

FEDERAL ISSUES REPORT
Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management
October 20, 2006

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) meets in North Carolina from December 4 - 8, 2006 (the same week as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting in Key Largo). The Council continues to work on two areas of fishery management planning: the snapper-grouper complex and the king-Spanish mackerel fishery. At the September 2006 meeting of the Council, Florida council member George Geiger was elected Chairman.

Snapper-Grouper Management Plans

Amendment 13C—The final rule for Snapper Grouper Amendment 13C was published in the Federal Register on September 21, 2006, and becomes effective on October 23, 2006. This amendment establishes management measures to end overfishing of snowy grouper, golden tilefish, vermilion snapper and black sea bass. It allows moderate increases in recreational and commercial harvest of red porgy because of improving population conditions.

Measures to address overfishing of snowy grouper, golden tilefish, vermilion snapper and black sea bass include:

- Restrictive commercial quotas and trip limits.
- Prohibits purchase and sale after quotas are met.
- Restricts all harvest and possession to applicable bag limit after quotas are met.
- Changes sea bass trap specifications and use to limit bycatch.
- Reduces recreational bag limit for snowy grouper, golden tilefish and black sea bass.
- Increases recreational minimum size limit for vermilion snapper and black sea bass.

Measures for red porgy include:

- Increases the commercial trip limit.
- Establishes a commercial quota that allows a moderate increase in harvest.
- Prohibits purchase and sale after quota is met.
- Restricts all harvest and possession to applicable bag limit after quota is met.

- Increases the recreational bag limit.

Commission staff recommends continued support for these measures and will be presenting state consistency rules for consideration at the February 2007 FWC meeting.

Amendment 14--This amendment proposes to establish a series of reserves designed to protect deepwater reef fish species and their habitat. The three Florida sites are in federal waters in depths ranging from 120 to 900 feet deep. Most of the depths encompassed are in the 300 to 600-foot range. At the September meeting of the Council, public comments from a series of workshops were reviewed and changes were made to the draft amendment including the following:

- Added a deepwater site off South Carolina proposed as an artificial reef area.
- Selected one of 6 proposed areas as the preferred alternative for a reserve off of northeast Florida.
- Removed proposed requirements for vessel monitoring systems on commercial vessels.

The projected approval date for Amendment 14 by the Council has been moved back to March 2007 to allow time for environmental impact statement review.

Commission staff recommends continued support for these measures.

Amendment 15--The Council continues to work on this amendment which addresses stock rebuilding plans and schedules for snowy grouper, golden tilefish, vermilion snapper, black sea bass and red porgy. The amendment also addresses the issue of recreational sale by requiring a federal commercial snapper-grouper permit to sell those species in or from the South Atlantic federal waters zone. It would also prohibit sale of fish caught under the recreational bag limit even if caught on a charter boat with a commercial permit.

Commission staff will continue working with Council members and staff in development of this amendment and a range of management alternatives for rebuilding stocks. We recommend support of provisions restricting recreational sale.

King Mackerel Management Plan

At the June 2006 meeting the Council voted to develop a regulatory

amendment that would set the total allowable catch of the Atlantic migratory group of king mackerel at 7.1 million pounds, and the total allowable catch of the Atlantic migratory group of Spanish mackerel at 6.7 million pounds. At a joint meeting of the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council mackerel committees in September, it was recommended to withdraw this regulatory proposal and instead develop a full plan amendment. This will provide better coordination between the two councils, and allow greater flexibility in setting total allowable catches.

A public scoping document will be prepared addressing a possible separation of the current joint plan between the two councils and modifying the associated boundary and permit issues should such a separation occur. Public input meetings will be scheduled for late 2006 and early 2007.

Commission staff will continue working to develop a range of alternatives for separating the king mackerel fishery between the two council jurisdictions.

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

The Gulf Council meets the week of November 13-16 in Galveston. Reef Fish management will be the principal topic of discussion. At the August 2006 meeting of the Council, Texas representative Robin Riechers was re-elected chairman, and Mississippi representative Corky Perret was re-elected co-chairman.

The Council will consider recommendations on Reef Fish Amendment 28 (Grouper Allocation), an update for Reef Fish Amendment 29 (Grouper IFQ), and update for Reef Fish amendment 26 (Red Snapper IFQ). Other Reef Fish issues that will be taken up include scoping options to address overfishing in the gag grouper, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish fisheries; and recommendations from the Southeast Fishery Science Center (SEFSC) regarding the Goliath Grouper Southeast Data Analysis and Review (SEDAR). SEDAR is the federal stock assessment process involving scientists, managers, and stakeholders. The GMFMC has requested that the NMFS Science Center conduct an analysis to determine if there is an acceptable level of harvest of goliath grouper that may be taken for scientific study to help determine the status of the goliath grouper stock. The results of any council action will likely affect Florida's management of goliath grouper.

Commission staff will continue working with Council members and staff in development of these amendments and a range of management alternatives for rebuilding gag grouper, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish stocks; and to address the goliath grouper harvest issue.

The Council will also review the Draft Economic Impact Statement and Interim Rule for Red Snapper/Shrimp. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is proposing an Interim Rule that would: 1) establish a 6.5 million pound total allowable catch (TAC); 2) establish a 13" commercial and 16" recreational minimum size limit for red snapper; 3) no change to the recreational harvesting season; 4) prohibit the possession of red snapper by captain and crew; 5) and, place an effort cap on the shrimp fishery in the western Gulf.

Commission staff will continue working with Council members and staff in development of this Interim Rule and a range of management alternatives for rebuilding red snapper stocks.

The Council will also receive a report on the ad hoc Shrimp Effort Workgroup and develop scheduling of an ad hoc Shrimp Effort Advisory Panel; recommendations from the Joint SAFMC/GMFMC Committees on King Mackerel including a revised framework for the Joint King Mackerel Fishery Management Plan. Finally, the Council will discuss SEDAR recommendations for red drum.

Commission staff will continue working to develop a range of alternatives for separating the king mackerel fishery between the two council jurisdictions.