Gulf of Mexico IFQ Programs: Red Snapper and Grouper-Tilefish

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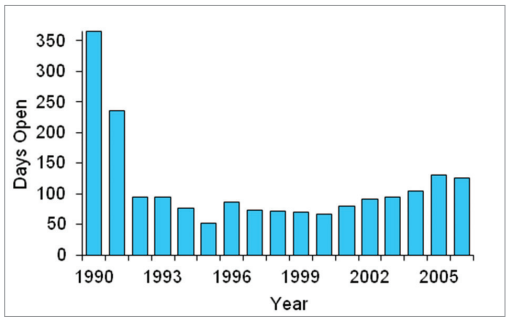
The Gulf of Mexico has two IFQ programs: the single-share category Red Snapper IFQ (RS-IFQ) program that began in 2007 and the multi-species multi-share category Grouper-Tilefish IFQ (GT-IFQ) program that began in 2010. For both IFQ programs, the fishery is composed of small boats (i.e., 10 to 73 feet) manned by small crews fishing with hook-and-line gears, such as handlines, bandit reels, and longlines. The IFQ programs were developed to address over-capitalization, quota overages, and short fishing seasons resulting in a derby-style fishery with decreased safety-at-sea, market gluts, high operating costs, and high bycatch and discard mortality. The main goals of the IFQ programs were to reduce overcapacity and mitigate derby fishing conditions, which would lead to improved safety-at-sea, increased market stability, increased fishing flexibility, and cost-effective and enforceable management.



Number of days per year that the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery was open from 1990 through 2005.

Both IFQ programs are managed completely through an online data collection system, where users are assigned accounts and all transactions are completed electronically. The online system allows for real-time data updates, automatically links to the NMFS permitting system, and does not limit users to traditional working hours. Both programs were limited to users with valid reef fish permits for the first five years of the program, after which any U.S. citizen or permanent resident alien could obtain an IFQ account. During the first five years, only accounts that maintained their reef fish permit could receive shares or allocation and harvest fish. Accounts that did not maintain their permit were limited to only selling allocation or shares.

Commercial Quotas/Catch Allowances for 2012 in gutted pounds

Share Category	Share Cap %	Quota/Catch Allowance	2012 Landings	% Quota Landed	Quota Remaining
DEEP WATER GROUPER	14.704321	1,127,000	128,194	11.3	998,806
GAG GROUPER	2.349938	567,000	177,330	31.2	389,670
OTHER SHALLOW WATER	7.266147	509,000	69,222	13.5	439,778
RED GROUPER	4.331882	5,370,000	1,473,752	27.4	3,896,248
RED SNAPPER	6.020300	3,300,901	951,708	28.8	2,349,193
TILEFISH	12.212356	582,000	70,800	12.1	511,200

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Example manager interface of NMFS Gulf Reef Fish Program individual fishing quota online system.

The two programs were designed with many similar quota share distribution and ownership provisions. Initial share distribution differed slightly in both programs, but in essence was based on historical catch records within a given time frame and current ownership of a reef fish permit. Quota share caps exist in each program, with the GT-IFQ program also having an allocation cap (maximum amount of pounds held by a single entity). Fishing flexibility measures were built into each IFQ program, including a 10 percent overage allowance, multi-species share categories, and multi-use allocation that can be used between share categories.

After five years, the RS-IFQ program has seen a 25 percent consolidation in shareholders. Fishermen have taken advantage of the increased flexibility by landing red snapper year-round, which also mitigated market gluts that resulted from short seasons. Furthermore, with the implementation of the GT-IFQ program, fishermen from both fisheries bought allocation or shares from the other IFQ program, allowing them to harvest bycatch fish that otherwise might have been discarded. Bycatch has decreased over time in some geographic areas, but further work is needed to reduce bycatch of red snapper off the west Florida shelf as the stock rebuilds. Many of our share categories have seen increases in quotas; within red snapper over 95 percent of the quota is landed each year.

Management and law enforcement have improved, especially as a result of the real-time data supplied by the online system and vessel monitoring systems. In particular, we have seen a decrease in the number of seizures each year. Determining the economic and social benefits from the program has been difficult, primarily due to difficulty getting accurate price information for allocation and share transactions, as well as ex-vessel values. While we have seen increases in all of these price categories, these data are often misreported or not reported, which leads to greater uncertainty when analyzing the data. Our next efforts are concentrating on the five-year review of the Red Snapper IFQ program and the addition of more reef fish species to the program.

Catch accounting requirements for the Red Snapper and Grouper-Tilefish IFQ Programs.