

**Testimony of Holly Binns**  
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**Pew Charitable Trusts, Pew Environment Group**  
**Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Meeting**  
**Orange Beach, Alabama**  
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Good Morning, Chairman McIlwain and Council Members. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input today on grouper management.

My name is Holly Binns and I manage the Pew Environment Group's Campaign to End Overfishing in the Southeast. The Pew Environment Group is the conservation arm of the Pew Charitable Trusts.

As you are well aware, gag and red grouper are two of the most important fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. Managing these populations sustainably benefits both the overall ecosystem and the economies of the coastal communities that depend on them.

It is in that spirit that we strongly encourage the Council to take decisive and immediate action to begin developing a science-based management plan for gag and red grouper that complies with the new MSA requirements to end overfishing immediately and to begin rebuilding the gag population as soon as possible.

Since both of these fisheries have large recreational components, particularly gag, and in-season monitoring is not yet possible, we urge the Council to establish and manage to an Annual Catch Target as part of the Accountability Measures for these species in order to prevent the fishery from exceeding the ACL and ensure that overfishing does not continue.

We recognize that decisions to drastically cut gag harvest will be very difficult given the popularity and importance of the fishery in the Gulf of Mexico, especially in Florida.

However, if science-based catch limits are implemented expeditiously, projections in the stock assessment update suggest that under present conditions, catch levels could soon increase and be near current limits within five or so years after enactment.

For this reason, we urge the Council to take action at this meeting to begin developing the necessary management measures, with the goal of implementing these changes in time for the 2011 fishing season.

We share the common goal of maintaining healthy ecosystems which include large, healthy fish populations that in turn are capable of supporting fishing communities and provide ample fishing

opportunities for the long-term when fished sustainably. We look forward to working with the Council and staff to ensure sustainable grouper populations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this input.