



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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

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NOAA Seeks Comments on a Proposed Rule to Set a Bag Limit for Vermilion Snapper, Set the Annual Catch Limit for Yellowtail Snapper, and Eliminate the Venting Tool Requirement

NOAA Fisheries is seeking public comment on a proposed rule that would set a bag limit for vermilion snapper, set the annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper, and eliminate the venting tool requirement. The proposed rule will publish in the *Federal Register* on May 7, 2013, with the comment period ending June 6, 2013.

Vermilion snapper

The proposed rule would set a 10-vermilion snapper bag limit within the 20-fish aggregate reef fish bag limit. Vermilion snapper is not overfished or undergoing overfishing. However, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) received testimony from some fishermen that the vermilion snapper stock may be declining. In addition, recreational landings have been increasing in recent years and could contribute to the vermilion snapper annual catch limit being met before the end of the fishing year. This would result in a closure of vermilion snapper fishing. To minimize the risk this could occur, the Council recommended a 10-fish vermilion snapper bag limit within the 20-fish aggregate reef fish bag limit.

Yellowtail snapper

The proposed rule would also increase the Gulf of Mexico yellowtail snapper annual catch limit from 725,000 pounds to 901,125 pounds. A recent stock assessment determined the yellowtail snapper stock is considered to be healthy and well above the biomass needed to harvest the maximum sustainable yield. Therefore, the Council recommended the annual catch limit be increased.

Venting tool requirement

The proposed rule would eliminate the requirement to use venting tools when fishing for reef fish. Some scientific studies have questioned the usefulness of venting tools in preventing barotrauma in fish, particularly those caught in deep waters. In addition, some fish caught in shallow waters may not need to be vented, and attempts at venting may cause damage to fish by improper venting and increased handling times. Finally, the current requirement interferes with using other devices such as fish descenders. These devices can be used by fishermen to return fish back to depth. Because of these factors, the Council recommended the venting tool requirement be rescinded.

Species in the Reef Fish 20-Fish Aggregate Bag Limit

- Vermilion Snapper
- Lane Snapper
- Almaco Jack
- Gray Triggerfish
- Tilefish
- Goldface Tilefish
- Blueline Tilefish

Request for Comments

NOAA Fisheries must receive comments on this proposed rule no later than June 6, 2013. We will address all comments specifically directed to the framework action or the proposed rule in the final rule. You may obtain electronic copies of the proposed rule and the amendment from the NOAA Fisheries Web site:

http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_fisheries/reef_fish/index.html or the e-Rulemaking Portal: www.regulations.gov.

How to Submit Comments

You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2013-0038, by any of the following methods:

Electronic Submission: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2013-0038, click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

Mail: Submit written comments to Peter Hood, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office, Sustainable Fisheries Division, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505.

Instructions: Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NOAA Fisheries. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NOAA Fisheries will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, or Adobe PDF file formats only.