2019 Alabama Exempted Fishing Permit Status Report

Report Number: 5

Period covered: June 1 – Sept. 1, 2019

Background

In 2018 and 2019, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) was issued an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) from NOAA Fisheries to manage the private vessel and state-licensed charter vessel components of Alabama's recreational Red Snapper fishery (excludes federally-permitted charter vessels). During both years of the EFP, ADCNR will attempt to manage landings within a quota. The 2019 quota is 1,079,513 pounds which was reduced by the harvest overage from 2018 which was estimated to be 2,007 pounds. ADCNR will monitor Red Snapper landings via Snapper Check, the program established to collect mandatory reports from recreational anglers landing Red Snapper in Alabama. Any landings amount above the quota in 2019 will be deducted from the 2020 quota prior to the start of the 2020 season. In order to obtain landings estimates, the number of reported harvested fish are multiplied by the average weight of fish measured and weighed by ADCNR staff from randomly selected vessels. Although a vessel representative from each recreational vessel with Red Snapper is required to submit a landing report prior to landing fish 100% compliance is not anticipated. Therefore, an estimate of the number vessels for which a landing report is not submitted is needed. Unreported Red Snapper are estimated by determining the ratio of the number of fish from reported and unreported trips to the number of fish from reported trips. Unreported trips are determined by comparing information collected by ADCNR staff at public boat ramps and marinas to vessel reports submitted by anglers through Snapper Check.

2019 Season Summary

Through September 1, an estimated 970,824 pounds of Red Snapper have been harvested by recreational anglers fishing from private and state-licensed charter vessels (Figure 1). The estimated reporting rate for private vessels and state licensed charter boats is 48.7% and 36%, respectively. ADCNR staff have interviewed 437 private vessels and 25 state-licensed vessels with Red Snapper during the reporting period. Enforcement will continue to check anglers to ensure compliance with the mandatory reporting requirement.

Daily private and state-licensed charter vessel trips and mean wave heights recorded at a weather buoy located south of Orange Beach, Alabama during the 2018 season are provided in Figure 2. Fishing effort was highest during the first two weekends of the season. Wave heights were consistent for the remainder of the season and fishing effort was estimated to be 25-60% less than the first two weekends except for the fourth weekend in June which had much lower effort. The low number of trips may have been a result of the wave heights which were the highest of the season. Daily fishing effort for private and state-licensed vessels and mean wave heights during the 2019 season are provided in Figure 3. Mean daily wave heights have been higher in 2019 than in 2018. Three weekends in 2019 had wave heights of 3 ft or higher including the weekend Hurricane Barry made landfall in Louisiana (Saturday, July 13th).

Length-frequency distributions of Red Snapper sampled during the entire 2018 season and during the 2019 season through September 1 are provided in Figures 4 and 5, respectively. The mean weight of fish sampled from private vessels in 2019 is 1.2 pounds less than fish sampled during the entire 2018 season. The lower mean weight, in addition to the reduced number of trips, has resulted in lower landings than anticipated. As a result of lower than expected landings ADCNR will add an additional three days to the season; October 4-6.

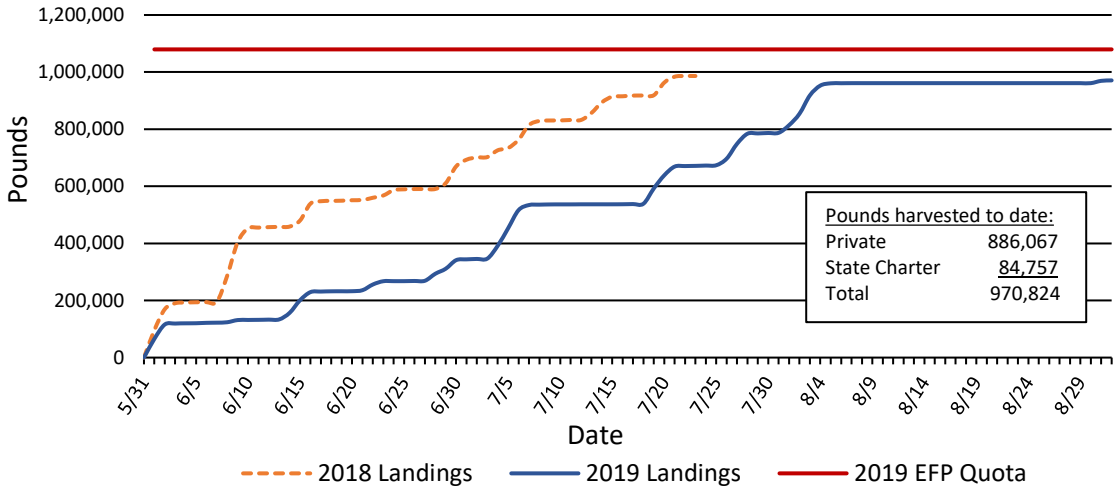

Figure 1. Cumulative Alabama recreational Red Snapper landings for the entire 2018 EFP season and current 2019 EFP season (June 1 – Sept. 1, 2019).

