

Request for an Exempted Fishing Permit for Management of the Private Recreational and State-Licensed Charter Components of the Red Snapper Recreational Fishery in Special Reef Fish Zones Off Florida's Gulf Coast for 2018 and 2019

- i. **The date of the application:** February 12, 2018
- ii. **The applicant's name, mailing address, and telephone number**

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- iii. **A statement of the purposes and goals of the exempted fishery for which an EFP is needed, including justification for issuance of the EFP**

The purpose of this EFP is to allow the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to conduct a pilot study during 2018 and 2019 to test data collection and quota monitoring methodologies to be potentially applied by the State of Florida for management of the private recreational and state-licensed charter components of the red snapper fishery off Florida's Gulf coast. Throughout this application, state-licensed charter refers to for-hire trips that are run from vessels that do not have a federal Gulf Reef Fish Charter/Headboat permit.

Anglers and state-licensed charter boat captains participating in the pilot study will catch and/or harvest red snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*) off Florida's Gulf coast and use two methods to report relevant information regarding their fishing trip: (1) a voluntary smartphone/tablet app and (2) the mandatory Gulf Reef Fish Survey (GRFS). Under this EFP, the FWC will test the feasibility of the app as a future recreational reef fisheries data collection method. Although not mandatory during 2018, individual anglers and state-licensed charter boat captains will be encouraged to report through the app from the time they catch and/or harvest red snapper to within 24 hours of completing their fishing trip. Based on the results of the voluntary reporting using the app in 2018, reporting via the app may be mandatory in 2019. The mandatory GRFS currently being used to supplement reef fish recreational fisheries data collected through the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) will be used to estimate red snapper landings and fishing effort by private anglers, and a new registration requirement to facilitate surveys will be established for state-licensed charter boat captains participating in the pilot study covered by this EFP.

Private anglers would be allowed to fish in the Gulf of Mexico off Florida from shore out to 200 nautical miles (i.e., out to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) boundary) during the specified Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season authorized under this EFP. State-licensed charter boat captains would be allowed to participate in the pilot study and fish from shore out to 9 nautical miles, since they are not permitted to fish in federal waters. For the purposes of estimating state charter harvest of red snapper through this pilot program, state-licensed charter captains that would like to take customers fishing for red snapper would be required to sign up for the pilot study covered by this EFP. These captains, when surveyed through the For-Hire Telephone Survey for MRIP, would

report on behalf of their customers. An additional sample of state charters may be selected during the Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season to ensure adequate sample sizes for effort estimates. State-licensed captains that do not run red snapper or reef fish trips in the Gulf of Mexico would not be required to sign up for the pilot study and would be prohibited from keeping red snapper under this EFP.

The voluntary reporting app is being developed in partnership with the Snook and Gamefish Foundation's iAngler program because of its record of successful implementation and scientific testing in Florida (Jiorle et al. 2016)¹, and for consistency with a similar recreational fishery red snapper app-based reporting program being implemented by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Individual private anglers would be able to use the app to report their personal catch. Individual names and other information needed to identify individual anglers would be collected using the app, and could be matched to GRFS data. In contrast, state-licensed charter captains would report on behalf of all customers fishing for red snapper aboard their vessel. Red snapper information collected through the app will include:

- Date of fishing trip,
- Time fished,
- General location of fishing trip,
- Depth fished for red snapper harvest,
- Number of red snapper harvested,
- Number of red snapper released,
- Size (inches) of red snapper harvested,
- Size (inches) of red snapper released,
- Number of red snapper released using a descending device, and
- Number of red snapper vented before release.

According to standard procedures outlined in the iAngler app, anglers will be instructed to report the number of red snapper released and/or harvested as zero if they went on a red snapper trip but failed to catch any red snapper. Anglers could also report if their trip was cancelled due to weather. As mentioned, all of this would need to be reported within 24 hours of completing their fishing trip or expected trip. Although anglers fishing for red snapper will be encouraged to report their catch/harvest through the app (to help FWC test its feasibility for use as a future recreational fisheries data collection method), the primary method for monitoring red snapper landings will be the GRFS survey (see Appendices I and II attached to this request for a more detailed description of the procedures, methodologies, and statistical approaches used by GRFS).

