

# South Atlantic Council Issues



Review and Discussion  
September 27, 2018



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

This is a review and discussion of anticipated actions and discussions from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Sept. 30 through Oct. 5 meeting in Charleston, SC, as well as other Atlantic federal issues. The Council's meeting was originally scheduled for Sept. 16-21 in Charleston; however, it was postponed due to Hurricane Florence.

Division: Marine Fisheries Management

Authors: Erika Burgess, Jessica McCawley, and Martha Guyas

Contact Phone Number: 850-487-0554

Report date: Sept. 20, 2018

Photo courtesy Don DeMaria

# South Atlantic Council Issues



## Yellowtail snapper

- Considering revision to accountability measure
- Goal to reduce likelihood of commercial fishery closure before the total Atlantic quota is met



## Snapper grouper for-hire limited-entry

- Council took public comment via webinar in August
  - Private recreational fishermen against limited-entry
  - Mixed opinions among for-hire operators
- Council will hold in-person public comment meetings in Oct. and Nov.



At their next meeting, the Council will review public comments on their proposal to revise the yellowtail snapper commercial accountability measure (AM), allowing the commercial fishery to remain open until all or a larger portion of the total Atlantic yellowtail snapper quota is caught. Currently, the commercial AM requires closure of the fishery once the commercial quota is met. The Council is proposing the commercial fishery only shut down after the total Atlantic yellowtail snapper quota is met. This change may reduce the likelihood of a commercial in-season closure.

The commercial yellowtail snapper fishery regularly meets its quota, as it did this year, triggering the AM. The recreational fishery lands 65% or less of their quota annually, meaning a portion of the total yellowtail snapper quota goes unharvested. The total Atlantic yellowtail snapper quota is allocated between the commercial (52.56%) and recreational (47.44%) fisheries.

Accountability measures are used to prevent or address overfishing. Because the total Atlantic quota is never fully met, there is a low risk that the proposed commercial AM would lead to overfishing. The commercial industry highly supports this change. The Council will consider further changes to yellowtail snapper regulations after the 2019 yellowtail snapper stock assessment.

The Council will also review public comments on establishment of a federal snapper grouper for-hire permit moratorium, which is the first step toward limited-entry. This action would halt the issuance of new permits, limiting the number of vessels allowed to operate snapper grouper for-hire trips in federal waters. Whereas limited-entry exists for Gulf federal for-hire permits, there is no limit to the number of Atlantic federal for-hire permits NOAA Fisheries may issue.

The Council took public comment via webinar in August and will hold in-person meetings throughout the South Atlantic in October and November. So far, private recreational comments generally oppose limited-entry because of fears it will reduce opportunities to take for-hire trips or limit one's opportunity to join the profession. For-hire captains' opinions are mixed, although relatively few of them have weighed in. Those captains in support argue that limited-entry would result in more accountable full-time operators and address overcapacity.

# Anticipated Final Action Items



## Spiny lobster

- Updating federal regulations to be more consistent with FWC rules
- Gulf Council took final action in August



## Commercial snapper grouper regulation changes

- Revisions to minimum size limits, fishing season structure, and trip limits



*Commercial fishermen expressing support for all proposed actions*



The South Atlantic Council is anticipated to take final action to update federal spiny lobster regulations to be more consistent with FWC regulations. This includes adopting regulations for bully net harvesters that mirror FWC regulations established in 2017. Additionally, they are expected to reinstate a process by which FWC can directly request NOAA Fisheries update federal regulations to be consistent with future FWC rule changes. The spiny lobster industry supports these actions because they desire consistent regulations across state and federal jurisdictions.

FWC manages spiny lobster in state waters and the South Atlantic and Gulf councils jointly manage it in federal waters. Historically, the councils have set federal regulations for spiny lobster based on Florida regulations because this fishery occurs almost entirely off Florida. The Gulf Council took final action to approve these changes at their August meeting.

The Council is also scheduled to take final action on several proposed changes for commercial snapper grouper regulations. All the proposed changes are based upon requests from commercial fishermen. The Council proposes to reduce the federal commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish to match the state waters minimum size limit of 12 inches, which was set by FWC in 2015. To prevent or delay early season closures, they propose to change the season structure, trip limits, and/or size limits for vermilion snapper, greater amberjack, and other jacks. The Council proposes to change the season structure for snowy grouper and revise blueline tilefish trip limits in attempt to keep these fisheries open at the same time because these species are often caught together. They propose allowing harvesters to retain a limited number of red porgy during the closed season to reduce regulatory discards. In general, the proposed changes are driven by commercial harvester preferences and not by sustainability concerns. The Council held public hearings in May and June 2018, and the commercial industry generally supports all the proposed changes.

If the South Atlantic Council approves the spiny lobster and snapper grouper proposed changes, they will be forwarded to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce for final approval and implementation.

## Other Atlantic Items



### 2018 red snapper season

- Commercial season opened July 26
- 6-day recreational season closed Aug. 19

### Snapper grouper best fishing practices

- Considering requirements for gear that reduce discard mortality

### Pelagic longline Exempted Fishing Permit

- NOAA Fisheries denied application to fish with pelagic longlines in the east Florida closed area



The 2018 Atlantic commercial red snapper season opened July 26 with a 75-pound commercial trip limit. The commercial season will close when the quota is met. As of Sept. 10, 53% of the commercial quota was harvested. The recreational season opened for two, three-day weekends in August, beginning Aug. 10 and closing Aug. 19. During the recreational season, FWC deployed staff to the east coast to collect biological samples and survey private recreational fishermen at 34 sites along Florida's east coast. FWC staff interviewed over 1,900 fishing parties and collected samples from over 1,400 fish. FWC's surveys and sampling will be used to generate a recreational harvest estimate and provide biological data for use in the next red snapper stock assessment. The final recreational harvest estimate will be available in 2019.

Related to red snapper, the Council will discuss management changes to reduce discard mortality of snapper grouper species. Discard mortality is a chronic problem for red snapper and other snapper grouper stocks because these deep-water fish are susceptible to barotrauma. To reduce discard mortality, the Council is considering requiring bottom-fishers to possess or use descending devices and limiting them to single-hook rigs. They are also considering revising the circle hook requirement. Some Council members would like to allow only non-offset circle hooks. Others would like the circle hook requirement to extend south beyond its current boundary of 28° north latitude (approximately Palm Bay, FL). This summer, the Council took public comment on this topic via webinar and through their website. Most commenters strongly support requiring anglers to have descending devices and venting tools. Few people offered comments on the other proposed changes.

Lastly, NOAA Fisheries recently announced they denied an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) request to study pelagic longline catch rates in the East Florida Coast Pelagic Longline Closed Area. The closed area was established in 2001 to reduce bycatch of several overfished and protected species that are highly concentrated in this area, including swordfish (particularly juveniles), sailfish, and sea turtles. FWC opposed this EFP request, and several similar requests made over the years, because of concern that it would rollback conservation gains made for billfish and swordfish.

# No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- September Council meeting rescheduled for Sept. 30 – Oct. 5 in Charleston, SC
- The following Council meeting is Dec. 3-7 in Kitty Hawk, NC



No specific direction is requested at this time; however, input on Council items is always welcome.

The next Council meeting is Sept. 30 – Oct. 5 in Charleston, SC.

The following Council meeting will occur Dec. 3-7 in Kitty Hawk, NC. This is the week before the December FWC Commission meeting.