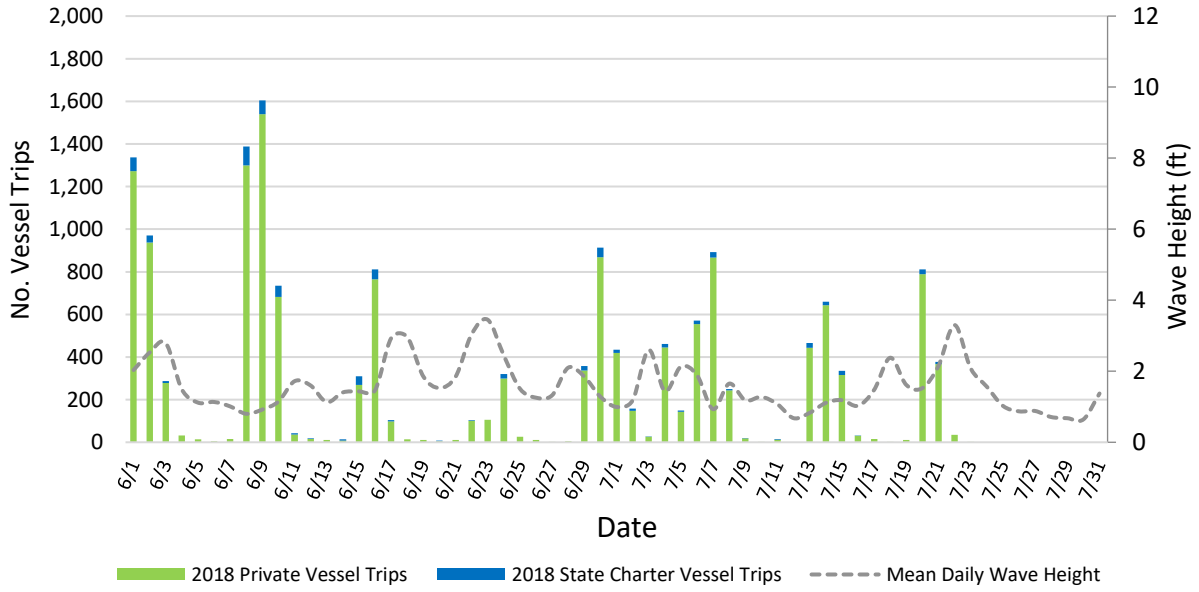

Figure 2. Daily private vessel and state charter vessel trips landing Red Snapper and mean daily wave height during the 2018 Alabama Red Snapper season (June 1 – July 23). Wave height data from NOAA Data Buoy Center, Station #42012 (Orange Beach, AL).

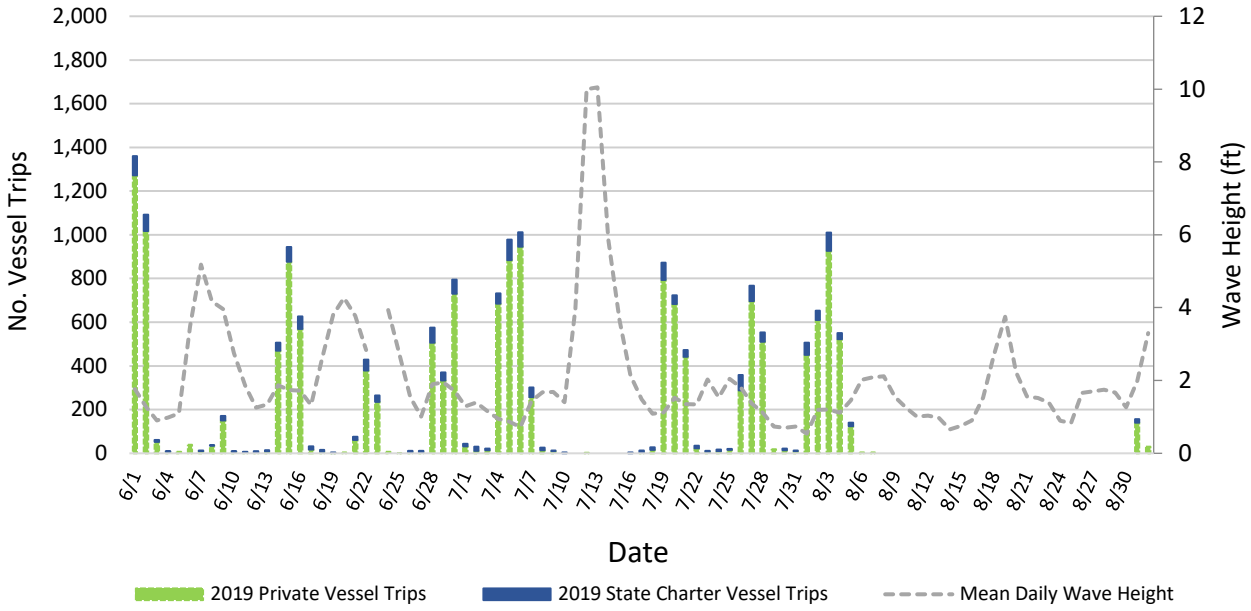

Figure 3. Daily private vessel and state charter vessel trips landing Red Snapper and mean daily wave height during the current 2019 Alabama Red Snapper season (June 1- Sept. 1). Wave height data from NOAA Data Buoy Center, Station #42012 (Orange Beach, AL). The gap in the wave height trendline indicates data was not recorded.

