

Public Hearing Summary  
Reef Fish Amendment 62: Red Grouper Management Measures

**Virtual Meeting**  
**January 15, 2026**

**Council/Staff**

CJ Sweetman  
John Sanchez  
Mike Allen  
Matt Freeman  
Emily Muehlstein

**19 Members of the public attended**

**Stace Stroud** – Recreational; Big Bend, Florida

Supports regional management for red grouper. In the Big Bend area of Florida, there are plenty of red grouper and fewer fisherman compared to other parts of the coast. He regularly catches tons of red grouper when targeting red snapper.

**Bob Zales** – Commercial; Florida

Encourages the Council to move this amendment forward as fast as possible. He is hearing that all the transmitted amendments are piled up at the Secretary of Commerce's office and nothing is getting implemented. He hopes we can expedite this to get the allocation straightened out as fast as possible. He is concerned that a huge quota increase mid-year will adversely affect the market. He supports the incremental increases in **Action 1, Preferred Alternative 3**. He expresses concern about the assessment suddenly showing such a dramatic change from a depressed stock to an excessively healthy stock and assumes the change might be attributed to the SRFS data and changes in natural mortality. On the recreational side, there is a lack of recreational data collection. He sent the Council information on electronic data collection in Europe which proves that we can do it here.

**Zachary Istre** - Commercial Spearfisherman; Big Bend, Florida

He does 1800 -2000 dives a year in 60 to 200 feet of water from Tampa to Apalachicola, Florida. He's not seeing the amount of red grouper that the assessment says are there. Additionally, last year, with the huge increase, the fishermen didn't catch it all because the red grouper aren't there. He suggests the Council implement recreational reporting.

**David Duncan** - Charter; Texas

He wonders if the Shallow-water grouper closure will still be in place in 2026. He also wants to better understand the Council process, so he can get more involved.

**Virtual Meeting**  
**January 20, 2026**

**Council/Staff**

John Sanchez

CJ Sweetman

Troy Frady

Matt Freeman

Emily Muehlstein

**21 members of the public attended.**

**Bill Tucker** – Commercial; Florida

Concerned about the quota being raised based on what he sees on the water. He doesn't know how the recreational harvest numbers work but, the commercial process is easy to understand. There is a very experienced commercial fleet trying to catch the allocation, but they're having a hard time. They would fill the quota if they could. When the fleet can't catch the current ACL, it makes him question the wisdom in moving forward to increase it.

**Robert Houghton** – Florida Panhandle

Gag fishing is better than it's ever been. He questions how we get the stock assessment numbers and the landings estimates.

**Mathew DeLilio** – Recreational; Placida, Florida

Mostly aligned with the preferred alternatives. Agrees with the removal of the 20-fathom closure because it's likely that it's not being adhered to. The closure does add more pressure to near shore and shallow water areas, but fishing pressure is significant and will continue even with the removal of the closure. The Council and FWC should increase the population of juveniles in nearshore waters especially since they move offshore as they mature. He recently started diving, and he doesn't see a lot of red groupers although he

does see lots of gags near shore. Knowing how red grouper mature, it's great that the assessment shows lots of fish, but he's not seeing what he expects to see. He supports and encourages development of recreational catch reporting.

**Ashford Rosenberg** – Gulf of America Shareholders Alliance

Supports moving this document forward quickly. Urges the Council and NOAA to fast track this document though rulemaking as quickly as possible. She does support the phase-in increase in **Action 1, Preferred Alternative 3**. The precautionary approach allows the fleet to adjust their business but also allows for any potential future reductions to not be as drastic. A Phase-in approach is novel, and she would love to see them considered for both increases and decreases for other species. She emphasizes that a late year quota increase in 2026 will cause the fleet to leave fish in the water two years in a row. Last year, 62% of the commercial red grouper quota was harvested, and this year could be similar. This doesn't achieve OY and counters benefits of the IFQ program.

**Written Comment Summary**

September 2025 – January 21, 2026

631 Public Hearing video views.

**5 comments received.**

- Encouragement for finalizing this document as soon as possible to ensure the quota is distributed as early as possible.
- Support for **Preferred Action 1, Alternative 3**. While the assessment shows a healthy stock, too much of an increase too quickly may crash the stock.
- The stock seems very healthy with plenty of juveniles
- The Council should consider a minimum size limit decrease.
- Support for keeping the recreational season closed to reduce gag discards out of gag season.