



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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NOAA Announces Approval of an Exempted Fishing Permit for a Pilot Study by Gulf of Mexico Headboats Evaluating an Allocation-Based Management System

NOAA Fisheries has issued an exempted fishing permit (EFP) to the Gulf of Mexico Headboat Cooperative (Cooperative). The Cooperative consists of headboat owners/captains. The Cooperative intends to evaluate the efficiency of an allocation-based management system, using a limited number of headboats in a two-year pilot study.

This study, to be conducted in the Gulf of Mexico, is intended to (1) assess whether such a system can better achieve conservation goals established in the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico, (2) evaluate the effectiveness of a more timely electronic data reporting system, and (3) evaluate the potential social and economic benefits of an alternative management strategy for the headboat segment of the recreational fishing sector within the Gulf of Mexico reef fish fishery.

The Cooperative requested an EFP that authorizes their members to harvest a specific amount of red snapper and gag at any time during the 2014 and 2015 fishing years. Their allocation is based on the Cooperative participants' 2011 aggregate landings of red snapper and gag as a percentage of the total landings in that year for each species. Those percentages were applied to the expected red snapper and gag recreational catches allowed for 2014 and 2015.

The Cooperative was allocated 148,089 pounds whole weight (ww) for red snapper, based on the proposed red snapper recreational catch of 5.39

million pounds ww. The Cooperative was also allocated 42,114 pounds gutted weight (gw) of gag, based on the current gag recreational catch of 1.519 mp gw. These weights will be translated into numbers of fish.

NOAA Fisheries has authorized a maximum of 20 headboats to participate in the Cooperative. The Cooperative currently consists of 11 headboats, and it may add additional vessels before the 2014 fishing year begins.

All vessels in the program will be required to purchase, install, activate, and maintain a Vessel Monitoring System. A participating captain will "hail out" as the vessel leaves the dock, and "hail in" at least one hour prior to landing, alerting law enforcement and port agents to his/her return. Landings will be reported at the end of the trip using electronic reporting software approved by NOAA Fisheries, and allocations will be monitored through the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office's Catch Share Program Web site.

Academic researchers, in collaboration with the Cooperative, intend to conduct a socio-economic study of the anticipated effects of the change in headboat cooperative management using currently available data sources. Simultaneously, they will develop additional survey instruments to gather economic data for an analysis of the effects of the pilot project on Cooperative vessels after its first and second years. Data collection will emphasize impacts of the pilot project.