

SEA GRANT

Telephone: (251) 438-5690

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By

Rick Wallace, Extension Marine Specialist
Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will be holding a series of scoping meetings on the management of gag, red grouper, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish in federal waters. Scoping meetings are part of the initial phase of preparing a fishery management plan amendment. The purpose is to identify issues and a reasonable range of management alternatives. The scoping meeting for our area will be held at 7:00 p.m. Monday, March 19th at the City of Orange Beach Parks and Recreation building, 27235 Canal Road, Orange Beach, Alabama.

The management proposals for gag and red grouper are quite complicated. According to National Marine Fishery Service scientists, gag was recently declared to be undergoing overfishing and the catch needs to be reduced while red grouper has undergone a modest recovery and the catch could be increased. Both species are often caught together and changing regulations on one species will affect the other particularly on the issue of bycatch mortality.

The greater amberjack stock is not meeting its rebuilding target. Reductions in catch from 11 to 30% are said to be needed. Proposals include switching from angler limits to vessel limits and closed seasons for recreational fishermen. Commercial fishermen would face trip limits and increases in the closed season.

Gray triggerfish were found to be undergoing overfishing and a 35% reduction in landings is said to be needed. Most of the triggerfish landed are caught off of Alabama and West Florida. Various combinations of bag limits, size limits, and seasonal closures are suggested to achieve the 35% reduction.

For more information on the scoping meeting or to obtain copies of the scoping document, call the Gulf Council at 813-348-1630. The document can also be viewed at www.gulfcouncil.org and selecting Reef Fish Amendment 30 Scoping Document.