Fisherman Feedback: Red Snapper Response Summary

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SEDAR98-RW-01

17 September 2026

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Please cite this document as:

Gulf Council Staff. 2026. Fisherman Feedback: Red Snapper Response Summary. SEDAR98-RW-01. SEDAR, North Charleston, SC. 20 pp.

Fisherman Feedback: Red Snapper
Response Summary
September 2026

The Gulf Council (Council) asked fishermen, divers, and other federal fishery stakeholders what they have noticed about red snapper and red snapper fishing in recent years. Active fishermen have local knowledge and are a rich source of information and may notice trends or phenomena that scientists and managers may not observe. Local knowledge expands the types of information gathered by fisheries scientists and managers to gain a better, more contemporary understanding of what is happening on the water. The Gulf Council collects information through the Fisherman Feedback Tool because data used in stock assessments often have a terminal year that is several years old. On-the-water feedback from fishermen helps fill this information gap by providing managers with more recent insights to inform stock projections and management measures.

Observations on red snapper were collected using the Fisherman Feedback web-based tool that was advertised via press release, social media, and on the Council's website. As a result, 466 unique responses were received between July 21, 2026 – August 21, 2026.

Respondents self-selected their association with the fishery (Figure 1). Respondents were not limited to a single category, and some identified with more than one sector, resulting in a total of 556 responses. A majority of respondents (59%) identified with the private recreational fishing sector, followed by for-hire (29%), and commercial (12%).

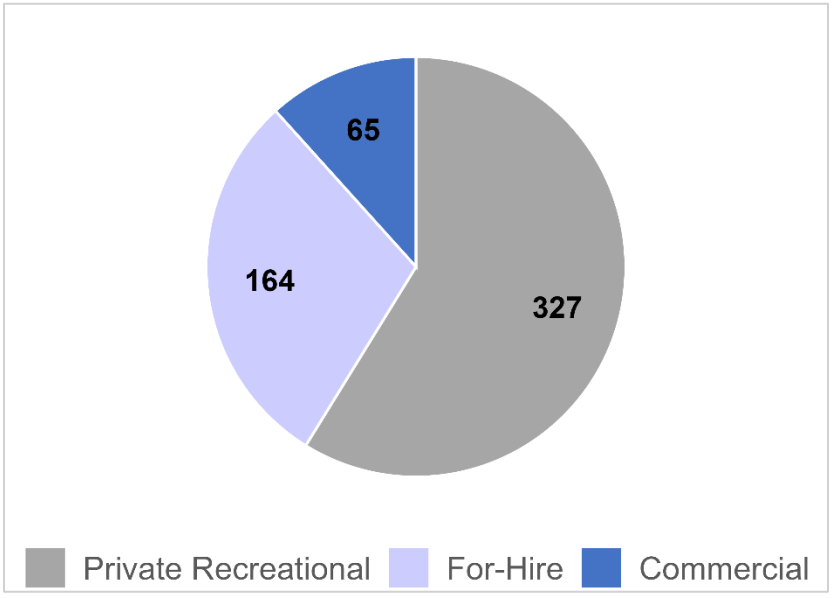


Figure 1*: Results collected from the tool asking individuals to self-identify their fishing sector association. While 466 individuals answered the survey question, they were not limited to a singular response and some identified with more than one sector of the fishery, resulting in a total of 556 responses.*

Respondents were provided a gridded map of 21 areas in the Gulf of America (Gulf) where they were able to self-identify the general location(s) of their observation (Figure 2). The greatest number of responses came from the northeastern Gulf (Zones 5-11; mid-peninsular Florida through Alabama), with the highest density (40% of all respondents) concentrated off western Florida and Alabama (Zones 8-10). The upper Florida Keys (Zone 1) had no responses, and the lowest number of responses came from the lower Florida Keys (Zone 2), followed by southwest Florida (Zone 3), and south Texas (Zones 20 and 21).

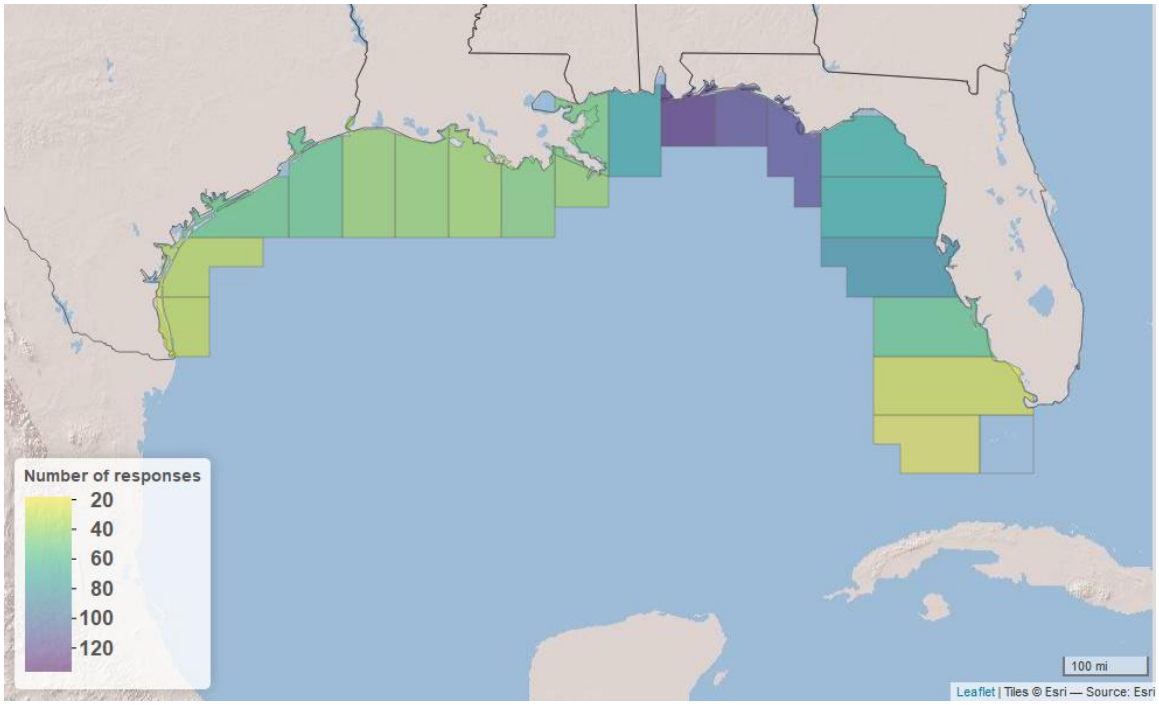


Figure 2: *Number of responses received in each of 21 areas in the Gulf. Respondents could select more than one area, so the total number illustrated in the map (n=853) exceeds the number of individual responses (n=466).*

The overall sentiment of each response was classified as positive, negative, or neutral/mixed through manual analysis. The analysis showed that more than half of the comments (58%) were negative in nature (Figure 3), followed by neutral/mixed (23%), and positive (19%). Comments were classified as either positive or negative based on overall sentiment of their response, while comments were classified as neutral when they were observational in nature, with sentiment either absent or hard to discern. Additionally, any comments that included an equal mix of positive and negative sentiments were also considered to have an overall neutral/mixed sentiment.

Many respondents expressed a strong concern with depredation from sharks, goliath grouper, and dolphins (porpoises), as well as discard mortality in general for this species. Many respondents with negative overall sentiment also observed a decrease in sizes of red snapper and claimed to

struggle to catch as many as previous years. Several respondents, primarily from Florida, attributed declines in the size and number of fish caught to localized depletion and fishing seasons that are too long. Some respondents further justified the occurrence of localized depletion by claiming they could catch red snapper in relatively shallow depths at the beginning of the season but needed to go to deeper depths as the season continued because red snapper were no longer present closer to shore. Some respondents claimed that larger red snapper were still abundant but were becoming more difficult to catch due to discoloration in the water, being outcompeted by gray triggerfish, and because smaller red snapper were more aggressive and pushed the larger red snapper off the reefs. Respondents attributed the decline in red snapper catches to excess pressure from each of the sectors, including commercial, charter and private recreational fishing. Other respondents also claimed that high grading and state charter boats fishing in federal waters have negatively impacted red snapper catches.

