



PUBLIC HEARING GUIDE

12/5/11



Reef Fish Amendment 35 Greater Amberjack Rebuilding Plan



Provisions in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require regional fishery management councils to develop management measures to prevent overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield from each fishery for the United States fishing industry

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To view the virtual Public Hearing presentation on this amendment, please visit www.youtube.com/user/gulfcouncil.

What is a Public Hearing?

A public hearing is held at the end of the fishery management plan process and provides the public with an opportunity to comment on a fishery management plan or amendment that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is developing. Public hearings are conducted after the Council has selected a preferred alternative for each proposed action in the plan or amendment. Public comments should focus on the alternatives contained in each action. Suggestions, issues, and concerns expressed during the public hearing are then presented to the Council for review and consideration before final action is taken.

How does a public hearing affect fisheries management?

Comments provided during the public hearing process are witnessed by at least one Council member and are reported to the full Council prior to final action. Your input is considered as the Council deliberates and chooses the most appropriate management measures to address the issue(s) at hand.

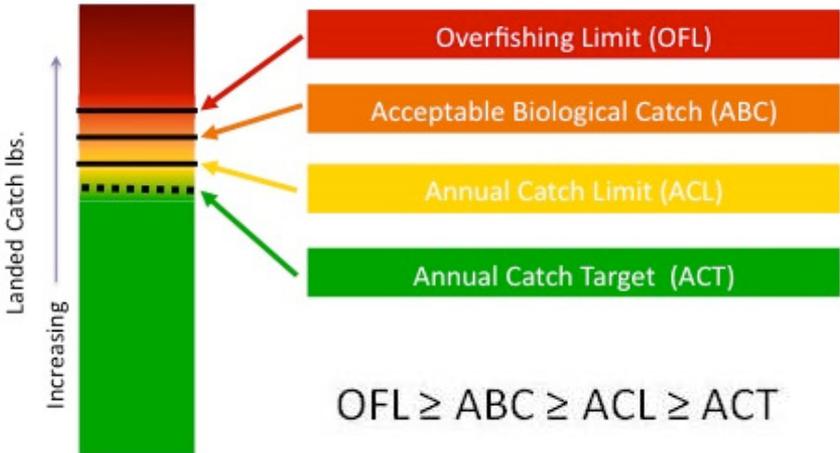
How else can I get involved?

There are many ways you can help the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council identify fishery management needs and develop reasonable management alternatives. There is a range of options for participation in fisheries management, each dependent on how actively involved you want to become. The first step to becoming involved is to educate yourself about the management process by visiting our website at www.gulfcouncil.org, signing up to receive our communications, and contacting council members and staff to discuss management. You can attend meetings, serve on panels and committees that advise the Council on fisheries, and even apply to become a council member.

[Introduction to Amendment 35](#)

This amendment considers changing the greater amberjack rebuilding plan to modify the stock Annual Catch Limit and to prevent sector Annual Catch Limit (quota) overages.

The latest greater amberjack assessment shows that the stock is both overfished (population is too low) and undergoing overfishing (rate of removals is too high). The Gulf Council's scientific advisors recommended that the greater amberjack Acceptable Biological Catch be set at 1,780,000 million pounds whole weight. As a rule, an Annual Catch Limit cannot be higher than the Acceptable Biological Catch, so the current stock Annual Catch Limit of 1,870,000 million pounds whole weight must be adjusted.



Under federal law (National Standard 1 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act) the system of Annual Catch Limits must be re-evaluated and modified if catch exceeds the Annual Catch Limit for a stock more than once in four years. Both the commercial and recreational sectors have exceeded the greater amberjack sector Annual Catch Limits (quotas) twice in the last three years. This amendment considers modifying recreational size limits and closed seasons, and modifying commercial trip limits and closed seasons to help prevent each sector from exceeding its Annual Catch Limit (quota).

Greater Amberjack Rebuilding History

2003 – A rebuilding plan was developed for greater amberjack based on stock assessment results that indicated the stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing. The plan aimed to rebuild the stock in 10 years, by the end of 2012.

2008 – Catch limits were readjusted to meet the rebuilding goal after a new stock assessment found the stock was not recovering at the desired rate.

- Established a stock Annual Catch Limit of 1,870,000 million pounds whole weight.
- Established sector Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures
 - If sector landings are projected to exceed their quota, then the sector can be closed for the rest of the year.
 - The following year's quota can be reduced to adjust for the sector overage.
- Quota allocations were established and divided the stock Annual Catch Limit as 73% recreational and 27% commercial.
- The recreational minimum size limit was increased from 28 inches to 30 inches fork length.
- A zero bag limit was set for captain and crew of for-hire vessels.

