

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: February 20, 2019
Subject: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Report

Purpose:

Update Commissioners on anticipated actions and discussions at the upcoming South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (SAFMC's) March 4 through 8 meeting in Jekyll Island, GA.

Summary:

In March, the SAFMC is scheduled to review many potential management changes for dolphin, ranging from revising management objectives and benchmarks to establishing commercial gear requirements to reducing the recreational vessel limit. Some of the issues were brought forward by stakeholders, such as allowing sale of charter-caught fish and reducing the 60-fish recreational vessel limit. The SAFMC will also use recalibrated recreational data to review sector allocations and quotas. The current sector allocations are 90% recreational and 10% commercial. It is uncommon for either sector to meet their quota; however, in 2015 the commercial sector did, and the fishery was closed for six months. The SAFMC will discuss ways to manage sector allocations so that future quota closures could be prevented. This could include allowing temporary transfer of quota between sectors or allowing sectors to share quota.

Other items scheduled for discussion during the SAFMC's March meeting include:

- Best fishing practices for snapper grouper: The SAFMC is considering requiring anglers to use descending devices to release discarded snapper grouper species, because these tools can reduce discard mortality associated with barotrauma. The SAFMC is also considering allowing only non-offset circle hooks for snapper grouper fishing because studies have shown these hooks result in higher post-release survival rates. These best fishing practices, especially descending devices, have broad support from stakeholders.
- Sector allocations: The SAFMC is developing a policy for reviewing sector quota allocations that specifies when a review is triggered. The purpose of allocation reviews is to ensure current allocations meet management objectives and the allocations are relevant to current fishery conditions as well as the needs of fishery participants.
- Red grouper rebuilding plan and commercial vessel limit: Red grouper is overfished. The SAFMC must implement a rebuilding plan for the stock. They are also considering creating a commercial vessel limit of 200 pounds to help the species rebuild. This vessel limit is expected to impact less than 6% of commercial fishing trips.

Staff Recommendation:

No direction requested at this time; however, input on SAFMC items is welcomed.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management