The majority of positive comments indicated no issue with catching their limits of red snapper and were happy with the current season structure. Many of the positive comments stated that the stock has rebounded and red snapper were abundant. Some of the positive comments did indicate that red snapper were not as abundant as they were a few years ago but were satisfied with that turn because it allowed them to catch other species. Many of the neutral/mixed sentiment comments indicated high abundance of juvenile red snapper but difficulty catching larger red snapper. Other neutral/mixed sentiment responses indicated high abundance, but they had to fish at greater depths to catch them or that red snapper were reluctant to bite. Additionally, some neutral/mixed comments indicated they were satisfied with red snapper fishing and abundance, but sharks have been a serious issue. Current management of red snapper had mixed influences on overall sentiment, as some individuals believed the season should be longer and the bag limit should be increased, while others believed the season was too long, the annual catch limit should be reduced for each sector, with some stating the season needed to be closed immediately.

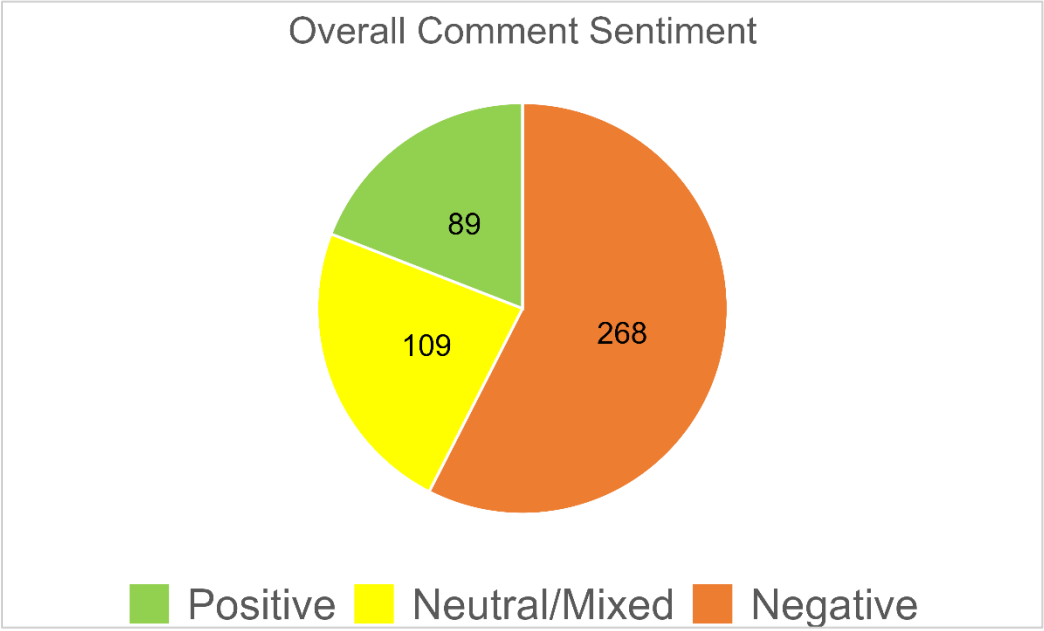


***Figure 3**: Number of responses indicating positive, negative, or neutral/mixed sentiment (n=466) classified by manual analysis.*

Overall comment sentiment was also sorted by location (Figure 4). Responses from the Florida Panhandle and Alabama (Zones 8-10), which had the greatest sample sizes, were mostly negative in overall sentiment. In every region of the Gulf, excluding southeastern Louisiana (Zones 13 and 14), central Texas (Zone 19), and southern Texas (Zone 21), negative overall sentiment was observed most frequently in responses. In 62% of the Gulf, the majority of responses were negative in overall sentiment, including all regions in Florida (excluding the Charlotte Harbor region in Zone 4), through eastern Mississippi (Zones 2-11), western Louisiana through eastern Texas (Zones 16-18), and the Corpus Christi region (Zone 20). The greatest proportion of positive responses came from eastern Louisiana (Zones 12-15) and eastern Texas (Zone 18). However, positive sentiment contributed to less than 40% of responses and wasn't the most frequently observed in these regions. Additionally, there was no apparent geographic trend in the distribution of neutral/mixed comments.

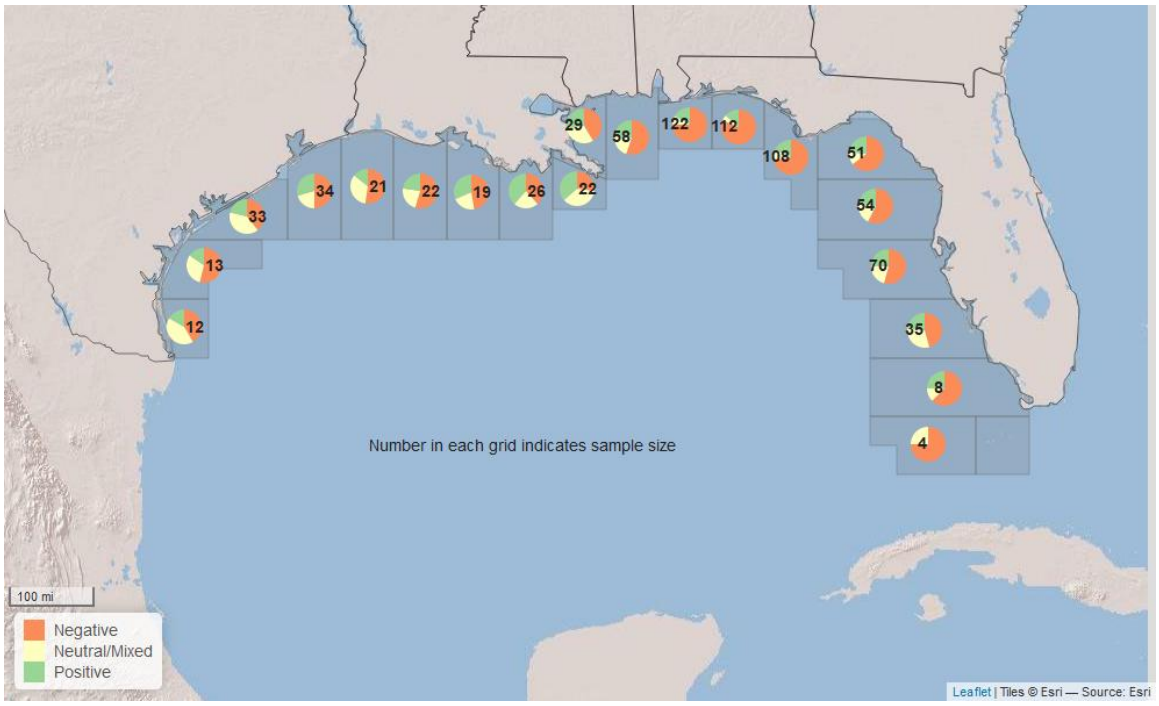


Figure 4*: Sentiment analysis for each area. Each comment (n=466) was characterized as positive, negative, or neutral/mixed based on independent review of each comment by two reviewers. Each comment was then linked to one or more areas based on the self-reported locations. Respondents could select more than one area, so the total number illustrated in the map (n=853) exceeds the number of individual responses.*

Overall sentiment was also categorized by fishing sector (Figure 5). Overall sentiment from the private recreational fleet differed substantially from the other two sectors. The majority of commercial (80%) and for-hire (78%) responses were negative in overall sentiment, while only 47% of private recreational responses were negative. Neutral/mixed responses were similar in proportion for commercial (15%) and for-hire (13%), while 29% of private recreational responses exhibited neutral/mixed sentiment. While positive overall sentiment was lowest in proportion for all sectors, the proportion of positive responses from the private recreational sector (24%) was substantially greater than commercial (5%) and for-hire (9%) sectors.



Figure 5*: Number of responses indicating positive, negative, or neutral/mixed sentiment sorted by commercial, private recreational, and federal for-hire fishing sector. Sentiment was classified by manual analysis and sector was self-selected by each respondent. Respondents were not limited to a singular sector declaration in their response (n=556). Comments that were not associated with the three primary fishing sectors were not analyzed.*

Comments from the 466 respondents were analyzed for sentiment focusing on the condition of the stock. Of the 466 comments, 64 did not provide comments that were determined to be related to the condition, health, or abundance of the stock, resulting in 402 unique comments applicable to stock condition. These comments were then classified based on whether they indicated that the stock was in good, negative, or neutral health (Figure 6).

