



The Island's award-winning weekly newspaper

Grouper plan may catch on

By Cindy Lane
SUN STAFF WRITER
clane@amisun.com

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has decided to submit a proposed individual fishing quota (IFQ) program to fishermen in a referendum.

"We have overwhelming support from the fishing communities, including the (recreational) Fishing Rights Alliance and environmental defense groups," said Gulf Fishermen's Association President Glen Brooks, calling the decision "spectacular."

The association, which represents more than 200 commercial fishermen, restaurants and others, supports the IFQ plan because it

allows for a year-round fishery for both small- and large-scale fishermen, he said.

"This is the only thing that will keep us in a year-round fishery without eliminating the small guys," Brooks said. "With IFQ, a guy catching 200 pounds a year and a guy with 50,000 pounds a year will both be able to keep fishing."

Without the IFQ plan, small-scale fishermen will not be able to meet the landing requirements on permit endorsements, he said.

The current system created a vicious cycle, according to the association: Fishermen race to catch as many grouper as possible as fast as possible before the quota for the entire fishery is met, regardless

of weather conditions, leading to large numbers of fish caught at the same time, which lowers prices for fishermen, encouraging them to catch even more fish.

The IFQ plan will allow greater flexibility to fish when the weather and market conditions are favorable instead of having to fish during certain times regardless of weather, according to the association. It also will boost income for grouper fishermen and crews and provide a year-round supply of fresh grouper for consumers, retailers and wholesalers.

The council voted 13 to 3 for the referendum at its meeting last week in Key Largo. The referendum is expected to be held in the fall.