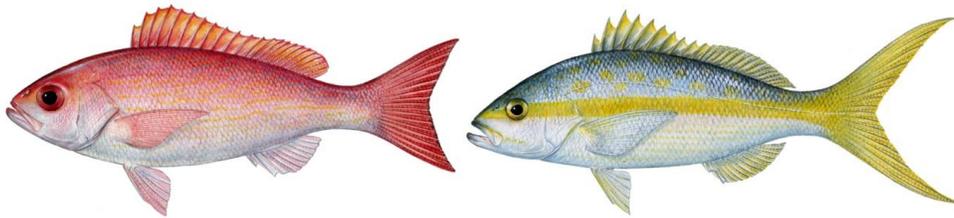


**PROPOSED RULE: VERMILION SNAPPER, YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER,
AND MODIFYING VENTING TOOL REGULATIONS FOR GULF OF
MEXICO FEDERAL WATERS
Framework Action**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

May 2013



What is being proposed in this rule?

- A bag limit of 10 vermillion snapper would be included in the 20-reef fish aggregate bag limit.
- The yellowtail snapper annual catch limit would be increased from 725,000 pounds to 901,125 pounds.
- The requirement to use venting tools when fishing for reef fish would be eliminated.

Why does the vermillion snapper harvest need to be restricted?

- Vermilion snapper are not overfished (the population is too low) or undergoing overfishing (too many fish are caught).
- A recent stock assessment indicated the vermillion snapper annual catch limit could be increased, but the last year of data used in the assessment was from 2010.
- The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) heard testimony from fishermen who observed signs over the past few years the vermillion snapper stock may be declining.
- To reduce the risk of overfishing, the Gulf Council decided not to increase the vermillion snapper annual catch limit.
- Accountability measures close vermillion snapper if the annual catch limit is met or projected to be met.
- Recreational landings have been increasing in recent years (with the exception of 2010).
- To reduce the chances of closing vermillion snapper fishing early, the Council recommended limiting the recreational sector to 10 fish with in the 20-fish aggregate bag limit.

***Species in the Reef Fish
20-Fish Aggregate Bag
Limit***

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

Why can the yellowtail snapper annual catch limit be increased?

- The current annual catch limit for Gulf yellowtail snapper is 725,000 pounds and is based on past landings data.
- A 2012 stock assessment indicated that the U.S. vermilion snapper stock was healthy.
- Because yellowtail snapper in the U.S. comprises a single stock, the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions are combined for stock assessments.
- The stock is split up with 75% of the harvest going to the South Atlantic and 25% of the harvest going to the Gulf.
- The Scientific and Statistical Committees of the South Atlantic and Gulf Council reviewed the stock assessment and recommended the acceptable biological catch can be increased.
- The Gulf share of the acceptable biological catch is 1.0125 million pounds.
- To account for management uncertainty, the Gulf Council set the annual catch limit at 901,125 pounds.

Annual Catch Limit

The amount of fish that can be harvested from the stock each year.

What is a venting tool?

- Many marine reef fish have a gas-filled swim bladder that controls buoyancy to allow the fish to maintain a certain depth in the water column.
- When a fish is retrieved from deeper waters, the gas in the swimbladder can over-expand and fill the body cavity with trapped gases when the fish is brought quickly to the surface.
- A venting tool is a device to deflate the body cavity so a fish has an easier time swimming back down to the bottom.

Why do the venting tool requirements need to be changed?

- The venting tool requirement was implemented with two other measures (non-stainless steel circle hooks and dehooking devices) to reduce the number of fish that die from being caught and then released.
- Recent research has questioned the usefulness of venting tools in preventing the deaths of released fish.
- Problems with the venting tool requirement include:
 - Being less effective for fish caught at deeper depths.
 - 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.
 - The current requirement interferes with using other devices such as fish descenders, which are devices that take the fish back to depth without venting.
- Because of these problems, the Gulf Council recommended the venting tool requirement be eliminated, but that fishermen should be encouraged to use devices that help fish survive the catch and release experience.

How can I submit comments on the proposed rule?

- NOAA Fisheries will be taking public comments on the proposed rule for the framework action from May 7, 2013, through June 6, 2013.
- Instructions on how to submit comments on the proposed rule for the framework action can be found in the [Fishery Bulletin](#).

Related Links:

- [FB13-037: NOAA Fisheries is Seeking 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](#)
- [2013 Vermilion Snapper, Yellowtail Snapper, and Venting Tool Framework Action](#)
- [Proposed rule](#)