Sentiment regarding stock condition was mixed between responses. The greatest proportion of responses were negative regarding stock condition (47%) and indicated a decrease in abundance and size. Many of these responses also indicated having to fish greater depths to catch red snapper and still struggling to catch large fish. A slightly lower proportion of responses were positive regarding stock condition (41%) and indicated no issues with catching their limits of legal-sized red snapper. Neutral/mixed responses (12%) either indicated that the stock was healthy in deeper waters, but abundance was low closer to shore, or that there was a healthy abundance of juvenile red snapper, but large fish were difficult to find.

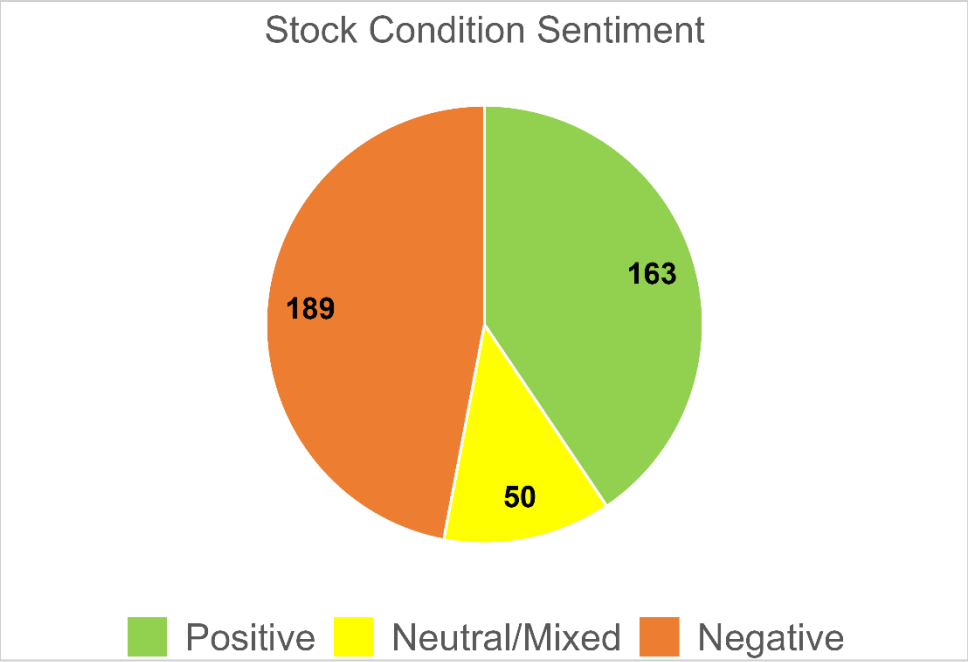


***Figure 6**: Number of comments indicating positive, negative, or neutral/mixed sentiment regarding stock condition (n=402).*

The sentiment of comments related to the condition, health, or abundance of the stock were also sorted by location (Figure 7). The majority of responses in the western Gulf exhibited positive sentiment regarding stock condition (Zones 12-21). Contrarily, the majority of responses from north of Tampa Bay through eastern Alabama (Zones 6-10) were negative in regard to stock condition sentiment, marking a clear distinction in the perception of current abundance of red snapper. This distinction indicates that the concentration of red snapper abundance may be higher in the western Gulf.

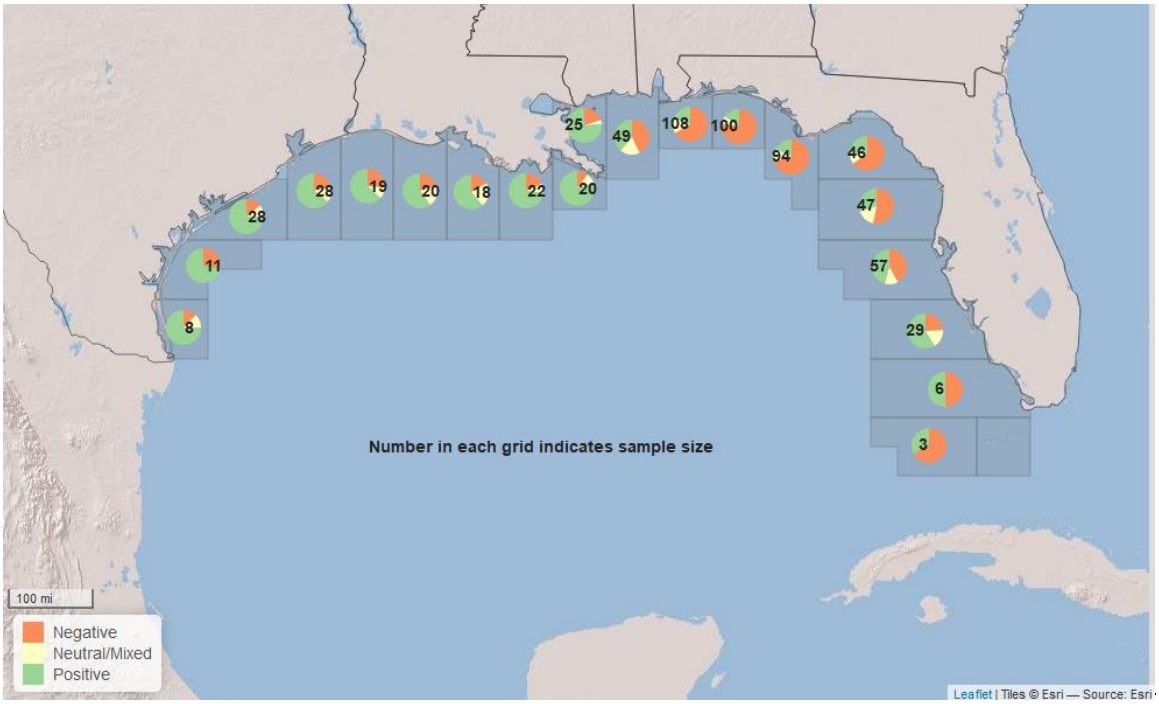


***Figure** 7: Sentiment analysis of the perception of stock condition by location. Each comment related to the health, condition, and/or abundance of the stock was characterized based on whether it indicated something positive, negative, or neutral/mixed about the stock (n =402). Each comment was then linked to one or more areas based on the self-reported locations. Respondents could select more than one area, so the total number illustrated in the map (n=738) exceeds the number of individual responses related to stock condition.*

Results were also analyzed by sector (Figure 8). Stock condition sentiment from the private recreational sector greatly differed from for-hire and commercial sectors. While the majority of responses were negative regarding stock condition in the for-hire sector (74%) and commercial sector (76%), slightly over half of the private recreational responses were positive (53%).

