

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management  
**Date:** November 18, 2015  
**Subject:** South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Report

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**Purpose:**

This item is a report on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) September meeting.

**Summary:**

At its September meeting, the Council chose preferred alternatives for the establishment of Special Management Zones (SMZs) to protect spawning snapper and grouper species, including a one-square-mile SMZ around an area known as Warsaw Hole off Florida. Other alternatives for the Florida site, located southwest of the Marquesas, are two- and four-square miles in size. Final Council action on SMZs is scheduled in March.

The commercial quota for dolphin was met early this year, resulting in the first ever in-season closure on June 30, 2015. Increasing participation by long-line fishermen in this fishery will likely cause this to become a recurring problem. To minimize the likelihood that another in-season closure occurs in 2016, the Council is proposing to implement a trip limit after a portion of the dolphin quota has been caught. There is stakeholder support for a 2,000 lb. trip limit after 65-75% of the quota has been reached, because it may allow the fishery to operate through the remainder of the year. The Council will review analysis and take final action at its next meeting December 7-11, 2015, in Atlantic Beach, North Carolina.

On August 24, 2015, hogfish was closed to recreational harvest because the quota was exceeded for the second time in two years. FWC and Council are concerned that harvest may have been overestimated and requested that NOAA Fisheries reexamine data that was used to close the fishery. The Council is also developing a rebuilding plan for the Florida Keys/East Florida stock of hogfish because it is overfished, with overfishing occurring. Staff will seek direction on the rebuilding plan at a future Commission meeting.

During their September meeting, the Council also proposed changes to (1) reduce the scope of the winter area closure for black sea bass pot fishing; (2) increase recreational black sea bass bag limits; (3) increase harvest and possession limits for blueline tilefish; (4) the fishing year for yellowtail snapper; and (5) mutton snapper regulations. The Council will hold public hearings via webinar in November and is scheduled to take final action in December on the proposed changes for blueline tilefish, yellowtail snapper, black sea bass, and dolphin. FWC staff will discuss potential mutton snapper management changes in a separate presentation at this FWC meeting.

Finally, staff will request direction on Atlantic gray triggerfish. The Commission recently approved an increase in the gray triggerfish minimum size limit from 12 to 14 inches based on recent Council action.

Afterward, staff and the Commission received concerns about the new minimum size limit and lack of public comments on this size limit change from south Florida fishermen. Subsequent stakeholder comments indicate that a 12-inch minimum size limit may be more appropriate for Atlantic state waters.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Staff requests Commission direction on the establishment of an SMZ for snapper and grouper at Warsaw Hole in federal waters off Florida and on commercial dolphin trip limits. Staff also requests direction on the Atlantic gray triggerfish minimum size limit and implementation of a recreational bag limit for this fishery in state waters. If the Commission chooses to return to the 14-inch minimum size limit, staff recommends authorizing the Executive Director to make this change and implement a five-fish recreational bag limit via Executive Order. Staff also recommends that the import size limit also be returned to 12-inches statewide and that the Executive Order expire on October 31, 2016, which would allow time for the Council to consider upcoming stock assessment results.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

Jessica McCawley, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management