2011 – Based on the results of a stock assessment update, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee determined greater amberjack is still overfished and undergoing overfishing. Greater amberjack is in its 9th year of its rebuilding plan, which ends in 2012. Management measures in Amendment 35 are expected to reduce overfishing, but until a new stock assessment has been completed it is unknown if greater amberjack will meet its rebuilding schedule.

Amendment 35 - Summary of Actions

Action 1: Modifications to the Greater Amberjack Rebuilding Plan

This action considers adjusting the greater amberjack stock Annual Catch Limit. Based on results from the 2011 greater amberjack stock assessment, the Gulf Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee set the greater amberjack Acceptable Biological Catch at 1,780,000 million pounds whole weight. The current Annual Catch Limit of 1,870,000 million pounds whole weight exceeds the newly recommended Acceptable Biological Catch and must be adjusted.

Alternative 1: No Action – do not modify the greater amberjack rebuilding plan or adjust the stock Annual Catch Limit (defined as total allowable catch in Amendment 30A). The stock Annual Catch Limit would remain at 1,871,000 pounds whole weight unless overages occur. Based on the 27% commercial and 73% recreational allocation of greater amberjack the sector ACLs are as follows:

Stock ACL	Commercial ACL (quota)	Recreational ACL (quota)
1,871,000	503,000	1,368,000

Alternative 2: Modify the rebuilding plan for greater amberjack as specified by the Scientific and Statistical Committee using Tier 3b of the Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule and set the stock Annual Catch Limit at 1,780,000 pounds whole weight. Based on the 27% commercial and 73% recreational allocation of greater amberjack, the sector Annual Catch Limits are as follows:

Stock ACL = ABC	Commercial ACL (quota)	Recreational ACL (quota)
1,780,000	481,000	1,299,000

Preferred Alternative 3: Modify the rebuilding plan for greater amberjack using the Gulf Council's Preferred Annual Catch Limit/Annual Catch Target Control Rule established in the Generic Annual Catch Limit/Accountability Measures Amendment, using these methods:

Option a: Would set stock Annual Catch Limit = 1,539,000 pounds whole weight as reduced from Acceptable Biological Catch.

Option a. Stock ACL	
Sector	ACLs (quotas)
Commercial	409,000
Recreational	1,130,000
Total	1,539,000

Preferred Option b: Would set the ACL = ABC = 1,780,000 pounds whole weight and ACT = 1,539,000 pounds whole weight as reduced from Annual Catch Limit. Based on the 27% commercial and 73% recreational allocation of greater amberjack, the sector Annual Catch Limits are as follows:

Preferred Option b. ACL = ABC and set an ACT		
Sector	ACL = ABC	ACTs (quotas)
Commercial	481,000	409,000
Recreational	1,299,000	1,130,000
Total	1,780,000	1,539,000

Alternative 4: Modify the rebuilding plan for greater amberjack and set the Stock ACL at 0 pounds until a new stock assessment has been completed.

Action 2: Recreational Management Measures

The recreational sector has exceeded its sector Annual Catch Limit (quota) twice in the three years since sector Annual Catch Limits were implemented. The current June 1-July 31 recreational closed season was established in 2011 to prevent closures early in the year and make at least one prized species available to fish for when red snapper season is closed. The Gulf Council is considering changing the recreational minimum size limit and closed season for greater amberjack to prevent the recreational sector from exceeding its sector Annual Catch Target (quota). (Table 2.2.2 below shows the combined results of actions 2.1 and 2.2.)

Action 2.1 Modify the Recreational Minimum Size Limit

Studies have shown that 50% of female greater amberjack are reproductively mature at approximately 35" fork length. It is estimated that at the current 30" minimum size limit, fewer than 5% of female greater amberjack reach sexual maturity. This action considers increasing the minimum size limit for greater amberjack to increase the spawning potential of the stock.

Preferred Alternative 1: No action - do not modify the current minimum size limit of 30" fork length.

Alternative 2: Modify the minimum size limit for greater amberjack to 32" fork length.

Alternative 3: Modify the minimum size limit for greater amberjack to 34" fork length.

Alternative 4: Modify the minimum size limit for greater amberjack to 36" fork length.

Action 2.2 Modify the Recreational Closed Seasons for Greater Amberjack

Peak spawning for greater amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico occurs in March and April. The recreational greater amberjack season has a fixed June-July closure, and is managed with an in-season closure once the sector Annual Catch Limit is reached. This action considers changes to the recreational closed season for greater amberjack.

