly juvenile red snapper, has been an issue in the shrimp fishery because it lowers recruitment and, eventually, the overall productivity of the red snapper fishery. To address this, the Council amended its Shrimp Fishery Management Plan to require bycatch reduction devices on shrimp trawls. The use of these devices has reduced finfish bycatch by a minimum of 30%.

Aquaculture

The Gulf Council's Aquaculture Fishery Management Plan is the only federal fishery management plan to solely address aquaculture. The plan establishes a regional permitting process to manage the development of an environmentally sound and economically sustainable aquaculture industry.

Other

The Gulf Council also has management plans for coral, spiny lobster, and red drum.

For more information on the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council or its Fishery Management Plans, please visit www.gulfcouncil.org.