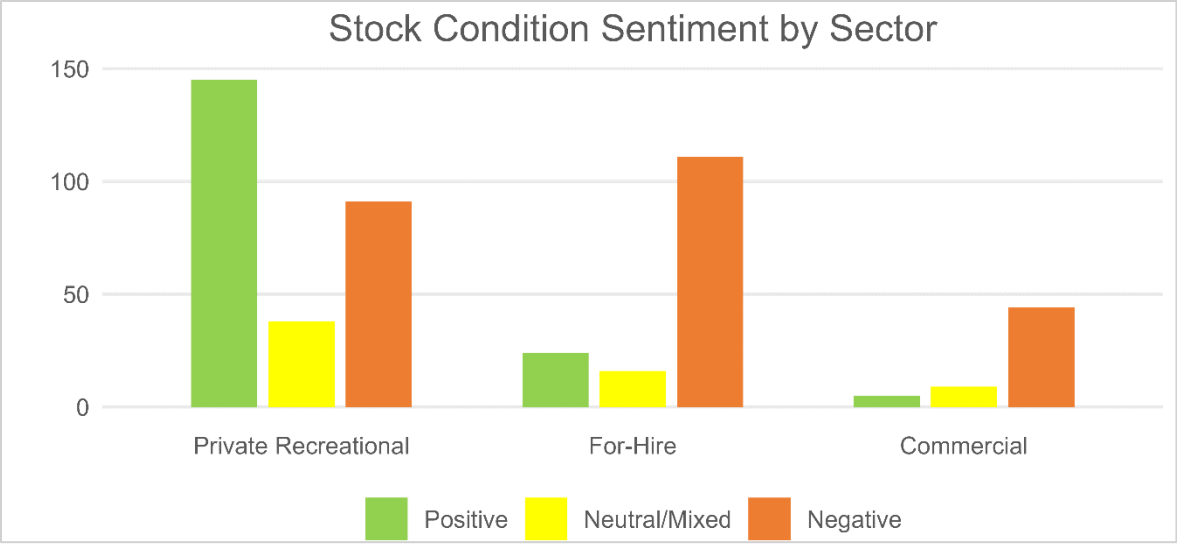


***Figure 8**: Number of responses related to stock condition (n=483) that indicate positive, negative, or neutral/mixed sentiment and sorted by commercial, private recreational, and federal for-hire fishing sector. Sector was self-selected by each respondent. Respondents were not limited to a single sector, so the total number of responses depicted in this figure exceeds the number of responses related to stock condition that were received (n=402). Comments that were not associated with the three primary fishing sectors were not analyzed.*

Comments were analyzed for the words most frequently used to contribute to either positive or negative sentiment through automated analysis (Figures 9 and 10). The most frequently occurring word was "sharks", which occurred in 93 unique comments and 51 more times than the next most frequent word, "small". Almost 70% of responses that mentioned "shark" were from Florida, and 71% were private recreational anglers. The word "dolphins" also occurred 35 times, indicating many respondents expressed concern regarding depredation from these animals. Excluding "sharks", the most frequently occurring negative words were: "small", "decline", "less", and "harder", which seems to indicate that much of the negative sentiment expressed concern about the size of the red snapper being caught, a decline in abundance, and increased difficulty in catching red snapper – all indicators of poor stock condition. Conversely, the most frequently occurring words of positive sentiment were: "large", "more", "plentiful", "good", and "abundant" – all of which contradict the indications of the negative sentiments. It is possible that the contradiction between positive and negative words most frequently observed could stem from geographic differences, as observed in Figure 7.

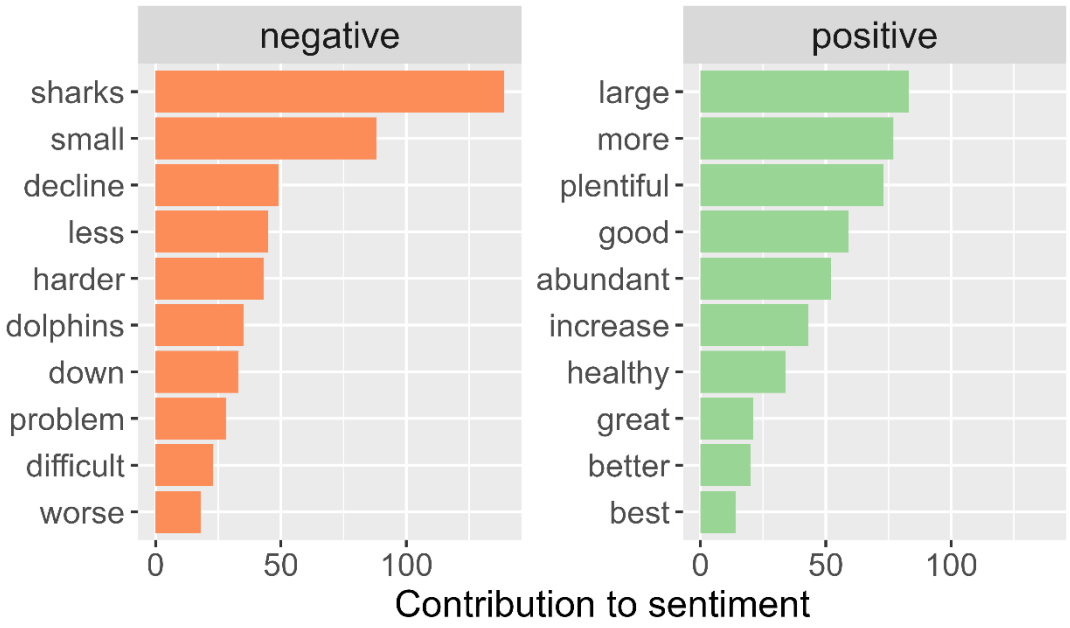


***Figure 9**: Most frequently used words contributing to comment sentiment identified using automated sentiment analysis.*

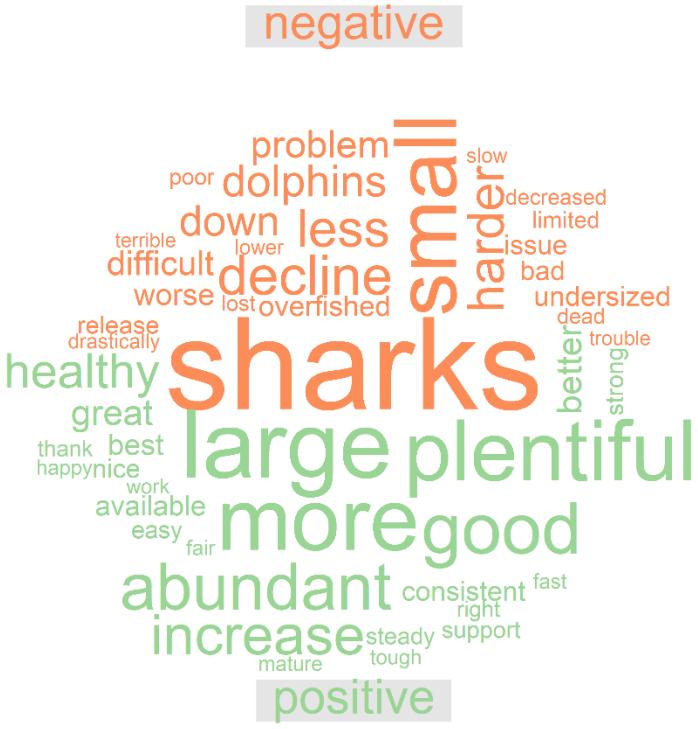


***Figure 10:** Most frequently used words contributing to comment sentiment identified using automated sentiment analysis.*

The Gulf Council utilized it's Fisherman Feedback Tool for red snapper in 2022 and again in 2026 (this report) and generated summary reports for each. This section of the 2026 effort compares the responses from both efforts. There were 414 more responses received in 2022 than 2026 (n=880 and 466, respectively). While the private recreational sector accounted for the majority of responses in both surveys, there was a substantial increase in the proportion of responses from the for-hire and commercial sectors in 2026 (Figure 11).

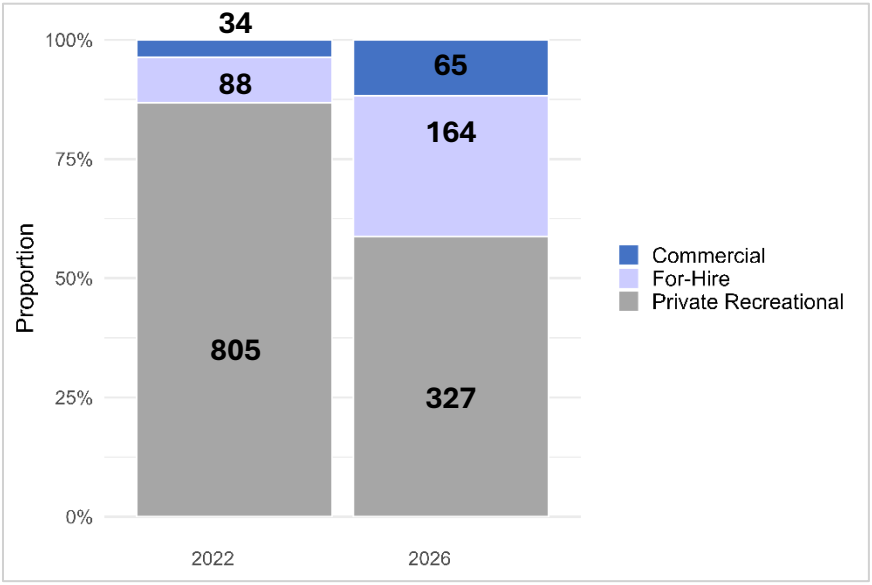


***Figure 11**: Results collected from the tool asking individuals to self-identify their fishing sector association. While 880 individuals answered the survey question in 2022 and 466 in 2026, they were not limited to a singular response and some identified with more than one sector of the fishery, resulting in a total of 927 and 556 responses, respectively.*