As a conservation measure, anglers participating in the pilot study covered by this EFP will be encouraged to use a descending (recompression) device or venting tool as needed when releasing red snapper and other incidentally-caught reef fish to minimize the likelihood of post-release mortality.

Besides collecting ancillary red snapper catch/harvest information through the app, FWC will use its GRFS as the primary method to monitor private recreational red snapper landings. GRFS is a specialized survey designed to supplement the MRIP survey to provide more precise catch estimates

¹ Jiorle, R.J., R.N.M. Ahrens, and M.S. Allen. 2016. Assessing the Utility of a Smartphone App for Recreational Fishery Catch Data. *Fisheries* (41):758-766.

for the recreational private boat fishery targeting reef fishes off Florida's west coast. Anglers fishing from private boats are required to sign up for a free GRFS designation to legally retain select reef fish species. Subscribers serve as the sample universe for a monthly mail survey to estimate fishing effort. Catch data is collected through targeted surveys of offshore private recreational fisheries. A comprehensive list of recreational fishing access points is currently maintained by FWC and used for the access point intercept survey portion of the MRIP. This site register is used to identify a sub-set of sites throughout the west coast of Florida where private recreational boats return from offshore fishing trips. Offshore private boat fishing sites are selected for supplemental assignments (i.e., additional to MRIP assignments) using valid statistical sampling approaches. GRFS is in the process of undergoing MRIP certification.

As explained above, red snapper landings by Florida state-licensed charter captains who elect to fish for red snapper during 2018-2019 (the period covered by this EFP) will be estimated through the For-Hire Telephone Survey for MRIP. An additional sample of state charters may be selected during the Florida Special Red Snapper Season to ensure adequate sample sizes for effort estimates. FWC will be working with MRIP to adjust draws and assignments to better account for these short seasons to concentrate sampling for red snapper. The duration of the Special Red Snapper Fishing Season is based on projected landings for the private recreational and state-licensed for-hire components of Florida's red snapper fishery. The fishery will be closely monitored (MRIP and GRFS) and red snapper harvest will be closed via Executive Order when Florida's portion of the ACT (1,305,360 pounds whole weight) is estimated to be reached. Season closure dates will be projected and announced before the season opens.

Florida's portion of the private recreational red snapper quota is 42% of the Gulf-wide Annual Catch Limit (ACL) (1,631,700 pounds of 3,885,000 pounds whole weight). For the purposes of this EFP, the duration of Florida's Special Red Snapper Fishing Season would be calculated based on an Annual Catch Target (ACT) of 1,305,360 pounds whole weight (20% buffer on Florida's ACL). Florida's allocation was set based on the average annual private recreational component landings from 2006-2015, excluding 2010 (approximately 42% of Gulf-wide annual private recreational harvest). This time series was chosen because it reflects recent trends in recreational effort and current levels of red snapper abundance off the West Florida shelf.

iv. For each vessel to be covered by the EFP, as soon as the information is available and before operations begin under the EFP:

(A) A copy of the USCG documentation, state license, or registration of each vessel, or the information contained on the appropriate document

(B) The current name, address, and telephone number of the owner and master, if not included on the document provided for the vessel

GRFS-registered anglers and Florida state-permitted charter captains who elect to sign up for participation in the pilot study would be eligible to harvest red snapper under this EFP. FWC would provide lists of documentation and contact information for these anglers, captains, and vessels (through the mandatory GRFS registry and from the list of state-licensed captains who sign up for the pilot study) to NOAA Fisheries just prior to the Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season opening. FWC staff would provide updated lists to NOAA Fisheries following each season to ensure NOAA Fisheries is provided with accurate lists of all possible EFP participants, as anglers can sign up

for GRFS any time throughout the year before they go fishing for reef fish in the Gulf of Mexico. To facilitate quota monitoring and ensure GRFS designation and charter licensing requirements are met, all red snapper harvested through this EFP in state and federal waters off Florida would be required to be landed in Florida.

