

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: May 1, 2019
Subject: Reef Fish Management Updates

Purpose:

Obtain approval for amendments that will revise FWC's reef fish regulations to align with stakeholder requests and recent federal changes.

Summary:

The South Atlantic Council, which manages reef fish in federal waters off the Atlantic coast of Florida through North Carolina, facilitated an in-depth review of federal reef fish management with commercial and recreational stakeholders. Public comment gathered during this review is also relevant to state management of reef fish. Stakeholders requested that managers consider fishery seasonality when setting regulations, adopt measures to lengthen fishing seasons, and reduce discards.

Staff will present proposed draft rules aligned with stakeholder requests. The proposed draft rules would also increase consistency between state and federal rules and provide clarification to and streamline the current regulations. If approved, the draft rules will be noticed and filed without further hearing unless requested. Specifically, the proposed draft rules would:

- Designate blueline tilefish as a restricted species. This designation means commercial harvesters must have a Restricted Species Endorsement (RS) for harvest and sale of blueline tilefish. This may result in a longer blueline tilefish season for federally-permitted Atlantic commercial fishermen.
- Set a commercial minimum size limit of 20 inches fork length for almaco jack in Atlantic state waters. This will end harvest of small fish, increase reproductive potential of the stock, and may lengthen the fishing season. The South Atlantic Council recently approved a 20-inch size limit.
- Remove the minimum size limit for blackfin, queen, and silk snapper. These deep-water fish are extremely susceptible to barotrauma, thus allowing fishermen to keep any of these fish that they catch will reduce dead discards. This matches current and pending regulations in federal waters.
- Remove outdated commercial vessel limit and season language for Atlantic red porgy. Because other provisions in FWC rule require commercial harvesters to follow federal vessel limits and seasons in Atlantic state waters, removing this outdated rule language would reduce confusion.
- Make technical updates and correct outdated references to federal rules.
- Streamline the gag and black grouper minimum size limit rule language and clarify the gag grouper import size limit.

Staff Recommendation:

Approval of the proposed draft rules to be effective July 1, 2019.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Guyas, Division of Marine Fisheries Management