Geographic differences in responses between surveys were calculated by subtracting the proportion of responses from each grid in 2022 from 2026 (Figure 12). Because the sample size in 2022 was nearly twice as large as 2026, proportions were used rather than numbers to accurately represent geographic differences in responses. The Apalachicola region in the Florida Panhandle (Zone 8) had the greatest increase in the proportion of responses from 2022 to 2026, while the Mississippi/Alabama region (Zone 11) had the greatest decrease in the proportion of responses. Excluding the Upper Florida Keys (Zone 1) and southwest Florida (Zone 3), every region in Florida had an increase in proportion of responses (Zones 2-10). Excluding western Louisiana (Zone 17), every region west of Florida had a decrease in the proportion of responses (Zones 11-21).

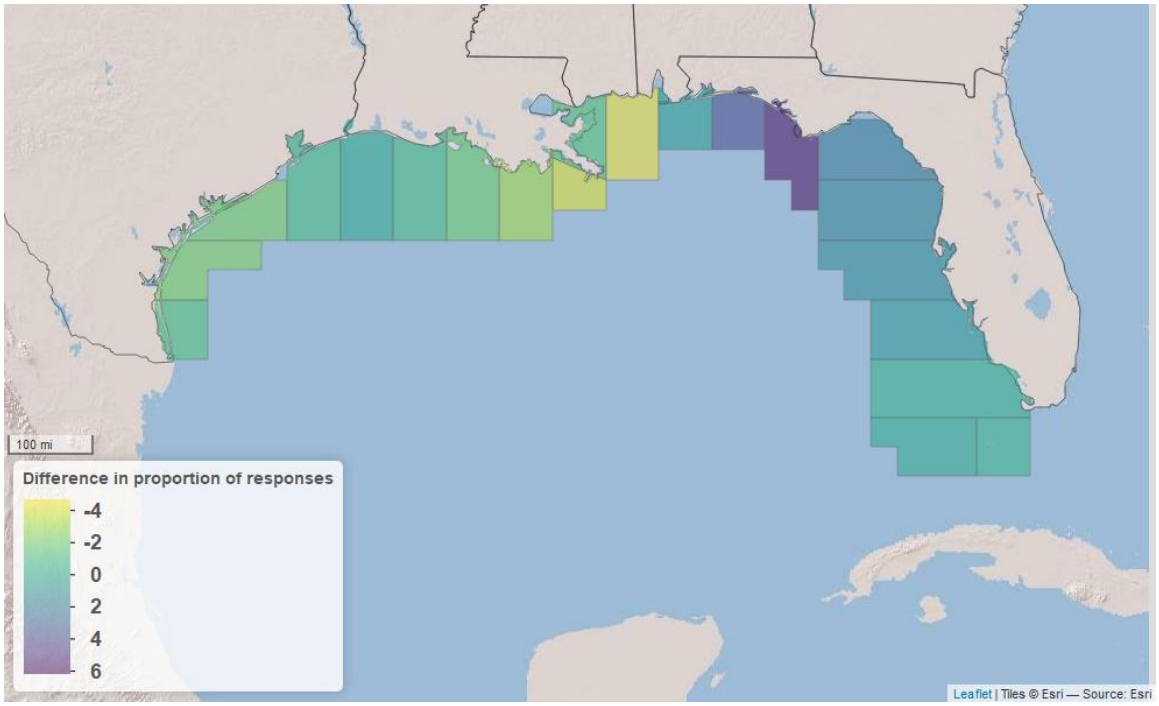


Figure 12: *Difference in number of responses received in each of 21 areas in the Gulf from 2022 to 2026. Respondents could select more than one area, so the total number illustrated in the map (n=1594 and 853 respectively) exceeds the number of individual responses (n=880 and 466 respectively).*

There was a 17% increase in negative sentiment from 2022 to 2026 (Figure 13). Neutral/mixed sentiment proportions decreased between surveys by 10%, and the proportion of positive responses also decreased by 7%. While negative sentiment was most frequently observed in 2022, the increase in the proportion of negative responses received in 2026 suggests the majority of stakeholders were not currently satisfied with the status of red snapper and thought it was a topic of concern.

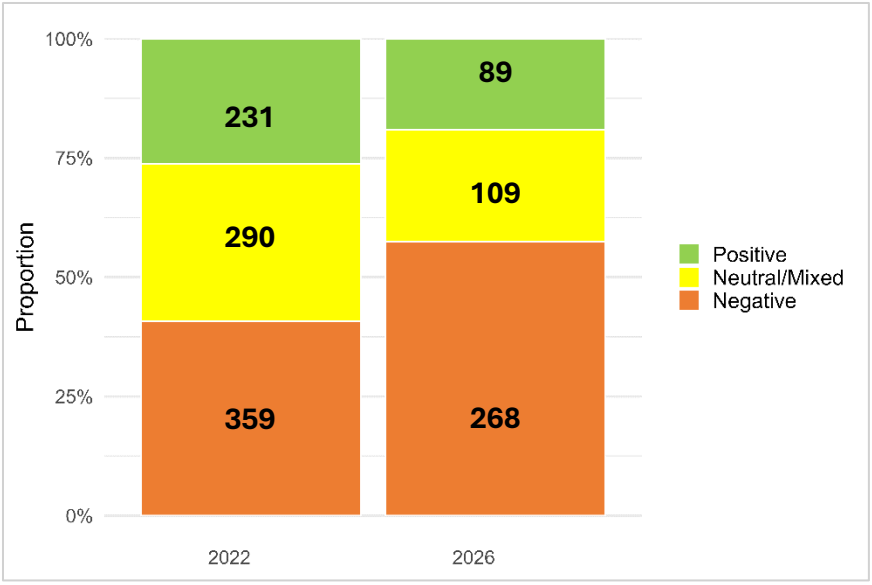


***Figure 13**: Proportion of responses in 2022 and 2026 indicating positive, negative, or neutral/mixed overall sentiment (n=880 and 466 respectively) classified by manual analysis.*

Geographically, average overall sentiment, or the mean of the numeric sentiment scores (i.e., -1 = Negative, 0 = Neutral/Mixed, 1 = Positive), changed in every grid (Figure 14). In 2022, every grid exhibited negative average sentiment except for Louisiana (Zones 12-17), which exhibited neutral/mixed average overall sentiment. However, in 2026, every region exhibited negative average overall sentiment except for southeast Louisiana (Zones 13 and 14). The region off Destin, Florida (Zone 9) showed the greatest change in average overall sentiment, where almost 25% of the responses in 2022 were negative, but 66% of responses in 2026 were negative. Only four regions (Zones 3, 13, 18, and 19) showed slight improvements in responses. However, three of the regions (excluding Zone 13) exhibited negative average overall sentiment in both surveys.

