

Establishing Flexible Management Authority for Federal For-Hire Red Snapper Fishing:

How Could It Work?



**GULF
COUNCIL**

Background: What's the issue?

- Despite having longer fishing seasons year over year, FH has not been landing its ACT in recent years
- Have had current system of FH management for multiple species, and specifically for red snapper; what has changed?
 - Weather variability?
 - Economic conditions?
 - Catch composition?
- One discussed goal: timely management response to fishery performance
- Council input here CRITICAL



Background: Council Direction

Designate authority to the Regional Administrator to:

- Modify select federal for-hire fishing regulations for red snapper based on predetermined criteria
 - Bag limits
 - Minimum size limits
 - Fishing season start dates, structure (core season?)
 - Weekends only? Continuous? Split season?
- RA can already reopen the fishing season prior to the end of the fishing year
- Timing consideration:
 - Most recent stock assessment has 2016 terminal year
 - Advice from current stock assessment (SEDAR 98) will not be ready until early 2027

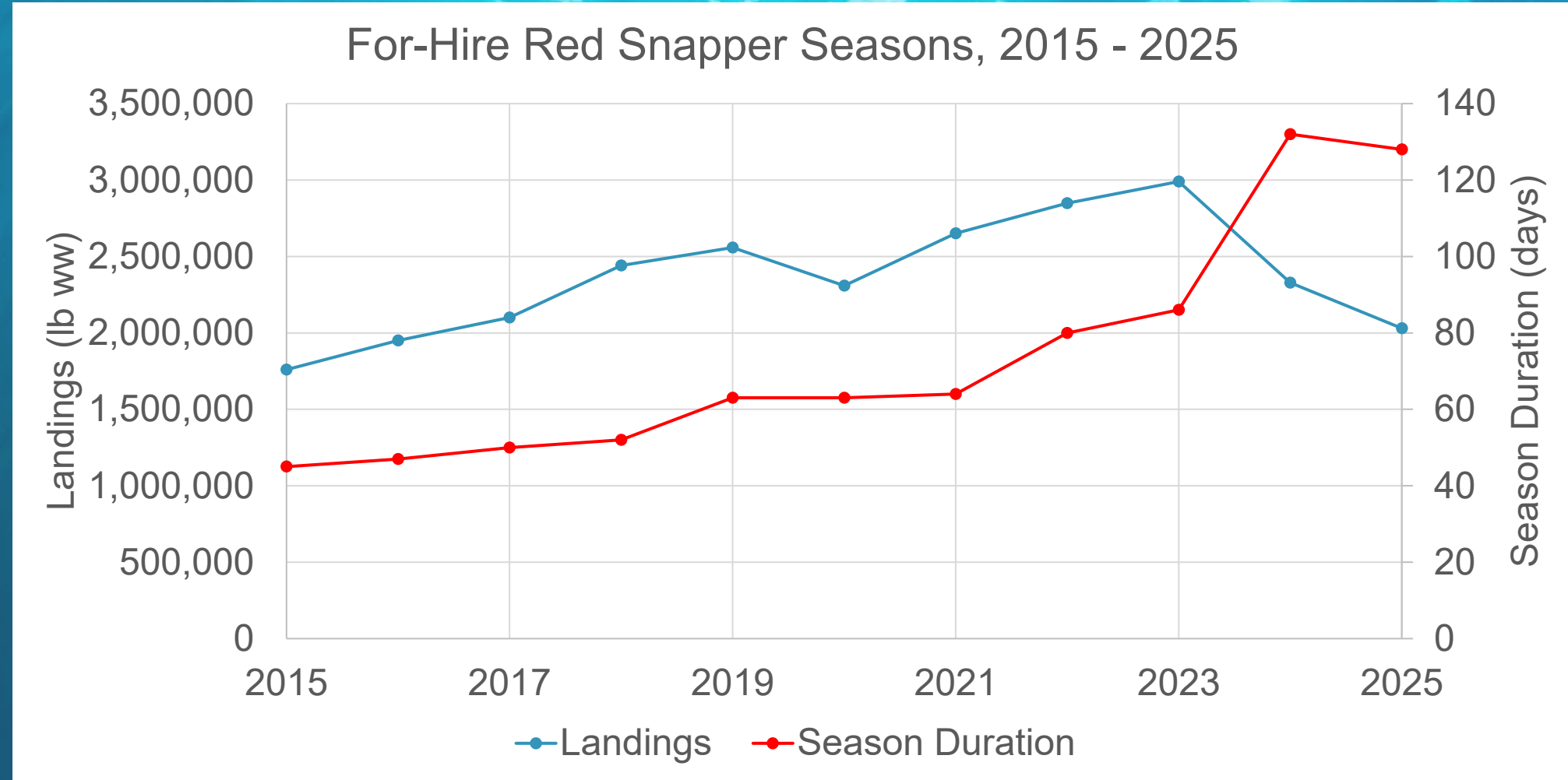


Amendment Type

- Plan amendment needed
- Framework Procedure:
