

SEA GRANT
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The 2007 red snapper season is scheduled to close at midnight October 31. That is still six weeks away but fishermen need to be thinking about the 2008 season.

The 2008 season will probably have the same two-fish bag limit but the season will be shortened to account for the lower recreational quota (2.45 million pounds). The length of the season will depend on which options in the red snapper plan, now being reviewed by NOAA Fisheries Service, are chosen by regulators.

The basic options call for a June 1 – September 15 (107 days) recreational season or a May 1 – July 31 (92 day season). If the captain and crew on charter boats are not allowed a bag limit, then the season could run from June 1st to the end of September (122 days) or could run from May 1st through August 7th (99 days).

Another scenario is based on the assumption that there was a 10% reduction in fishing effort and landings because of hurricanes. Acceptance of this controversial assumption plus no bag limit for captain and crew could result in the season going from May 15th through October 15th (154 days). In years past, the season has been from April 21st through October 31st (194 days).

It is important to note that the number of days the season can be opened is also dependant on the start date. NOAA Fisheries calculates how many days it will take to reach the quota based on how much fish was caught between various dates in the past.

As a result, an earlier spring start such as May 1 gives a 92 day season while a June 1 start gives a 107 day season.

Given all the variables that factor into determining what the 2008 season might be, you can imagine that there are many more possible options than outlined here. A comprehensive review of the season options can be found at www.gulfcouncil.org. Go to Downloadable Files and click on Final Reef Fish Amendment 27/ Shrimp Amendment 14. If you wish to voice your opinion on how the season should run you can submit your comments by emailing to: 0648-AT87.NOA27-14@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line the following document identifier: 0648-AT87.NOA27-14.