

SOUTHERN OFFSHORE FISHING ASSOCIATION

CALL TO ACTION

February 8, 2022

As some of you may be aware, the National Marine Fisheries Service through the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is currently seeking comments on a new proposed rule (Amendment 53) that will significantly affect the Gulf Red Grouper Fishery and will set a precedent to affect other important commercial fish species in the Gulf of Mexico and along the East Coast. The proposed rule, if approved by the Secretary of Commerce, will change the current commercial and recreational allocations from the historical 76% commercial/24% recreational to 60% commercial/40% recreational, a loss of 16% of the available commercial quota. This relates to a loss of 640,000 pounds of fresh Gulf red grouper available to you and your businesses.

A recent economic study by Thomas Murray and Associates shows that 85% of commercially harvested red grouper ends up on a restaurant plate. We have provided fresh Gulf harvested seafood to you for years and will continue to do so. We are requesting you to join us in providing comments to the NMFS opposing Gulf Council Amendment 53 and to send it back to the Gulf Council for reconsideration. Below is the link to the regulations.gov site where you can post your comments. The procedure on how to comment is listed below along with a link to the Federal Register notice seeking comments should you wish to review it.

Here are several bullet points for you to use in your comments if you wish. The key to comment is how the possible lack of red grouper and other fish species will adversely affect your business. Retailers and restaurateurs should comment on how the loss of fresh caught seafood will affect your customers. Comments should reflect the negative impacts to your income, employees, and consumers.

Fresh Gulf Seafood is extremely important to my business as customers and consumers request American Seafood over imports.

The loss of over 640,000 lbs of available red grouper will reduce my ability to provide fresh Gulf red grouper and could cause a substantial loss of the red grouper market over time.

The economic impact will negatively impact my business income which will impact my family and my community. The proposed amendment 53 and reduction of the commercial allocation is based on a flawed recreational data system using computer models to recalibrate historical recreational data to highly questionable levels.

If A53 is approved, it will set a precedent that will be used to change the commercial allocation in other popular species further impacting my business.

Any change in sector allocation should only be made using the Gulf Council Allocation Protocol that considers all social, economic, and other relevant impacts, not just based on a change in recreational data.

The negative impacts of proposed A53 have already affected the markets as the January '22 harvest is 2/3rds of last January and availability is limited.

Our business is still recovering from the impacts of Covid as we are beginning to see increases in business and customers only to be further curtailed due to the proposed A53.

Loss of fresh Gulf red grouper resulting in fewer sales could result in more employee layoffs adversely affecting other families.

Here is info on how to provide comments. Open the link “<http://www.regulations.gov/>.” Click on that and you will see a box that says, “search for rules, proposed rules, notices or supporting documents.” In that box enter “noaa-NMFS-2021-0098” without the quotation marks. Hit enter. It should take you to the proposed rule. You will see a box that has “comment” in it. Click on that and it will take you to where you can provide your comments. The federal register notice link is here: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-01-19/html/2022-00646.htm>.

Comments are due no later than February 18. Please comment and provide this to others to comment.

Thank you,