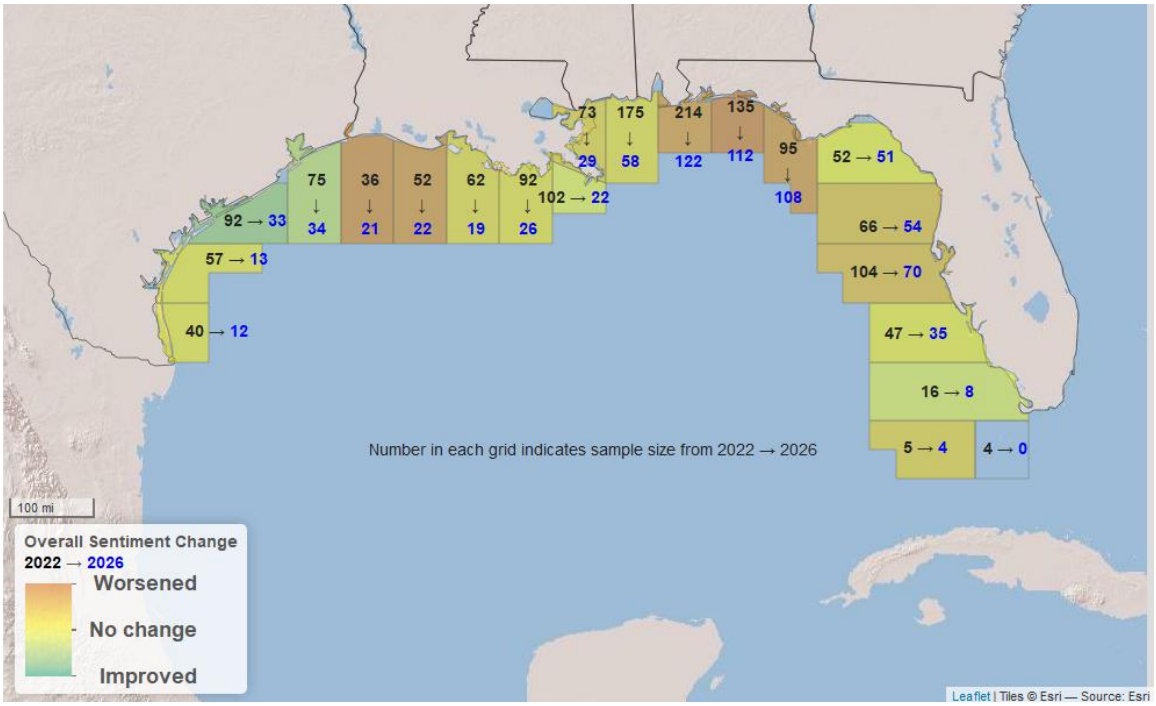


Figure 14*: Change in average sentiment analysis for each area from 2022 to 2026. Numbers in each grid represent sample size from each year, color coded accordingly. Each comment (n=880 and 466, respectively) was characterized as positive, negative, or neutral/mixed based on independent review of each comment by two reviewers. Each comment was then linked to one or more areas based on the self-reported locations. Respondents could select more than one area, so the total number illustrated in the map (n=1594 and 853, respectively) exceeds the number of individual responses.*

Overall sentiment for each survey was also categorized by fishing sector (Figure 15). The proportion of negative sentiment increased substantially for the for-hire and commercial sectors. The greatest change in sentiment came from the commercial sector, where 29% of commercial responses were positive (n=10) and 47% were negative (n=16) in 2022, only 5% of commercial responses were positive (n=3) and 80% of responses were negative in 2026 (n=52). The for-hire sector had the second greatest change in overall sentiment and strongly aligned with the commercial sector. While in 2022, 52% of responses were negative (n=46), 78% were negative in 2026 (n=128). Neutral/mixed sentiment in for-hire responses decreased from 31% (n=27) in 2022 to 13% (n=22) in 2026. Positive sentiment in for-hire responses also decreased from 17% (n=15) in 2022 to 9% (n=14) in 2026. The private recreational fleet had the smallest change in sentiment of each sector and had the greatest variation in sentiments in each year. Negative sentiment increased from 40% in 2022 (n=320) to 47% in 2026 (n=152), while positive and neutral/mixed sentiment both decreased by less than 5%. Unlike the for-hire and commercial sectors, there was no majority sentiment for the private recreational sector for both surveys.

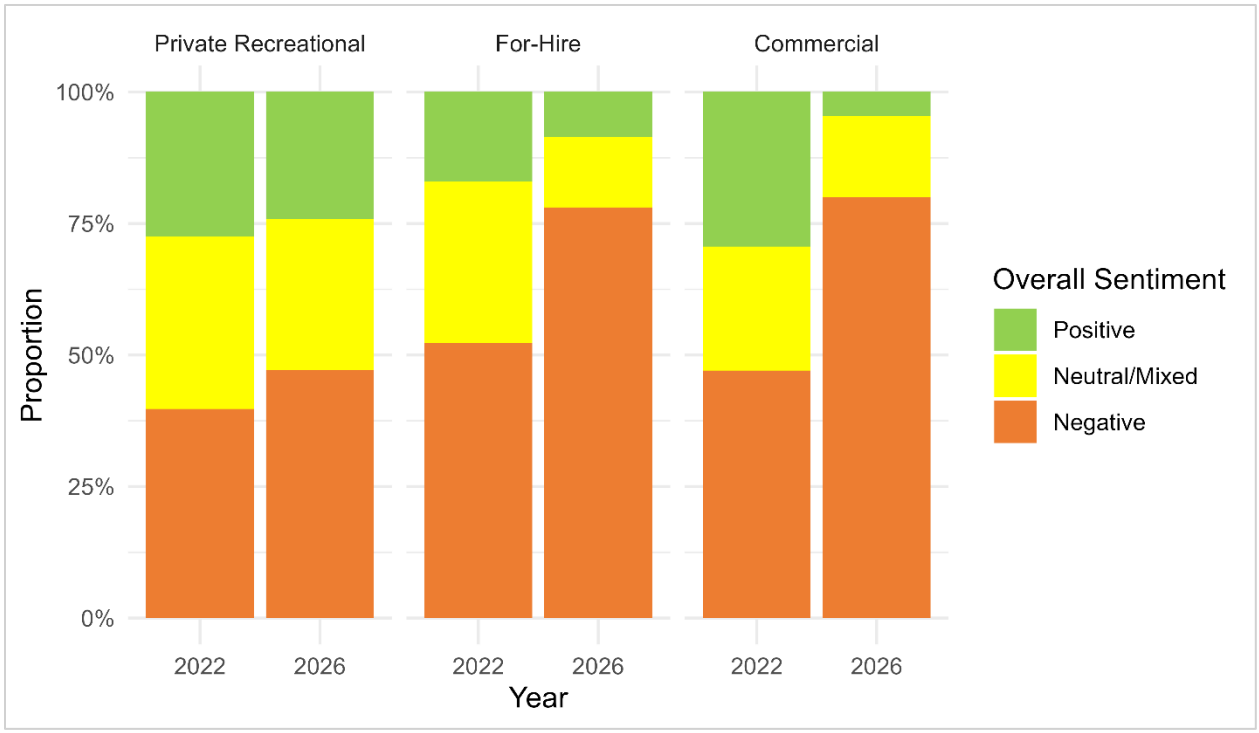


***Figure 15**: Proportion of responses indicating positive, negative, or neutral/mixed sentiment sorted by commercial, private recreational, and federal for-hire fishing sector for 2022 and 2026. Sentiment was classified by manual analysis and sector was self-selected by each respondent. Respondents were not limited to a singular sector declaration in their response (n=927 and 556, respectively). Comments that were not associated with the three primary fishing sectors were not analyzed.*

In 2022, 799 responses directly inferred something about the condition of the red snapper stock in the Gulf. In 2026, 402 comments were applicable to stock condition. These comments were classified based on whether they indicated that the stock was in positive, negative, or neutral condition (Figure 16). The majority of responses in 2022 (90%) indicated positive sentiment regarding the health of the red snapper stock, while only 6% of responses indicated negative sentiment. However, in 2026, there was a substantial decrease in positive sentiment (41%) and increase in negative sentiment (47%). This substantial shift in stock condition sentiment likely indicates that the stock is not as robust and healthy as it was thought to be in 2022.

