

Tab F, No. 7

EXPLORING MANDATORY REPORTING FOR THE PRIVATE RECREATIONAL SECTOR OF THE DEEP- WATER GROUPER COMPLEX FISHERY

Joint presentation from Gregg Bray (GSMFC)
and Lisa Hollensead (Gulf Council staff) to the
Gulf Council's Data Collection Committee
January 26th, 2026



PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Background

Overview of recreational data collection using mandatory approaches at the state level

- *Review of Tail n' Scales (MS) and Snapper Check (AL)*
- *Pros and cons of mandatory reporting survey designs*
- *Investigations on improving estimates of private recreation effort*

Recommendations from Gulf Fishery Information Network (FIN)

- *Specific to the deep-water grouper complex*

Overview of recreational data collection using mandatory approaches at the federal-level

- **Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS)**
- **For-hire sector**

Conclusions

Next steps

Bold = Lisa Hollensead

Italics = Gregg Bray

BACKGROUND: HOW TO COLLECT FISHERIES DATA?

Census

- Assumes 100% of data fields are reported 100% of time
- Examples: Individual Fishing Quota Program; Southeast Region Headboat Survey (nearly)
- Pros: Real-time data collection, low uncertainty
- Cons: Requires substantial oversight, violating the 100% reporting 100% of the time assumption would render output unusable since reporting rates (how many people didn't report when they should have) would be unknown

Survey

- A proportion of information collected and then expanded out to the total fishing population
- Examples: LACreel, ALCreel, MSCreel, MRIP, TPWD, SRFS
- Pros: Requires less oversight and is generally cheaper to administer than census
- Cons: Outcomes are estimates which have uncertainty, takes time to process and QA/QC

BACKGROUND: GULF COUNCIL AUGUST 2025 REQUEST

A presentation that explores the use of a mandatory reporting system for the recreational sector of the deep-water grouper fishery.

Council staff requested the GSMFC's Gulf Fishing Information Network (FIN) Committee to provide some insights at their Oct. 2025 meeting

The GulfFIN Committee is a state-federal cooperative group that is tasked with cooperatively collecting, managing, and disseminating marine commercial, recreational and anadromous fishery data and information for the conservation and management of fishery resources in the Gulf.

Recommendations from this Committee along with some background of mandatory reporting approaches in private recreational data collection in the Gulf and recent workshop will be presented by Gregg Bray (GSMFC staff)

REVIEW OF TAILS N' SCALES AND SNAPPER CHECK

- Alabama Snapper Check: developed in 2014, certified June 2018
- Mississippi Tails n' Scales: developed in 2015, certified June 2018
- Mandatory reporting required by state law
 - Enforcement had ability to confiscate fish and administer fines if in violation
- Data were used to monitor landings of private recreational Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) through state management of red snapper
 - Landings were available timelier than MRIP wave estimates helping reduce possibility of exceeding individual state's ACLs

WHAT WORKED AND WHAT CHALLENGES EMERGED?

- Increased reporting helped monitoring especially in shorter seasons
- Provided flexibility for states to implement a less burdensome survey
- Electronic reporting tools made it easier for anglers to report
- Reporting compliance was low in some areas
- Must be feasible for law enforcement
- Required additional costs
- Calibration of each state survey to MRIP a major challenge

OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORKSHOPS IMPROVE PRIVATE RECREATIONAL FISHING SURVEYS IN THE GULF

Recreational Effort Improvement Workshop – June 4-6, 2024

- <https://www.gsmfc.org/publications/GSMFC%20Number%20331.pdf>

Recreational Discard Data Improvement Workshop – July 30-August 4, 2024

- <https://www.gsmfc.org/publications/GSMFC%20Number%20332.pdf>

Challenges to novel approaches: coverage, technological maturity, voluntary participation or mandatory compliance, costs for long term implementation

