



South Atlantic Council Review

Review and Discussion

November 17, 2016

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 2

This is a review and discussion of actions from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Sept. 12-16 meeting in Myrtle Beach, SC, and items that will be discussed at the Council's Dec. 5-9 meeting in Atlantic Beach, NC.

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Items Scheduled for Final Action in December



Mutton snapper regulation changes

- Council has been coordinating changes with FWC
- Council-proposed Atlantic federal regulations are consistent with new rules approved by FWC
 - 18-inch minimum size limit
 - 5-fish recreational bag limit
 - 5-fish commercial bag limit, April – June
 - 500-lb. commercial trip limit, July – March



Mandatory electronic reporting by the for-hire fleet

- Report trip data weekly
- Smartphone app will be created for easy reporting



Following a review of their proposed federal mutton snapper regulation changes and their proposed requirements for electronic reporting by the for-hire fleet at the September meeting, the Council has indicated they will take final action on these items in December.

The Council has been coordinating mutton snapper rule changes with FWC, and their proposed rules align with the rules adopted by the Commission in September:

- An 18-inch minimum size limit for recreational and commercial harvest;
- A five-fish recreational bag limit within the 10-fish snapper aggregate;
- A five-fish per person commercial bag limit from April through June; and
- A 500-pound commercial trip limit from July through March.

There is strong public support for these proposed federal regulation changes and for consistency between state and federal regulations.

The Council is proposing mandatory, weekly electronic reporting by the federally-permitted for-hire fleet. This would be a new requirement for charter boats. For headboats, which have been required to report electronically since 2014, the Council is proposing a shorter grace period for submitting reports. Both charter boat and headboat permit holders will be required to report the previous week's data (Monday – Sunday) on the following Tuesday. If implemented, all for-hire operations with a snapper-grouper, dolphin/wahoo, or coastal migratory pelagics federal permit will be required to report information about each fishing trip, such as location fished, harvest and discards, and number of anglers fishing. In general, there is support for mandatory electronic reporting because it can improve data collection and monitoring of quotas. However, some Florida charter captains oppose this requirement because they view it as a burden. The Council is attempting to alleviate this concern by creating an easy-to-use app for submitting reports via a smartphone or tablet.

If approved by the Council and the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, the mutton snapper changes and for-hire reporting requirements could go into effect during 2017.

Dolphin and Yellowtail Snapper Sector Allocations



- Considering strategies to maximize commercial and recreational use of dolphin and yellowtail snapper quotas
 - Common quota pool
 - No sector closures until total quota is met
 - Allow sectors to carry over unused quota
 - Temporarily transfer allocation between sectors
 - Permanent sector reallocation (yellowtail snapper only)
- Postponed consideration of separate commercial dolphin allocations for longline and hook-and-line gear



Photo credit: Don DeMaria

Public hearings planned for January/February 2017



At their September meeting, the Council continued re-evaluation of sector allocations for dolphin and yellowtail snapper and consideration of strategies that would allow commercial and recreational sectors access to unused quota. In recent years, the commercial fisheries have caught most of their sector allocations for these species while the recreational sectors have not neared their limits. Under current rules, unharvested quota may not be carried over to the following fishing year or transferred between sectors. The Commission wrote a letter to the Council to support speedy implementation of an action that would allow harvest of unused quota and FWC staff advocated for this at the September Council meeting. The strategies under consideration are:

1. A common quota pool, which would reserve a portion of the total quota for either sector to access as needed.
2. Rule changes to allow either sector to continue harvesting fish beyond its sector allocation until the total quota is harvested.
3. Annual quota rollovers where a sector could carry over unused quota into the next year.
4. Temporary quota transfers where a portion of allocation would be transferred from the sector that is not utilizing its entire allocation to the other sector on an annual basis. This transfer could be reversed as needed.
5. Permanent sector reallocation from the recreational sector to the commercial sector for yellowtail snapper only.

Commercial harvesters support consideration of all of these options. Recreational anglers and charter captains have expressed concern about all of the strategies; however, there is some recreational interest in allowing quota rollovers. The Council plans to hold public hearings on these options in January and February of 2017.