Preferred Alternative 1: No action - do not modify the current fixed closed season June 1-July 31.

Alternative 2: Eliminate the fixed closed season and open January 1 until quota is filled.

Alternative 3: Modify the recreational seasonal closure to March 1-May 31.

Alternative 4: Modify the recreational seasonal closure to January 1-May 31 and November 1-December 31.

Alternative 5: Modify the recreational seasonal closure to June 1-July 23.

Table 2.2.2. Alternatives under Action 2.1 minimum size limits and Action 2.2 closed seasons that would achieve recreational Annual Catch Target (quota) = 1,130,000 whole weight from action 1 preferred alternative 3b. Note: 2012 is a leap year so there are 366 days in the year. Landings = total estimated harvest and the current management goal. Total removals = estimated harvest plus dead discards for comparative purposes.

Action 2.1, Alternative 1: Maintain the 30" fork length minimum size limit				
Action 2.2 Alternative	Closed Season	Days Open	Landings	Total Removals
1	Jun-Jul (status quo)	305	1,071,000	1,562,000
2	None	200	1,114,000	1,596,000
3	Mar-May, Dec 25-31	267	1,128,000	1,608,000
4	Jan-May, Nov-Dec	153	953,000	1,467,000
5	Jun 1-Jul 23	313	1,136,000*	1,614,000
Action 2.1, Alternative 2: Modify minimum size limit to 32" fork length				
Action 2.2 Alternative	Closed Season	Days Open	Landings	Total Removals
1	Jun-Jul (status quo)	305	840,000	1,377,000
2	None	239	1,113,000	1,596,000
3	Mar-May	274	883,000	1,411,000
4	Jan-May, Nov-Dec	153	738,000	1,295,000
5	Jun 1-Jul 23	313	889,000	1,416,000

Action 2.1, Alternative 3: Modify minimum size limit to 34" fork length				
Action 2.2 Alternative	Closed Season	Days Open	Landings	Total Removals
1	None	366	1,044,083	1,540,000
2	"	"	"	"
3	"	"	"	"
4	"	"	"	"
5	"	"	"	"
Action 2.1, Alternative 4: Modify minimum size limit to 36" fork length				
Action 2.2 Alternative	Closed Season	Days Open	Landings	Total Removals
1	None	366	754,000	1,308,000
2	"	"	"	"
3	"	"	"	"
4	"	"	"	"
5	"	"	"	"

*June 1-July 23 closure landings are projected to exceed alternative 3, but if used as the Annual Catch Target instead of the Annual Catch Limit, is still a reasonable alternative.

Action 3: Commercial Management Measures

The commercial sector has exceeded its quota twice in the three years since sector Annual Catch Limits were implemented. The Council is considering adjusting management measures to ensure quota overages do not occur in the commercial greater amberjack fishery. Currently, the commercial harvest of greater amberjack is closed March 1-May 31 and there is no commercial trip limit. Once the commercial quota is filled, commercial fishing is closed for the remainder of the year.

This action reconsiders the March-May in-season closure which is during peak spawning months. This action also considers establishing commercial trip limits for greater amberjack to reduce the rate of harvest. Doing so could help avoid an early closure; prevent a quota overage; prevent a market flood; and reduce bycatch of the species later in the year after a quota closure.

Alternative 1: No action - do not adjust the commercial fixed closed season from the current March 1-May 31 closed season. Do not establish a commercial trip limit.

Table 3.1. Alternative 1 options for commercial trip limits and respective expected closure dates and days the fishery is open based on two different model approaches.

Commercial Harvest	Closed Season	Alternative 1		Alternative 2		Preferred Alternative 3	
		503,000 lbs.		481,000 lbs.		409,000 lbs.	
		Model		Model		Model	
		1	2	1	2	1	2
No Trip Limit	Mar-May	17-Sept	31-Aug	9-Sept	7-Aug	17-Aug	1-Aug
		169	152	161	145	138	122

Note: Both model approaches are shown to offer the Council a range of expected closure days and open fishing days under various stock Annual Catch Limit alternatives described in Action 1. The closure date is as close to the sector Annual Catch Limit or sector Annual Catch Target as possible without exceeding it, and 2012 is a leap year so there are 366 days in the year.



Photo by Mike Jennings

Preferred Alternative 2: Establish a commercial greater amberjack trip limit and maintain March 1-May 31 closed season.

Preferred Option a: Establish a 2,000 pound whole weight trip limit for greater amberjack.

Option b: Establish a 1,500 pound whole weight trip limit for greater amberjack.