7 projects receiving funding: 3 effort projects and 4 discard projects

- Effort: testing satellite imagery; cellular app data with dockside surveys
- Discard: catch cards, electronic monitoring, observer data compared with dockside recall
- <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/noaa-fisheries-and-gulf-states-marine-fisheries-commission-announce-red-snapper-data>

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GULFFIN (OCT. 2025)

Focus on the deep-water grouper complex

Identified challenges

- Small group of anglers; most likely launching from private properties and cannot be accessed by samplers, will be difficult to validate landings reports (required for survey)
- Fishing well offshore which also makes enforcement difficult (required for survey or census)
- Many anglers are resistant to surveying and especially mandatory regulations (required for census)

Possible approaches

- Add extra question on offshore endorsement that asks whether the angler participates in the deep drop fishery. If so, do a targeted survey of those identified anglers (either phone or e-mail) that asks them about their effort and targeting of deep-water grouper species
- Encourage biological sampling through cooperative research project with agency or academic projects and highlight the angler's participation (i.e., an article in a fishing publication or through some other outreach method)
- Recommended a “carrot” approach
- Louisiana does a focused red snapper e-mail survey for its offshore anglers (~28% response)
- Texas does a mandatory reporting of alligator gar through its mobile app or online (estimates ~ 5-10% compliance)

ATLANTIC HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES (HMS) MANDATORY RECREATIONAL REPORTING

Automated Landings Reporting System

In the Gulf, Recreational fishermen with an Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat or Atlantic HMS Angling Permit must report swordfish and billfish landings, as well as bluefin tuna landings and dead discards, within 24 hours of returning from a trip. There are 4 electronic ways to for anglers to send their reports.

Tournament Reporting

This mandatory reporting program applies to operators of Atlantic recreational fishing tournaments targeting tunas, billfish, swordfish, or sharks. Such events must be registered with NOAA Fisheries at least one month in advance. All associated catch and effort must be reported to NOAA Fisheries within seven days of the tournament's end.

FEDERAL FOR-HIRE DATA COLLECTION PROGRAMS

Southeast Regional Headboat Survey

Began in Gulf in 1986

Mandatory weekly reporting of electronic logbook

Recently lost funding for dockside intercept validation throughout much of the Gulf due to insufficient monetary support

Proposed SEFHIER 2.0

Would require trip-level logbook reporting (would also include SRHS vessels)

Hail-out/hail-in reporting to estimate effort and inform dockside samplers when a vessel could be surveyed for validation (would be mandatory for captain to report to dockside sampler if intercepted)

Did not fish reports would be required

CONCLUSIONS

- Mandatory reporting can help fill data gaps in biological knowledge and improve estimates of effort and harvest in recreational fisheries
- Technological advancements allow for near real-time electronic reporting which can also improve harvest monitoring during short fishing seasons
- Violating the assumptions of a census design has consequences for interpreting data streams and substantial violations can hinder the ability to use these data for stock assessments or management
- Some mechanism of validation is required (costly)
- Electronic data must be warehoused and accessible (costly)
- Must be enforceable

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

If census:

Logbook (what did you catch/throw back etc.) and effort (what day were you out?, how long were you out?, where were you fishing?) information would mandatorily reported on each trip an angler targeted and/or harvested a DWG species.

Some type of permit or license to harvest DWG would be required

Would that permit or license have a cost to the angler and who would distribute those permits?

How would mandatory reporting be enforced and what would be penalties for non-compliance?

Who would be program administrator and warehouse data? The Gulf states? NMFS?

If survey:

How will anglers be selected for mandatory survey?

What minimum proportion should be sampled to produce fishery-wide estimates?

How will survey be validated and calibrated?

How would mandatory reporting be enforced and what would be penalties for non-compliance?

Who would be program administrator and warehouse data? The Gulf states? NMFS?

Would the Council consider GulfFIN's recommendation of adding a DWG questionnaire to the existing state surveys? (may not be useful for management at this time)