



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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NOAA Announces New Catch Share Program in Gulf of Mexico

NOAA's Fisheries Service will implement catch shares in the Gulf of Mexico commercial grouper and tilefish fisheries beginning January 1, 2010, in an effort to reduce overcapacity and improve profitability and working conditions for commercial fishermen of these species.

NOAA is acting based on a recommendation from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council to implement individual fishing quotas (IFQ), a type of catch share program, for these fish in the Gulf. This program does not alter the current allocations of fish between the commercial and recreational sectors, and it does not prevent the Gulf Council from requesting allocation changes in the future.

"Catch share programs are useful strategies to improve the environmental and economic benefits of our nation's fisheries," said Dr. Roy Crabtree, southeast regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service. "I applaud the council for working closely with commercial fishermen, environmental groups, and others on this significant accomplishment."

Currently, grouper and tilefish are managed by annual quotas and trip limits. Under these conditions, commercial fishermen tend to race to harvest fish before a closure, leading to early annual closures and derby-style fishing, which can result in fishing under unsafe conditions, such as poor weather and long hours. Derby fishing can also result in a market glut of fish during the early part of the year when there is heavy fishing and no fish later in the year after a closure.

Under the new grouper and tilefish program, each fisherman will be assigned a set percentage of the quota that he or she is permitted to catch throughout the year. Fishermen can choose when to fish and how much fish to catch on each trip, up to their quota. This should improve their ability to sell fish when demand is higher and allow them to fish when market or weather conditions are good.

The program is the second such catch share program for the Gulf of Mexico. The first was implemented in 2007 for red snapper.

"Conditions in the red snapper fishery have substantially improved since the catch share program eliminated derby-style fishing," said Crabtree. "I look forward to seeing the positive impact of this new program on the grouper and tilefish industry."

The program is expected to benefit grouper and tilefish stocks by encouraging resource conservation among program participants. Commercial fishermen have a direct incentive to use sustainable practices because the total allowable catch can be raised as fish populations increase, leading to an increase in each fisherman's quota. This approach to fishing is also a step toward ecosystem-based management and highlights a successful collaboration among fishery managers, industry participants, and other stakeholder groups.

Development of the program began with fishermen themselves. An advisory panel of industry participants outlined the basic design of the program. The main goals of this panel were to promote a year-round fishery and reduce restrictive regulations, while still allowing fishing operations of all sizes to participate in the fishery. This new multispecies program was designed to accommodate the reality of fishermen who catch more than one species during a trip.

For more information on this program, visit
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/Amendment29.htm>.

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