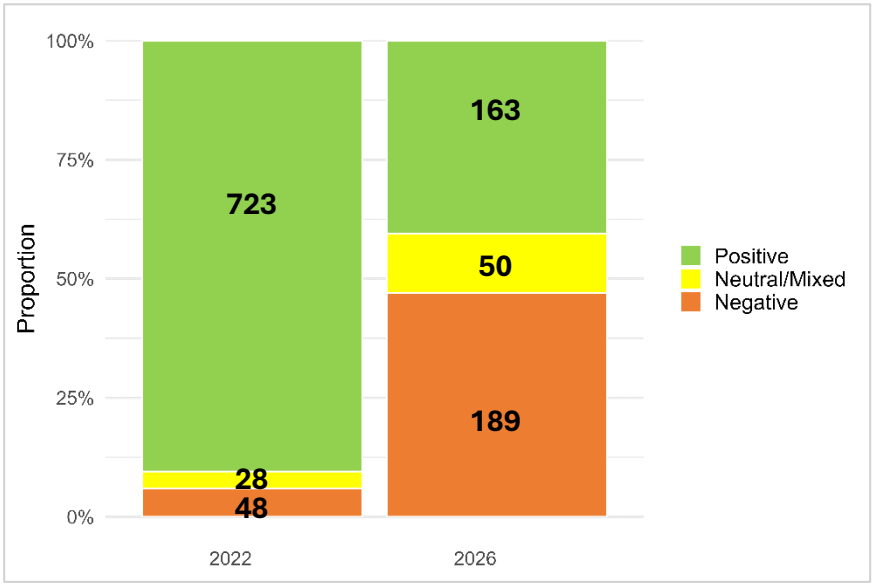


***Figure 16**: Proportion of comments in 2022 and 2026 indicating positive, negative, or neutral/mixed sentiment regarding stock condition (n=799 and 402, respectively).*

Changes in average sentiment of comments from 2022 and 2026 related to the condition, health, or abundance of the stock were also sorted by location (Figure 17). Excluding the Upper Florida Keys (Zone 1), every region in the Gulf exhibited worsened average sentiment regarding stock condition of red snapper. In 2022, every region excluding the lower Florida Keys (Zone 2) had at least 70% of respondents indicating positive sentiment regarding stock condition. The greatest change in stock condition sentiment was observed in the Florida Panhandle regions (Zones 8-10), where 86% of respondents indicated positive stock condition in 2022, while 67% of respondents indicated negative stock condition in 2026. The smallest change in average stock condition sentiment occurred in Texas regions (Zones 19-21) and southeast Louisiana (Zone 13), although average sentiment still worsened. While the entire Gulf exhibited worsened average sentiment regarding the stock condition, the magnitude of change was greater in the eastern Gulf (Zones 2-11) than in the western Gulf (Zones 12-21).

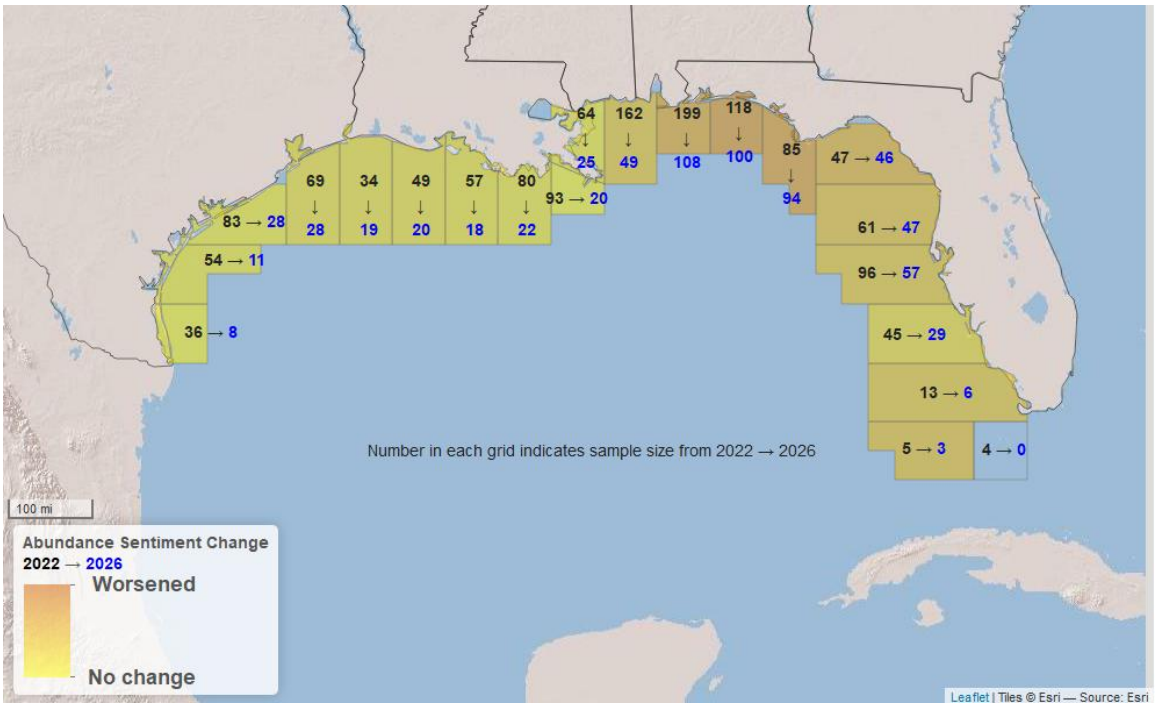


Figure 17*: Change in sentiment analysis of the perception of stock condition by location from 2022 to 2026. Numbers in each grid represent sample size from each year, color coded accordingly. Each comment related to the health, condition, and/or abundance of the stock was characterized based on whether it indicated something positive, negative, or neutral/mixed about the stock (n=799 and 402, respectively). Each comment was then linked to one or more areas based on the self-reported locations. Respondents could select more than one area, so the total number illustrated in the map (n=1454 and 738, respectively) exceeds the number of individual responses related to stock condition.*

Stock condition sentiment was also compared across sectors (Figure 18). All sectors exhibited both a decline in positive perceptions and an increase in negative perception across the two surveys. In 2022, almost all private recreational respondents (93%) and the majority of for-hire (70%) and commercial (71%) indicated positive sentiment regarding stock condition. However, in 2026, the majority of for-hire (74%) and commercial (76%) respondents expressed negative sentiment regarding stock condition. Further, a slight majority of the private recreational sector still exhibited positive stock condition sentiment in 2026 (53%). Similar to overall sentiment (Figure 15), stock condition sentiment did not substantially differ between sectors in 2022. However, in 2026, for-hire and commercial stock condition sentiments aligned, while private recreational sentiment differed substantially.

