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Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council:
January 2022 Outreach and Education Committee

Descending Efforts Across the Southeast Region

Programs in the Southeast

1. Return 'Em Right – NRDA/Sea Grant
2. DESCEND Act
3. Snapper/Grouper Amendment 29 – South Atlantic Council
4. Deck to Depth – The Nature Conservancy



Return 'Em Right

Funding

- NRDA Open Ocean TIG

Partners

- GSMFC, Sea Grant, NOAA, Gulf Council

Goals:

- Reduce mortality in reef fish resulting from barotrauma and release.
- Improve angler experiences with release gear.
- Increase the overall health of reef fish fisheries.

Return 'Em Right: Communication Components

Education & Outreach

- An independently branded program guided by anglers, grounded by science that promotes best release practices.

Fish descending device (FDD) distribution

- Education module a prerequisite for gear.
- Distributed in phases:
 - Phase 1: CFH – Launched fall 2021
 - Phase 2: Private Anglers – Launch Spring 2022



Return 'Em Right: Research Components

- Validate biological and logistical effectiveness of release methods.
- Develop more accurate release mortality rates for high-priority reef fishes.
- Assess depredation on fish released using FDDs.
- Test effectiveness of new technologies or practices to reduce depredation.

Return 'Em Right: Research Components

Principal Investigator	Institution	Research Priorities
Dr. Stephen Szedlmayer	Auburn University	Compare release mortality & survival of descended Red Snapper across depth zones
Dr. Marcus Drymon	Mississippi State University	Evaluate depredation rates of released reef fish; depredator identity
Erik Lang	LA Dept of Wildlife & Fisheries	Compare efficiency of release; characterize depredation; survey anglers' device type preferences
Dr. Will Patterson	University of Florida	Investigate seasonal release mortality of descended Gag Grouper

Return 'Em Right: Monitoring Components

- Rates of use for FDDs and venting for recreational sector
- At-sea observer programs
- State surveys
- Federal surveys (e.g. SRHS, SEFHIER, MRIP)

DESCEND Act

“Direct Enhancement of Snapper Conservation and the Economy through Novel Devices”

Requirements

- Persons aboard commercial, for-hire, and private recreational vessels in the Gulf of Mexico to have venting tool or descending device rigged and ready to use when fishing for reef fish in federal waters.

DESCEND Act: Definitions

Descending Device

- An instrument capable of releasing a fish at the depth from which the fish was caught.
- It is a weighted hook, lip clamp, or box that will hold the fish while it is lowered to depth.
- The rule would require a minimum of a 16-ounce weight and a minimum length of 60 feet of line attached to the descending device.



DESCEND Act: Definitions

Venting Tool

- A venting tool must be capable of penetrating the abdomen of a fish to release the excess gases accumulated in body cavity when a fish is retrieved from depth.
- A venting tool must be a sharpened, hollow instrument that allows air to escape, such as a hypodermic syringe with the plunger removed.
- The rule sets a 16–gauge needle, which has an outside diameter of 0.065 inches, as the minimum diameter hollow tube that must be used.
- Gulf of Mexico reef fish fishermen may also choose to use a larger diameter hollow needle because it will allow more air to escape from a fish rapidly.
- Fishermen must not use a tool that is not hollow, such as a knife or an ice pick, to vent a fish.

DESCEND Act: Rule Making

Comment
Period

- November 9 –
December 9, 2021

Expected
Implementation

- Mid-January 2022

Snapper Grouper Amendment 29

Organization

- South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Effective Date

- July 15, 2020

Requirements

- Descending device be onboard and ready to use on commercial, charter, and private vessels fishing for Snapper/Grouper species in South Atlantic federal waters.
- Non-offset and non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing north of 28°N latitude.
- Non-stainless steel hooks when fishing for snapper-grouper with hook-and-line gear with natural baits.

Deck to Depth

Organization

- The Nature Conservancy

Geographical Area

- Florida

Species

- 55 species of snapper and grouper

Goals

- Promote the use of descending devices
- Help snapper and grouper species recover. Ultimately resulting in less regulation, longer fishing seasons, a healthier ocean and fish populations robust enough to support both recreational and commercial fishing.

