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Abstract:
The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council determined that previous management of the grouper and tilefish fisheries in the northern Gulf of Mexico were not meeting management goals, and developed a catch shares program using individual fishing quotas (IFQs) beginning in January 2010 in order to more effectively manage these fisheries. An IFQ is a management method in which individual fishers and corporations are allocated the right to harvest a percentage of a fishery's total allowable catch, thus specifying how much of a particular species each fisher can harvest. This study makes use of a mail out survey to document the perceptions of fishers, seafood wholesalers, fisheries managers, and academics with an interest in the (northern) Gulf of Mexico grouper and tilefish IFQ program. While fishers, seafood dealers, fisheries managers, and academics all acknowledge that the IFQ program will create some problems, commercial fishers and dealers were far more skeptical of the alleged benefits of IFQs. Moreover, larger commercial operators were more inclined to agree with managers and academics that the IFQ program will produce several benefits for their operations and the fisheries. Some smaller operators believe that they will be driven to ignore the new rules or be forced out of business. In the future, the Gulf Council might do two things: put a bit more effort into making fishers aware of the potential benefits of IFQs, and develop alternatives with more flexibility perhaps working more closely with communities of fishers, who prize their independent way of life above all else.

Keywords: Individual fishing quotas; Gulf of Mexico; Fisheries management; Perceptions