



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

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Gulf of Mexico Commercial Grouper and Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota Program (IFQ) Referendum Result

NOAA Fisheries Service has completed a referendum to determine if commercial grouper and tilefish fishers approved of a proposed grouper and tilefish IFQ program for the Gulf of Mexico. Referendum ballots were mailed to eligible voters on December 5, 2008. Eligible voters were those individuals who possessed, on December 1, 2008, an active or renewable commercial Gulf of Mexico reef fish permit with combined average annual grouper and tilefish landings of at least 8,000 pounds (gutted weight) during 1999-2004 (with the allowance of dropping one year). Referendum ballots had to be returned to NOAA Fisheries Service's Southeast Regional Office by 4:30 p.m. Eastern time on January 5, 2009.

All ballots were mailed via the United States Postal Service using certified mail return receipt requested. Of 301 ballots distributed, 273 (90 percent) were returned by eligible voters, 23 ballots received by eligible voters were not returned, and 5 ballots were not claimed by the addressees.

Approval of the referendum required that a majority of the eligible votes cast be in favor of the IFQ. Of the 273 votes cast, a total of 220 votes (81 percent) were in favor of the proposed IFQ program, and 50 (18 percent) were opposed to the proposed IFQ program. Three returned ballots were declared invalid.

Results of the referendum will also be announced at the January 2009 meeting of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council).

Eligibility for the IFQ program is not the same as eligibility for the referendum. Individuals will qualify to participate in the IFQ program (if approved by the Council), provided they have an active or renewable commercial Gulf of Mexico reef fish permit and annual average grouper or tilefish landings of one or more pounds during the 1999-2004 qualifying period (with the allowance of dropping one year). NOAA Fisheries Service estimates more than 1,000 individuals will qualify for the proposed IFQ program.

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