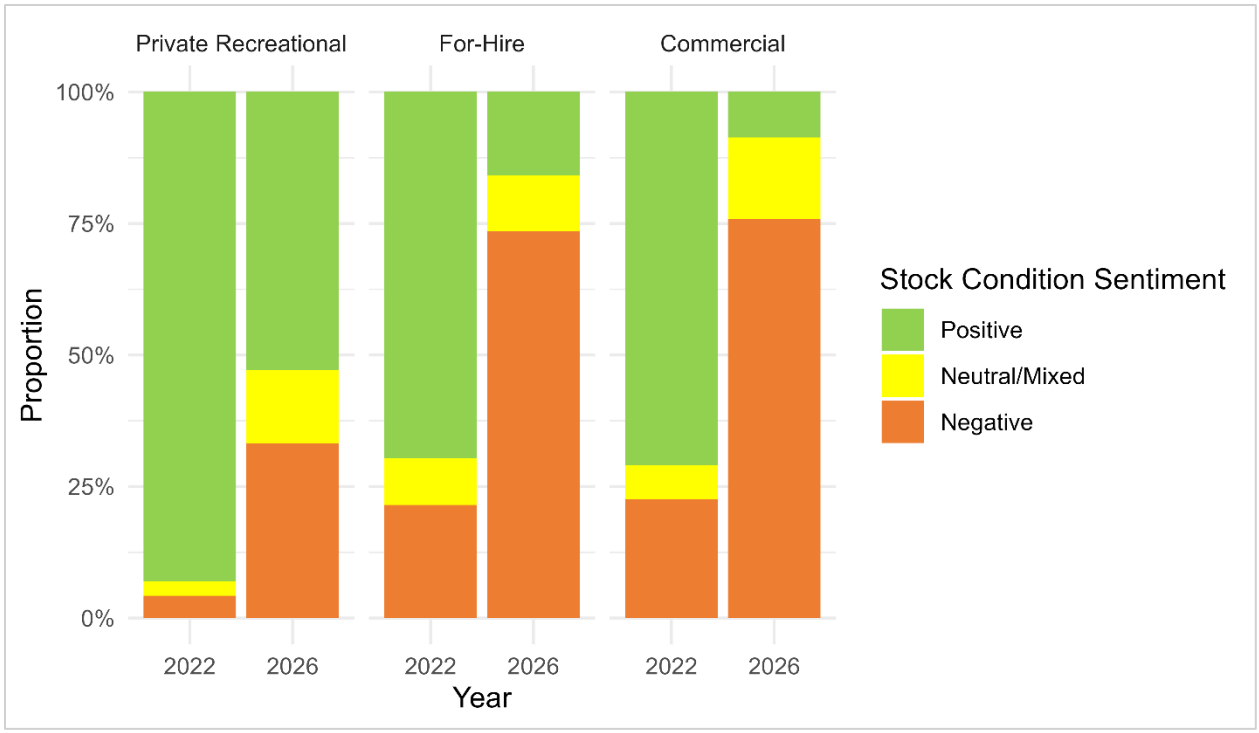


***Figure 18**: Proportion of responses in 2022 and 2026 related to stock condition (n=846 and 483, respectively) that indicate positive, negative, or neutral/mixed sentiment and sorted by commercial, private recreational, and federal for-hire fishing sector. Sector was self-selected by each respondent. Respondents were not limited to a single sector, so the total number of responses depicted in this figure exceeds the number of responses related to stock condition that were received (n=799 and 402, respectively). Comments that were not associated with the three primary fishing sectors were not analyzed.*

Between 2022 and 2026, 87 respondents completed both surveys. Respondents who completed both surveys fished in every region as far east as Southwest Florida (Zone 4) to as far west as southern Texas (Zone 21). The changes in overall sentiment for these respondents were compared between each survey (Figure 19). Twenty-seven respondents indicated an overall improvement in sentiment, and of those, three respondents aligned with the for-hire sector while the rest (n=24) aligned with the private recreational sector. There were no apparent geographic or sector-based trends observed for respondents who expressed no change or worse sentiment.

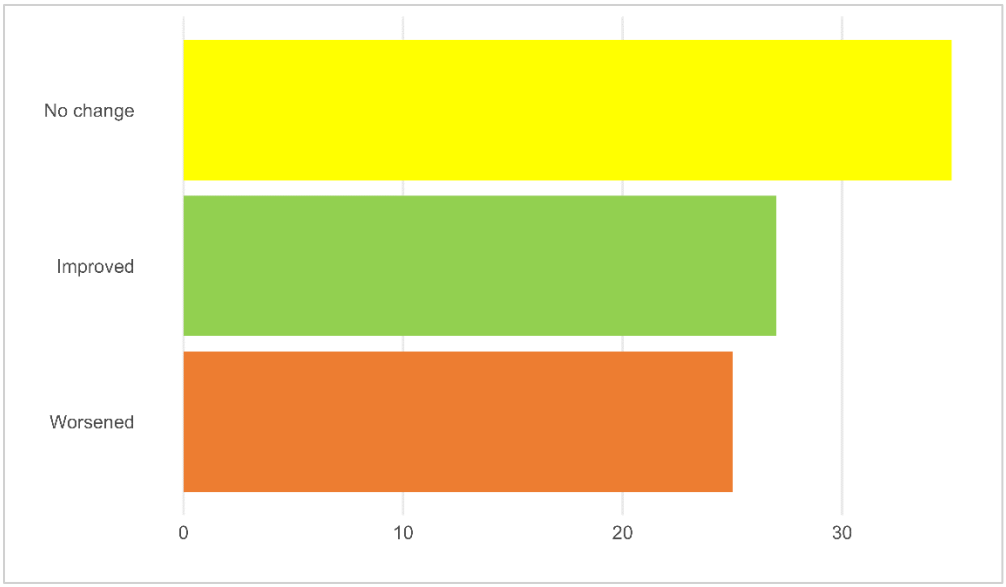


***Figure 19**: Overall sentiment comparison between respondents who completed both the 2022 and 2026 surveys (n=87). Responses were manually scored by whether they indicated positive, negative, or neutral/mixed sentiment.*

There were 73 respondents who completed both surveys that indicated something about the health of the red snapper stock. The changes in sentiment regarding stock health for these respondents were compared between each survey (Figure 20). Contrary to overall sentiment, the majority of respondents had no change in sentiment regarding stock condition. The three respondents who exhibited improved stock condition sentiment aligned with the private recreational sector, while worsened sentiment or no change in sentiment occurred in each sector.

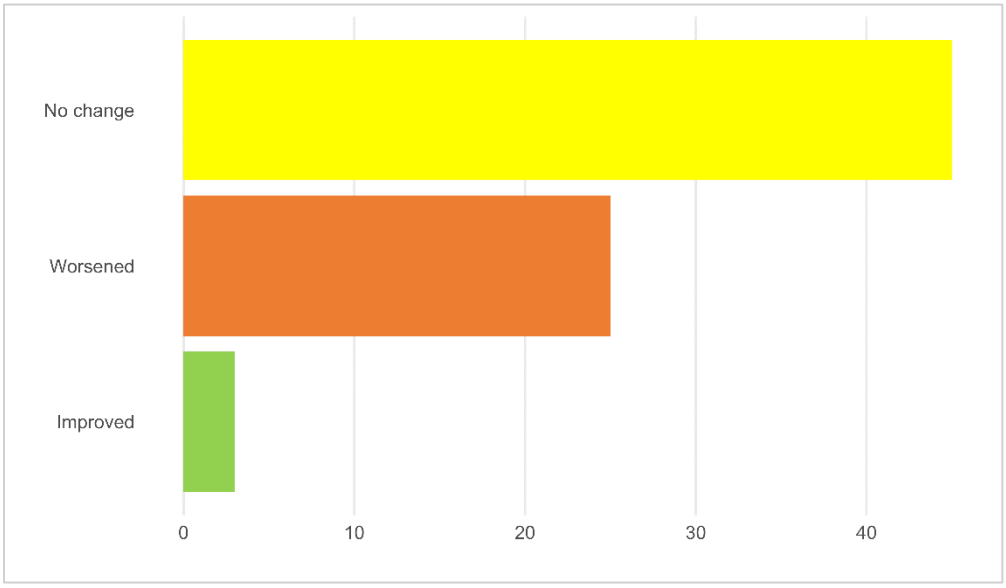


***Figure 20**: Stock sentiment comparison between respondents who completed both the 2022 and 2026 surveys and indicated something about the health of the stock (n=73). Responses were manually scored by whether they indicated positive, negative, or neutral/mixed sentiment.*

The results of Fisherman Feedback for Red Snapper will be submitted to the NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center and shared with the Council and its Scientific and Statistical Committee as SEDAR 98: Gulf Red Snapper Stock Assessment is completed and reviewed. The information collected through the tool is not intended to be considered as an index of abundance for direct incorporation into the stock assessment model. Instead, results of this effort are meant to supplement the role played by fisheries observers to the stock assessment process. The on-the-water perspective offered by respondents to this tool should be used to ground-truth the science and enhance our understanding of the stock.

Methods

Manual sentiment analysis was conducted by two independent readers, and overall comment sentiment was broadly characterized as positive, neutral/mixed, or negative. Readers also determined whether comments were related to the condition, health, or abundance of the stock. Those comments were analyzed again and classified based on whether they indicated that the stock was in good, negative, or neutral health. Readers then compared characterizations and resolved any disagreements in interpretation so that both readers agreed.

Automated sentiment analysis characterized each response using the 'tidytext' package in R. For this analysis, the words in each comment were compared to a revised version of the 'Bing' lexicon library which has been amended with characterizations for words commonly used in reporting fishery information and that may be unique to the stock. The library categorizes words into positive, negative, or neutral sentiment and scores every word in each comment accordingly. This was used to identify the most common words associated with a positive and negative sentiment.

For the comparison of 2022 and 2026 efforts, manual sentiment analysis characterized overall sentiment of each comment as positive, neutral/mixed, or negative and determined whether comments were related to the condition, health, or abundance of the stock. Abundance-related comments were analyzed and classified based on stock health indication by one reader as this was not done initially. Shifts in overall and abundance sentiment were characterized as improved, no change, or worsened.