 - Modified to allow Regional Administrator to make changes to federal FH regulations annually
- Default: Current red snapper regulations
 - Season opens Friday before Memorial Day (*transmitted*)
 - Season closes when FH ACT is projected to be met
 - 16-inch total length minimum size limit
 - 2 fish per person daily bag limit



Landings versus Season Duration



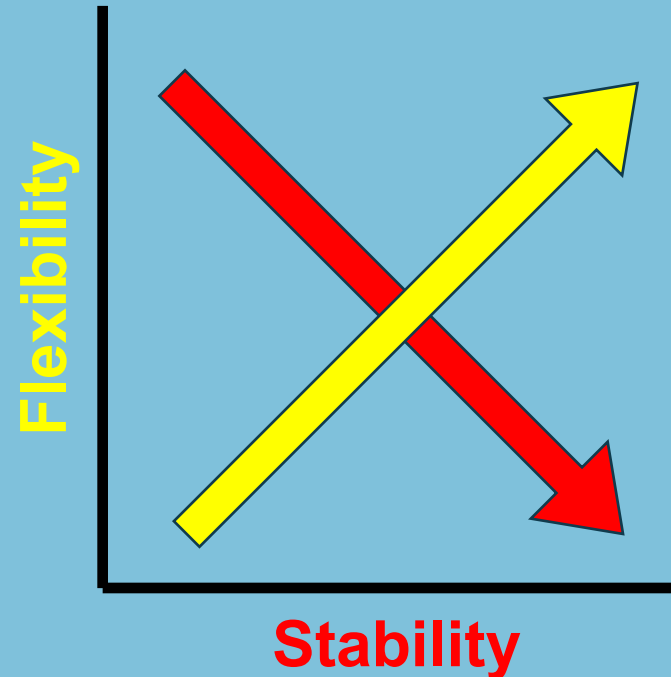
Timing of Regulatory Changes

- Framework procedure would need to be explicit about changes to be smoothly implemented
 - Closed framework process
 - Scope of possible effects analyzed in advance
 - Public would be able to predict changes and effects
 - E.g., “if, then, else”
- Else, management changes would occur through normal amendment process



Prioritizing Goals for FH Management

- What to do? More important to...
 - Management flexibility?
 - Harvest the ACT?
 - Fishing season start date?
 - Maintain mean harvest length?
- Consider more than one goal?



Prioritizing Goals for FH Management

- Classically:
 - Harvest ACT
 - Maximize access
- Recently:
 - FH public comment prioritizes season ~ May 1 and August 15
 - Council considered hindcasting season from August 15; discarded that alternative
 - Council considered May 1 open; discarded that alternative