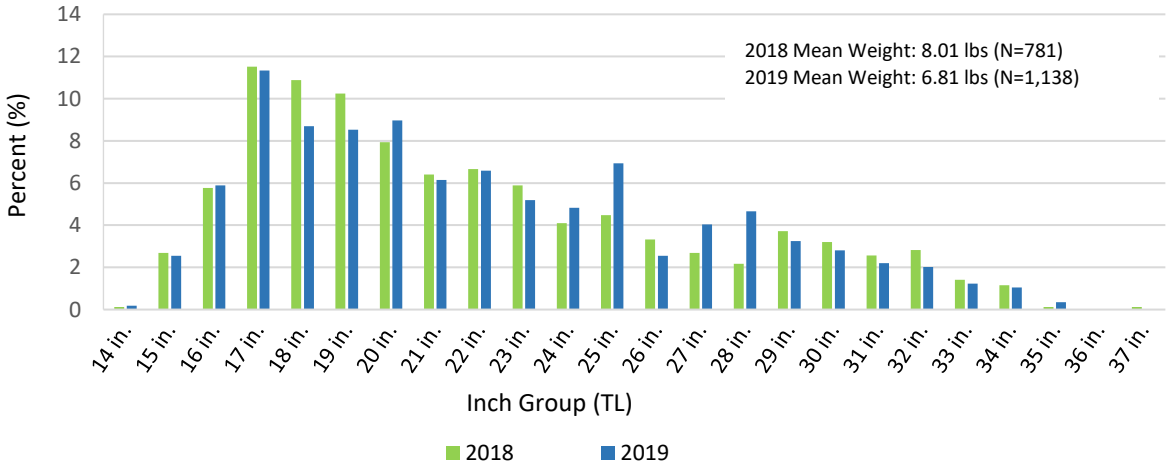

Figure 4. Private vessel Red Snapper length-frequencies (total length) for fish sampled during the 2018 and 2019 seasons.

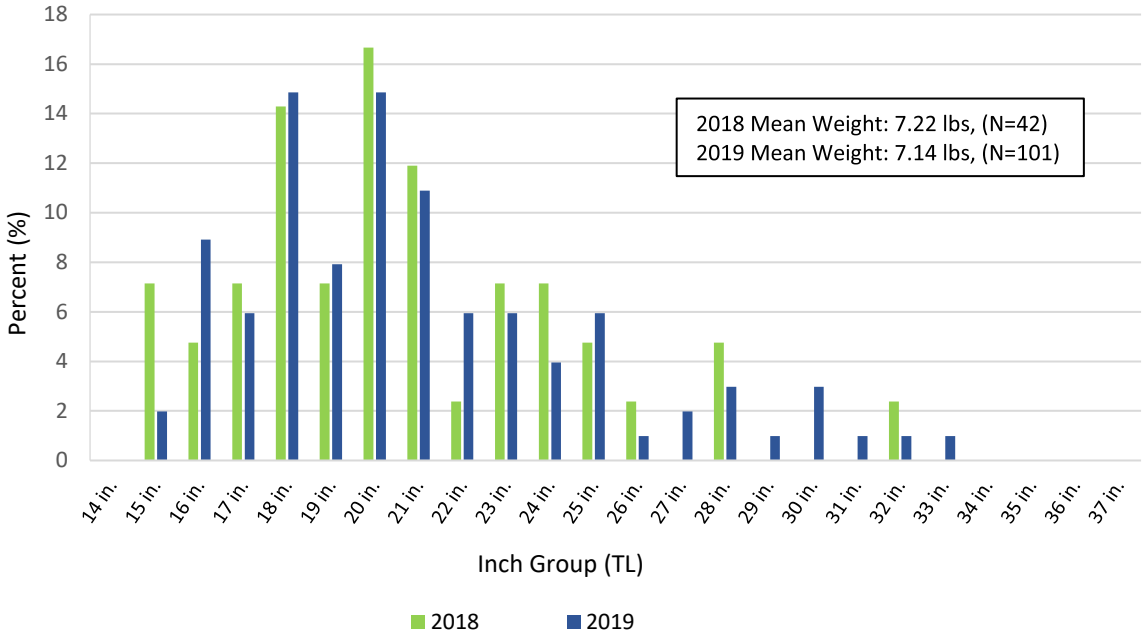

Figure 5. State charter vessel Red Snapper length-frequencies (total length) for fish sampled during the 2018 and 2019 seasons.