Option c: Establish a 1,000 pound whole weight trip limit for greater amberjack.

Option d: Establish a 500 pound whole weight trip limit for greater amberjack.

Table 3.2. Alternative 2 options for commercial trip limits and respective expected closure dates and days the fishery is open based on two different model approaches.

Commercial Harvest	Closed Season	Alternative 1		Alternative 2		Preferred Alternative 3	
		503,000 lbs.		481,000 lbs.		409,000 lbs.	
		Model		Model		Model	
		1	2	1	2	1	2
Preferred Option a: 2,000 lbs.	Mar-May	17-Sept	31-Aug	9-Sept	7-Aug	17-Aug	1-Aug
		169	152	161	145	138	122
Option b: 1,500 lbs.	Mar-May	31-Dec	20-Dec	26-Dec	4-Dec	2-Nov	14-Oct
		274	220	268	247	214	196
Option c: 1,000 lbs.	Mar-May	31-Dec	31-Dec	31-Dec	31-Dec	23-Dec	1-Dec
		274	274	274	274	266	244
Option d: 500 lbs.	Mar-May	31-Dec	31-Dec	31-Dec	31-Dec	31-Dec	17-Dec
		274	274	274	274	274	250

Note: Both model approaches are shown to offer the Council a range of expected closure days and open fishing days under various stock Annual Catch Limit alternatives described in Action 1. The closure date is as close to the sector Annual Catch Limit or sector Annual Catch Target as possible without exceeding it, and 2012 is a leap year so there are 366 days in the year.

Alternative 3: Establish a commercial greater amberjack trip limit and eliminate March 1-May 31 closed season.

Option a: Establish a 2,000 pound whole weight trip limit for greater amberjack.

Option b: Establish a 1,500 pound whole weight trip limit for greater amberjack.

Option c: Establish a 1,000 pound whole weight trip limit for greater amberjack.

Option d: Establish a 500 pound whole weight trip limit for greater amberjack.

Table 3.3. Alternative 3 options for commercial trip limits and respective expected closure dates and days the fishery is open based on two different model approaches.

Commercial Harvest	Closed Season	Alternative 1		Alternative 2		Preferred Alternative 3	
		503,000 lbs.		481,000 lbs.		409,000 lbs.	
		Model		Model		Model	
		1	2	1	2	1	2
Option a: 2,000 lbs.	None	18-Aug	17-Jul	9-Aug	8-Jul	13-Jul	11-Jun
		231	199	222	190	195	163
Option b: 1,500 lbs.	None	14-Sept	7-Aug	31-Aug	25-Jul	29-Jul	27-Jun
		257	220	244	210	210	179
Option c: 1,000 lbs.	None	12-Nov	23-Sept	23-Oct	9-Sept	31-Aug	28-Jul
		316	267	297	253	243	210
Option d: 500 lbs.	None	31-Dec	2-Oct	31-Dec	9-Sept	13-Dec	4-Aug
		366	276	366	261	348	217

Note: Both model approaches are shown to offer the Council a range of expected closure days and open fishing days under various stock Annual Catch Limit alternatives described in Action 1. The closure date is as close to the sector Annual Catch Limit or sector Annual Catch Target as possible without exceeding it, and 2012 is a leap year so there are 366 days in the year.

Common Terms and Definitions

Overfishing Limit (OFL) – The threshold that allows for the greatest possible harvest of fish, and above which the size of the stock is no longer large enough to sustain itself.

Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) – Determined by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee. It is the amount of fish that can be removed from a stock. It is set lower than the overfishing limit to account for scientific uncertainty in natural fluctuations in stock size.

Annual Catch Limit (ACL) – The amount of fish that can be harvested from the stock each year. ACL must be set by the Council at a level that is less than or equal to the acceptable biological catch. If the annual catch limit is exceeded, accountability measures are triggered.

Annual Catch Target (ACT) – Set by the Council if deemed necessary. Annual Catch target is set at a level lower than the annual catch limit to account for any management uncertainty that may occur. It creates a buffer so that harvest does not exceed Annual Catch Limit and trigger accountability measures.

Accountability Measure (AM) – Actions taken to prevent fish harvest from exceeding Annual Catch Limits, and if exceeded, can mitigate or correct the overage. There are two types of accountability measures: in-season measures, designed to reduce the likelihood annual catch limits will be exceeded within a fishing year; and post-season measures, which address overages after they have occurred.

Allocation – A portion of the stock Annual Catch Limit divided between fishing sectors.



Photo by Mike Larkin

NOTES



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