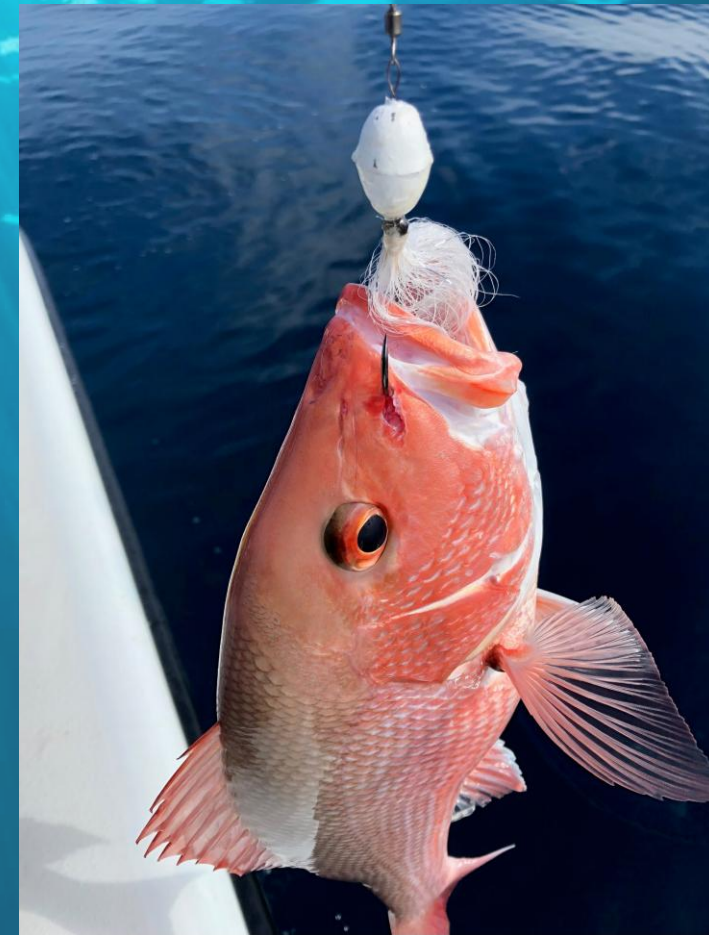
Purpose and Need

- Purpose:
 - The purpose is to develop procedures that provide the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator for Fisheries the authority to make management modifications within a specified timeframe and pre-analyzed range of alternatives for the federal for-hire fleet for red snapper in the Gulf.



Purpose and Need

- Need:
 - The need is to provide management flexibility including improved access to red snapper for the federal for-hire fleet while preventing overfishing and on a continuing basis achieving the optimum yield from the harvest of red snapper by the federal for-hire fleet in the Gulf.



Possible Actions: Considerations

- **Modify Fishing Season:**
 - RA can already modify duration, reopen, etc.
 - Changing opening date may affect planning certainty
 - May change mean size retained
- **Modify Bag Limit:**
 - Changes CPUE relative to bag limit
- **Modify Minimum Size Limit:**
 - Changes size at selection, retention
- **Assumes a healthy stock. What if that assumption is not true?**



Possible Actions: Examples

Action 1: Establishing Flexibility and Authority for the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator to annually modify the fishing season for the Gulf federal for-hire fleet for red snapper

Option 1 (status quo): Do not give the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator the authority to annually modify the fishing season for the federal for-hire component fishing season for red snapper. The fishing season opens on the Friday before the Memorial Day Federal Holiday and closes when the for-hire component ACT is projected to be met, or on December 31, whichever occurs first.

Option 2: Modify the Reef Fish Framework Procedure to provide the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator the authority to annually modify the federal for-hire component fishing season to open and close within the following time interval under the closed framework process:

- a. Between April 1 and August 31
- b. Between April 15 and August 31
- c. Between May 1 and August 31

- NMFS would notify the public via a press release of the fishing season opening by March 31st of that fishing year.



Possible Actions: Examples

Action 2: Establishing Flexibility and Authority for the NOAA Southeast Regional Administrator to modify the bag limit for federal for-hire fleet for red snapper

Option 1 (status quo): Do not give the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator the authority to annually modify the daily bag limit for the federal for-hire component for red snapper.

Option 2: Modify the Reef Fish Framework Procedure to provide the NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator the authority to annually modify the daily bag limit for the federal for-hire component for red snapper under the closed framework process.

- a. Allow the bag limit to be set anywhere between 1 to 3 fish per person per day
- b. Allow the bag limit to be set anywhere between 1 to 4 fish per person per day

- Consider a vessel limit? “...not to exceed”, “...whichever is more/less”
- NMFS would notify the public via press release of the FH daily bag limit by March 31st of that fishing year.



Possible Actions: Examples

- Under both example actions and alternatives, **EXPLICIT** triggers for management action needed
- NMFS would make management changes based on fishery performance relative to triggers
- If fishery performance trigger is not met, nothing would happen by way of this change to framework procedures
 - Default management would be maintained
- Without explicit triggers, management changes would have to follow the current amendment process



Next Steps?

**So...
now what?**