Private recreational vessels and state-licensed charter vessels that come from adjacent states to fish during Florida's season must land their fish in Florida. Catch and harvest by these participants would be captured under this EFP because they would be required to have a GRFS designation as well as be asked to report on the iAngler app.

Federally-permitted for-hire vessels that also have a Florida state charter captain or charter boat license would continue to follow the federal season for federally-permitted charter vessels in federal waters, and could also fish in state waters when both the federal for-hire federal and state seasons overlap. Any harvest by these vessels would be attributed to the federal for-hire component's ACL and not counted toward Florida's quota under this EFP or the private recreational angler component of the ACL.

v. The species (target and incidental) expected to be harvested under the EFP, the amount(s) of such harvest necessary to conduct the exempted fishing, the arrangements for disposition of all regulated species harvested under the EFP, and any anticipated impacts on the environment, including impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, threatened or endangered species, and EFH

The target species expected to be harvested under this EFP is red snapper. All red snapper are to be harvested according to current size and bag limits regulations established by the GMFMC. Also, please refer to language under item vi below for the time period when red snapper harvest will take place under this EFP.

Other reef fish species expected to be caught incidentally by anglers participating in the pilot study covered by this EFP include: gag, greater amberjack, rudderfish, almaco jack, red grouper, black grouper, vermilion snapper, and gray triggerfish. Direct harvest of these species is not covered by this EFP. Participating anglers will be required to release any incidental catch not allowed by current fishing seasons, size, and bag limits established by state (FWC) and federal (GMFMC) regulations.

As explained under item iii above, anglers participating in the pilot study covered by this EFP will be encouraged to use a descending (recompression) device or venting tool when releasing red snapper and other reef fish to minimize the likelihood of post-release mortality.

No significant impact on regulated species covered under this EFP is expected. The private recreational component of Florida's red snapper fishery will be closely monitored (MRIP and GRFS) and red snapper harvest will be closed via Executive Order when Florida's portion of the ACT (1,305,360 pounds whole weight) is estimated to be reached. Season closure dates will be projected and announced before the season opens. Closures would be announced through a media release, text alert (to subscribers), email to GRFS anglers, and on MyFWC.com.

For 2018, the Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season will be from May 25th to June 17th, 2018 (24 days). The total number of days for the Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season (24

day) was estimated based on wave 3 (May-June) of the 2016² MRIP red snapper catch rates (pounds per day) for private recreational anglers fishing in state waters (3-PR-St), private recreational anglers fishing in federal waters (3-PR-EEZ), and state-licensed for-hire vessels (3-FH-St). The table below summarizes the data used to estimate the combined number of days for the two Special Red Snapper Fishing Seasons.

Wave and Mode	Pounds Caught in 2016	Days open in 2016	Lbs./day	Days Needed for 2018	Expected Landings in 2018	Florida ACT
3-PR-St	697,065	40	17,426.6	25	435,666	
3-FH-St	110,780	40	2,769.5	25	69,238	
3-PR-EEZ	332,438	11	30,221.6	25	755,541	
Total:					1,260,444	1,305,360

Based on these catch rates and the MRIP-based factor to convert numbers of fish to pounds FWC estimated it would take about 25 days for the recreational fisheries to reach a level of red snapper landings at or slightly below Florida’s self-imposed ACT (1,305,360 pounds whole weight). If MRIP and GRFS landings data indicate quota is still available following the Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season and the Gulf-wide recreational sector red snapper ACL has not been reached, FWC could reopen harvest in the fall on 3-day weekends to allow the unused quota to be harvested.

Since GRFS was designed to supplement MRIP and provides recreational fishery catch estimates that integrate data from both surveys, FWC does not expect to know whether there is leftover (unused) red snapper quota until about 60 days following the end of the MRIP wave 3. Therefore, a potential supplementary red snapper season would not occur until sometime in the fall 2018. In the event of a red snapper quota overage in 2018, the 2019 season would be adjusted as needed to avoid a subsequent overage. FWC would consult with NOAA Fisheries to determine if a payback of the overage is required as an accountability measure.

