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**NATIONAL OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION**  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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## **NOAA Announces Fishing Rules to Protect Gulf of Mexico Gag and Red Grouper**

NOAA's Fisheries Service has announced a temporary rule that will prohibit recreational fishing for gag grouper in Gulf of Mexico federal waters. The six-month rule becomes effective on January 1, 2011, and can be extended an additional six months if necessary.

This rule will also reduce the commercial quota from 1.49 million pounds to 100,000 pounds and will prohibit the use of the red grouper multi-use individual fishing quota allocation for harvesting gag grouper. The quota will discourage commercial vessels from targeting gag or from fishing in areas with high accidental catch of gag, while still allowing the retention of some accidentally-caught gag that would otherwise be discarded dead at sea.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council requested the fisheries service implement this temporary rule while the council explores long-term measures to address the poor condition of the gag grouper population.

"This was a difficult decision, but a necessary action to protect the Gulf gag grouper population," said Roy Crabtree, southeast regional administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "We hope this is a short term action and will look to increase the harvest of gag as soon as possible."

The most recent scientific assessment update shows too many gag grouper are being removed from the population too quickly, indicating a need for protection under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

The council is expected to recommend long-term measures for gag grouper to the fisheries service sometime next year. NOAA's Fisheries Service will provide public comment periods before implementing final long-term management measures.

Through a separate long-term rule, the council also requested the fisheries service to reduce the red grouper total allowable catch from 7.57 million pounds to 5.68 million pounds, due to a recent scientific assessment update that indicates the population has declined since 2005. This rule will also become effective on January 1, 2011.

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