

Summary of Public Engagement for the Recreational Initiative



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Overview of Public Engagement Process



Two Public Input Sessions

- November 18, 2024 - 14 commenters, 25-30 on webinar
- January 16, 2025 - 10 commenters, 25-30 on webinar

We provided updates on the Recreational Initiative's progress and gathered public feedback. The following slides summarize the challenges identified and the proposed solutions shared during these sessions.

Key Challenges - Data Issues



Data Issues:

- No mandatory self-reporting, leading to inconsistent and unreliable data
- MRIP and retrospective data systems fail to reflect real-time conditions
- Stock assessments often misalign with angler observations, eroding trust
- Self-reported data lacks robust validation, reducing its credibility for decision-making
- Data gaps hinder adaptive strategies like split seasons
- Skepticism over discard mortality estimates raises concerns about data accuracy

Key Challenges - Discard & Bycatch



Discard and Bycatch

- Misaligned seasons lead to high discard mortality
- Released fish often preyed upon by sharks or dolphins
- Bycatch of non-target species remains high due to overlapping fishing efforts
- Seasonal closures disrupt the ability to target species effectively, causing waste
- Lack of adaptive management exacerbates discard issues in mixed-species fisheries
- Anglers express frustration over wasted catches and its impact on stock assessments

Key Challenges (cont.)



Season Mismanagement

- Short fishing seasons concentrate effort, increasing discard rates
- Overlap between fishing seasons and spawning periods raise sustainability concerns

Environmental and Technological Pressures

- Degraded nearshore habitats (e.g., water quality issues) force anglers offshore
- Advanced fishing technologies intensify pressure on offshore stocks

Key Challenges (cont.)



Complex Regulations

- Technical language and complicated rules deter casual anglers
- Lack of transparency and user-friendly communication creates frustration

Transparency Issues

- Stakeholders desire third-party audits of scientific data
- Errors in stock assessments harm livelihoods and erode public trust in management

Strategies and Solutions - Data & Stock Assessments



Better Data Practices

- Deploy biologists on private fishing trips to gather accurate discard data
- Validate self-reporting systems through robust phone apps and technology
- Include diver-provided data (e.g., video evidence) for stock assessments

Faster Assessments

- Automate and accelerate interim stock assessments to reduce lag
- Base regulations on more recent data for adaptive management

Strategies and Solutions - Regulations



Regulatory Adjustments

- Implement multi-species bag limits
- Align fishing seasons across species to minimize bycatch and discards
- Use harvest tags to control fishing effort and gather reliable data
- Explore regional management approaches to address local stock conditions and fishing practices

Multi-year ACLs

- Smooth out data spikes over several years to improve consistency
- Allow minor overages without immediate penalties

Strategies and Solutions (cont.)



Environmental Strategies

- Collaborate with agencies to address river pollution and restore nearshore habitats
- Enhance water quality to reduce need to go further and further offshore

Education & Outreach

- Simplify complex management concepts using social media and public outreach
- Foster trust by explaining fishery processes and encouraging compliance
- Build understanding of the connection between regulations and sustainability

Summary of Challenges & Solutions



Challenges

- Data issues, discard and bycatch, environmental and technological pressures, complex regulations

Solutions

- Better data practices, regulatory adjustments, environmental initiatives, education and outreach