For 2019, the season would occur in a similar method with harvest opening in early summer. If any quota remains following that season, then that quota would be fished during 3-day weekends in the fall.

Fishing activities permitted through this EFP are not anticipated to negatively impact fisheries, marine mammals, threatened or endangered species, or essential fish habitat, as any take of these species is not expected to exceed normal recreational red snapper/reef fish fishing activity. Increased use of descending devices and venting tools may increase survival of released fish, and could have a positive effect on these stocks. The Gulf of Mexico reef fish vertical line fishery is listed as a Category III fishery on the 2017 List of Fisheries, meaning the likelihood of mortality and serious injury is less than or equal to 1% of the potential biological removal level for each marine mammal stock³. Bottlenose dolphins are the only marine mammal with recorded interactions with this

² Data from 2016 were chosen to estimate catch rates for the 2018 Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season because the red snapper recreational season in 2016 included both weekdays and weekends. The 2017 season was composed almost exclusively weekends.

³ <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2017-01-12/pdf/2017-00250.pdf>

fishery. A 2011 Biological Opinion issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service concluded that the recreational reef fish hook and line (vertical line) fishery may have interactions with endangered sea turtles and smalltooth sawfish, but available data suggest these species survive the interactions and that this fishery does not jeopardize the continued existence of these species.⁴

vi. For each vessel covered by the EFP, the approximate time(s) and place(s) fishing will take place, and the type, size, and amount of gear to be used

The time period being requested for this EFP is May 25, 2018 – December 31, 2019. During this period, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission will establish the Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season to allow participating private recreational anglers to harvest red snapper off Florida's Gulf coast extending from the shore out to 200 nautical miles (state and federal waters). State-licensed charter captains would be able to harvest red snapper during the Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season from shore out to 9 nautical miles (state waters). In the event that MRIP and GRFS landings data indicate quota is still available following these seasons and the Gulf-wide recreational sector red snapper ACL has not been reached, FWC could reopen harvest in the fall on 3-day weekends to allow the unused quota to be harvested.

All fishing activities covered by this EFP will be consistent with allowable fishing gear used by Gulf of Mexico reef fish private recreational anglers.

vii. Data Analysis

One goal of this EFP is to determine angler willingness to report their red snapper fishing effort (number of trips and number of hours fished), catch, and harvest using the electronic iAngler app. This will be accomplished by comparing the number of people reporting through the app to the numbers of participants obtained through MRIP and GRFS surveys (GRFS recreational fisheries estimates are designed to integrate data collected through both surveys). Further, a survey of GRFS participants will be conducted following the Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season to determine if they also used the app to report their red snapper fishing trips, catch and effort. The types of questions that that will be evaluated through these analyses are:

- (1) What percent of total trips are reported in the app?;
- (2) Are the trips reported in the app representative of the overall red snapper fishery?; and
- (3) Was the level of reporting through the app high enough to be used to produce a precise estimate of red snapper recreational catch?

Although reporting via the app would be voluntary in 2018, the State of Florida would consider making this type of reporting mandatory in the second year of the EFP based on results from year 1.

State-licensed charter boat captains who target red snapper in the pilot study covered by this EFP will be required to sign up for the program. This will ensure that all anglers and vessels participating are known, registered to participate, and properly sampled. These captains will be also surveyed following the Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season to determine if they used the app

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http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_fisheries/reef_fish/documents/pdfs/2013/gulf_reef_fish_biop_2011.pdf

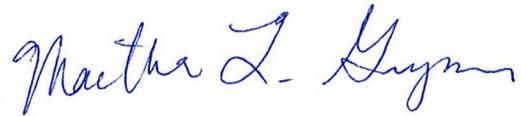
to report their red snapper catch and harvest. Private recreational anglers participating in the pilot study covered by this EFP will be known through their GRFS designation.

Through the iAngler app and in the post-season survey, participants in the pilot study covered by this EFP will be asked about their use of descending devices and venting tools during the Florida Special Red Snapper Fishing Season. Thus, the percentage of participating anglers willing to vent or descend reef fish will also be determined.

viii. The signature of the applicant



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