

Gulf of Mexico Gillnet Fishery

Fishing gear type: Gillnet

Current category: Category II*

Basis for current classification on the LOF: Primarily by analogy with other Category I and II Atlantic gillnet fisheries, as well as stranding data Gulf of Mexico (GMX) bottlenose dolphin stocks showing signs of interaction with gillnets, and a recommendation from the Atlantic Scientific Review Group (SRG) to elevate unless there were data to the contrary.

Current list of marine mammal species/stocks injured/killed: Bottlenose dolphin, Eastern GMX coastal; Bottlenose dolphin, GMX bay, sound, and estuarine; Bottlenose dolphin, Northern GMX coastal; Bottlenose dolphin, Western GMX coastal.

Estimated number of current participants: 724

Take Reduction Teams/Plans that affect this fishery: N/A

Year added to the LOF: 2001

Category when originally listed: Category III

Basis for original classification on the LOF: This fishery was created and listed as Category III by combining 3 Category III fisheries, the "Gulf of Mexico inshore gillnet", "Gulf of Mexico coastal gillnet", and the Gulf of Mexico portion of the "Gulf of Mexico king and Spanish mackerel gillnet." NMFS proposed to elevate the fishery to Category II based on analogy with other gillnet fisheries because of a recommendation by the Atlantic SRG and a NOAA memo indicating available stranding data underestimates human-related mortality of multiple GMX stocks of bottlenose dolphins. NMFS did not reclassify the fishery for the 2001 LOF because conclusive stock structure information for the GMX stocks of bottlenose dolphins was not available, and the fishery had not yet been observed. Instead, NMFS reevaluated existing data, continued monitoring the fishery, and collected additional information for possible reclassification on future LOFs.

Estimated number of participants when originally listed: 724

Past names, if any: "Gulf of Mexico inshore gillnet", "Gulf of Mexico coastal gillnet", and the "Gulf of Mexico king and Spanish mackerel gillnet."

Gear description/method for fishing: This fishery uses any type of gillnet configuration, including strike and straight gillnets.

Target species: This fishery targets a wide variety of target species, including, but not limited to: black drum, sheepshead, weakfish, mullet, spot, croaker, king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, Florida pompano, flounder, shark, menhaden, bluefish, blue runner, ladyfish, spotted seatrout, croaker, kingfish, and red drum.

Spatial/temporal distribution of effort: This fishery operates year-round in waters north of the U.S.-Mexico border and west of the fishery management council demarcation line between the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

Levels of observer coverage each year[†]: There has not been observer coverage in this fishery.

* The fishery is classified by analogy to other gear types or fisheries that are known to cause mortality or serious injury of marine mammals.

Management and regulations: Gillnet gear is prohibited in Texas and Florida state waters, but fixed and runaround gillnets are currently used in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama with highly variable fishing effort. Fishing for king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, cobia, cero, little tunny, dolphin fish, and bluefish are managed under the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources Fishery Management Plan (CMPR FMP). In the Gulf of Mexico, CMPR FMP species are the only federally managed species for which gillnet gear is authorized, and only run-around gillnetting for these species is allowed. In state waters, state and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Interstate FMPs apply.

History of Changes on the LOF

2006 LOF: Added a superscript “2” after this fishery in Table 2, indicating that the fishery is categorized by analogy. Although the 2003 LOF showed that two stocks of bottlenose dolphins (Charlotte Harbor and Mississippi Sound) had serious injury and mortality levels that were more than 1% and less than 50% of Potential Biological Removal (PBR), this fishery is considered a Category II by analogy because the PBR levels for these two stocks could no longer be calculated as of the 2005 SARs because the stock abundance information was outdated. Therefore, this fishery remained a Category II fishery by analogy to other Category II gillnet fisheries.

2003 LOF: Elevated to Category II based primarily on available stranding data of bottlenose dolphins with indications of interactions with gillnet gear, and a recommendation from the Atlantic SRG to elevate the fishery, unless there was data to the contrary. Bottlenose dolphin stocks in this area occur in relatively discrete communities, so PBR levels were calculated for each smaller stock when able. From 1997-2000, stranding network members recovered 39 bottlenose dolphins (from the GMX bay, sound, and estuarine stock, which is broken into 33 smaller stocks based on geographic area), with up to 12 showing evidence of gillnet interactions. Of the 12, 5 deaths were clearly attributable to gillnet gear, or 1.25 animals/year. Of the 5 deaths, 1 was from Charlotte Harbor (PBR=1.5), or 17% of PBR; 2 were from the Mississippi Sound (PBR=13), or 4% of PBR; 1 was from the Mississippi River Delta where abundance estimates were unknown; and 1 was from Vermillion Bay where abundance estimates were also unknown. Based on the 3 deaths that could be attributed to a stock, serious injury and mortality was more than 1% and less than 50% PBR.

[†] Observer coverage levels include the latest information reported in the most current final Stock Assessment Report (SAR).