

South Atlantic Council Issues



Review and Discussion
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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

This is a review and discussion of anticipated actions and discussions at the upcoming South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting on March 4 through 8 in Jekyll Island, GA.

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Photo courtesy SAFMC/Cameron Rhodes

Dolphin – Council Discussion



- Allow sale of charter-caught fish
- Lower recreational vessel limits
- Commercial gear requirements
- Revised management plan objectives and benchmarks
- Revised sector allocations
- Allow temporary transfer of quota between sectors or quota sharing



Photo courtesy Gabriel Bahra

The Council will undertake a comprehensive review of the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for dolphin. This was initiated after a quota closure shut down the commercial dolphin fishery six months early while the recreational fishery did not meet their quota, leaving 6.7 million pounds of fish unharvested in 2015. The Council initially wanted to gain flexibility in managing sector allocations of dolphin, either through temporary quota transfers or quota sharing, to avoid future quota closures. Over time, the Council expanded the scope of issues they want to review for dolphin.

In March, the Council will discuss many potential modifications to the Dolphin FMP, including:

- Allowing sale of charter-caught dolphin, a practice that ended in 2012. Charter captains in Florida have asked to regain the ability to sell their client's catch. This has support from a large group of commercial fishermen.
- Reducing the recreational vessel limit from the current 60-fish limit. This is supported by Florida fishermen. Note, there is also a recreational bag limit of 10 fish per person.
- Modifying commercial gear regulations to require longline harvesters to follow the same requirements as those targeting Highly Migratory Species. This could include circle hook requirements and bait restrictions.
- Revising management plan objectives and benchmarks, such as acknowledging the directed commercial fishery in the objectives, redefining optimum yield to better address differences in the sectors, modifying the recreational annual catch target (ACT), and establishing a commercial ACT.
- Revising sector allocations because of recalibrated recreational harvest estimates. The current allocations, 90% recreational and 10% commercial, are based on historical catches.
- Providing flexibility in management by allowing temporary transfer of quota between sectors or creating a common quota that each sector could access. This could prevent future quota closures. To date, the only quota closure for dolphin occurred in 2015 for the commercial fishery.

Other Issues



Best fishing practices to reduce release mortality

- Require descending devices
- Modify circle hook requirement

Sector allocation reviews

- Establish a policy for triggering quota allocation reviews

Red grouper rebuilding

- Updated stock assessment under review
- Council may take final action to adopt rebuilding plan and establish commercial trip limits in March



The Council will continue discussing best fishing practices to reduce discard mortality for snapper grouper species that are vulnerable to barotrauma. Barotrauma can cause potentially lethal damage to fish as internal gases expand when a fish is brought to the surface from depths exceeding 30 feet. To increase survival of released fish, the Council is considering requiring anglers use a descending device, which is a tool that promotes survival by helping recompress the gases. The use of circle hooks is already required in most of the South Atlantic region and is also considered a best fishing practice because they reduce discard mortality for several species. The Council is considering modifying the circle hook requirement to prohibit offset circle hooks. Some Council members would like circle hooks to be optional so anglers could use J-hooks to target small-mouthed species like vermilion snapper and gray triggerfish.

The Council will continue development of a policy for reviewing sector allocations, which must be complete by August 2019. In this policy, the Council will establish criteria that trigger allocation reviews. These triggers can be based on time, public interest, or some other indicator such as a sector continually under-harvesting its quota. 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. Allocation reviews will not necessarily result in reallocation between sectors.

Lastly, the Council will discuss implementing a rebuilding plan for red grouper and a 200-pound commercial vessel limit. The Council delayed final action on these items to await an updated, 2018 stock assessment with recalibrated recreational data. If the new assessment does not pass scientific peer review, the Council will take final action in March on the rebuilding plan based on a 2017 stock assessment. If the 2018 stock assessment is approved, final action will be delayed until June. Delaying final action is not expected to negatively affect the stock because the Council already reduced the quotas to address overfishing in 2018. The commercial trip limit is expected to have minimal negative impact on commercial fishermen because fewer than 6% of trips landing red grouper exceeded 200 pounds.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is March 4-8 in Jekyll Island, GA



Photo courtesy Destiny Murphy

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

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