The Council has postponed consideration of separate commercial allocations for the dolphin hook-and-line and longline fleets until the effects of a recently-approved commercial trip limit can be evaluated. The trip limit is expected to become effective in 2017.

Red Snapper Management



Current management and status

- Limited or no harvest allowed since 2010
- Continues to be overfished and undergoing overfishing

Management changes under consideration

- Create bottom-fishing closures
- Establish very limited snapper-grouper fishing seasons
- Adjust size limits, recreational bag limits, and commercial trip limits
- Require a recreational stamp for bottom-fishing or a red snapper tag for harvest
- Mandate recreational reporting via apps
- Require gear to reduce discard mortality



Public scoping planned for January/February 2017

The Council is proposing management changes related to Atlantic red snapper because, despite limited or no harvest since 2010, the 2016 stock assessment determined the stock remains overfished and continues to undergo overfishing.

In September, the Council reviewed potential management actions that might allow an annual fishing season while constraining harvest and discards to the quota; improve recreational data collection; and increase the survival rate of released fish. These potential management actions are:

- Closing areas to bottom-fishing in regions where there are high densities of both red snapper and bottom-fishing effort. This type of area closure would have a disproportionate impact on northeast Florida. When this action was proposed in 2010, it received strong opposition from stakeholders.
- Establishing very limited red snapper or snapper-grouper fishing seasons for the recreational and commercial sectors.
- Adjusting size limits and bag or trip limits. During the limited 2012-2014 red snapper seasons, the recreational bag limit was one fish per person and the commercial trip limit was either 50 or 75 pounds. For both sectors, there were no size limits.
- Requiring a recreational stamp for bottom-fishing in federal waters or a recreational harvest tag for red snapper. These options could improve recreational harvest and effort estimates.
- Mandating recreational anglers report harvest and fishing effort via apps to improve recreational estimates.
- Requiring fishermen who bottom-fish in federal waters to possess gear that could reduce discard mortality, such as descending devices and venting tools.

The Council plans to take these items out for public scoping in January and February of 2017. If the Council pursues any of these measures, they would not go into effect before 2018.

Other Items Under Consideration



For-hire limited entry program

- For snapper-grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, and dolphin/wahoo permits



Recreational snapper-grouper regulations

- Creation of a deep-water species aggregate bag limit and removal of size limits for these species
- Revision of existing aggregate bag limits
- Adjustments to the shallow-water grouper seasonal closure



Public scoping planned for January/February 2017

The Council reviewed two other groups of actions under consideration, which are also scheduled for public scoping in January and February of 2017.

The first group of actions being considered is establishment of a limited-entry program for each of the three South Atlantic federal for-hire permits. These permits are required to operate for-hire trips in federal waters for snapper-grouper species, dolphin, wahoo, cobia, and king and Spanish mackerel. The number of current active permits are over 1,500 for snapper-grouper, over 1,600 for dolphin-wahoo, and over 1,500 for cobia and mackerels. Over half of the active permits are issued to Florida for-hire operations. The number of active permits has been stable over the last several years. Recreational stakeholder opinions regarding limiting access to these permits are divided.

The second group of actions is related to recreational snapper-grouper fishing regulations. The Council is considering revisions to federal recreational snapper-grouper aggregate bag limits, size limits, and closed seasons. This is being done at the recommendation of stakeholders, including many anglers from Florida. The Council has discussed creating a deep-water species aggregate bag limit and removing size limits for these species. Removal of size limits could reduce regulatory dead discards related to barotrauma. The Council is also proposing revisions to existing aggregate bag limits, which include the three-fish grouper aggregate, the 10-fish snapper aggregate, and the 20-fish aggregate for other snapper-grouper species that do not otherwise have specific bag limits. In regard to closed seasons, the Council is re-evaluating the timing of the current January through April shallow-water grouper closure to determine if regional variations in the timing of grouper spawning can be accommodated. This action could allow fishermen greater access to grouper in south Florida.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is Dec. 5-9 in Atlantic Beach, NC



Staff is not seeking direction on specific Council items at this time; however, input on Council items is always welcome.

The South Atlantic Council will next meet Dec. 5-9 in Atlantic Beach, NC.