

South Atlantic Council Issues



Review and Discussion
May 1, 2019



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

This is a review and discussion of items from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) March 4 through 8 meeting in Jekyll Island, GA.

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Photo courtesy SAFMC/Cameron Rhodes

Red Snapper Seasons



2019

- Recreational: 5 weekend days
 - July 12-14 (Fri. – Sun.) and 19-20 (Fri. – Sat.)
 - FWRI will sample snapper and survey anglers
- Commercial open Monday, July 8, until quota met

2020 and beyond

- Council to reconsider when seasons occur



Photo courtesy Teri Bowman



NOAA Fisheries announced dates for the 2019 federal Atlantic red snapper season. The recreational season will consist of five days: Friday, July 12, through Sunday, July 14, and the following Friday and Saturday, July 19 and 20. The recreational season length is set to constrain harvest below the quota and based upon estimated harvest rates from the 2018 recreational season. Recreational anglers will be allowed one fish per angler with no minimum size limit. As in previous years, FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) will conduct intensive monitoring during the federal season to develop robust estimates of recreational red snapper harvest. Additionally, FWRI will maximize the scientific opportunity of the 2019 federal season by collecting biological samples. The commercial season will open Monday, July 8, and will remain open until the commercial quota is met. The commercial vessel limit is 75 pounds per trip or per day.

The Atlantic federal quota of 42,510 fish is allocated 71.93% (29,656 fish) to the recreational sector and 28.07% (124,815 pounds) to the commercial sector. In 2018, recreational anglers caught an estimated 38,318 fish and commercial harvesters landed 124,558 pounds of red snapper.

In March, the Council discussed creating more flexibility in setting the red snapper season dates. The start dates for recreational and commercial seasons are narrowly defined in federal rule. Per federal regulations, when NOAA Fisheries allows a season, the recreational season will be three-day weekends beginning the second Friday in July and the commercial season begins the second Monday in July. Recreational and commercial stakeholders have requested the season occur outside the peak spawning period (June – September) and for the recreational season to begin prior to the commercial season. In June, the Council will discuss moving the season start dates to the spring or fall and starting the recreational season before the commercial season. They will also consider ways to add flexibility to setting season days so that, for example, if the season is six days, the Council could spread the season out across three weekends instead of two. The Council intends to consider any changes prior to the 2020 red snapper season.

Dolphin – Council Discussion



- Allowing sale of charter-caught fish
- Reducing recreational vessel limits
- Commercial gear requirements and restrictions
- Quota sharing alternatives
- Next steps: Adjust quota based on revised recreational estimates
 - Modification of sector quota allocations may occur



Photo courtesy Grant Gisondo

The Council continued discussion on a comprehensive review and revision of the Dolphin Fishery Management Plan (FMP). First implemented in 2004, the Dolphin FMP is designed to maintain a balance between the predominantly recreational fishery and commercial fishing access. As part of this broad review of the FMP, the Council is considering many potential modifications 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 but opposed by fishermen from North Carolina. Note, there is also a recreational bag limit of 10 fish per person.
- Requiring commercial longline harvesters to abide by the same requirements and restrictions as those targeting Highly Migratory Species. Those requirements include training on handling protected species, as well as gear and bait restrictions. Adding these regulations could provide conservation benefits to protected and prohibited species.
- 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.

The annual quota and sector allocations for dolphin are based upon historical landings. In 2018, NOAA Fisheries revised the way they estimate recreational effort in the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). This has resulted in much higher estimates of recreational harvest. Thus, the quota and allocations must be revisited and they may be revised. The current quota is 15,344,846 pounds. The current allocation is 90% to the recreational sector and 10% to the commercial sector.

Other Discussions



Revised recreational estimates (MRIP)

- Concerns about unrealistic effort and catch estimates
- FWC is working with state and federal partners on next steps

Sector allocation decisions

- Forming a policy outlining factors that prompt allocation reviews

Best fishing practices for snapper grouper

- Goal: reduce release mortality
- Require descending devices
- Modify hook requirements



As previously mentioned, NOAA Fisheries revised how they calculate recreational fishing effort in MRIP and they recalibrated older estimates of recreational harvest using the new effort estimates. The recreational effort and recalibrated catch estimates are unrealistically high for Florida and other southeastern U.S. states. For example, a 2016 survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated anglers took 61 million saltwater fishing trips nationwide, whereas, for 2017, the new MRIP effort survey estimated over 80 million saltwater fishing trips in Florida alone. The dramatically higher catch estimates produced by the new effort survey will have major implications for assessing and managing fisheries. FWC sent letters expressing concern about the new estimates to the Council and NOAA Fisheries. In March, the Council agreed to form a group of state and federal partners to determine how to incorporate the new estimates into management. Additionally, NOAA Fisheries is exploring how biases could be inflating the effort estimates.

The Council continues development of a policy for reviewing sector allocations. They are considering initiating allocation reviews after a set number of years or after a stock assessment, and if a sector regularly under or over harvests its quota. The timing for reviews would vary depending on the social or economic importance of a fishery. The purpose of reviews is to ensure current allocations meet management objectives and the allocations are relevant to current fishery conditions and the needs of participants. Allocation reviews will not necessarily result in reallocation of quota between sectors.

The Council is considering requiring use of best fishing practices to improve post-release survival for snapper grouper species vulnerable to barotrauma and discard mortality. The Council may require harvesters to have a descending device, which is a tool that can reverse some affects of barotrauma. The Council is also proposing only corrodible (e.g., non-stainless steel) hooks be allowed for snapper grouper harvest and prohibiting offset circle hooks. The use of circle hooks, which is already required in most of the South Atlantic region, is considered a best fishing practice because they reduce discard mortality for several species. Some research shows that offset circle hooks cause higher rates of discard mortality compared to non-offset circle hooks. The Council may take final action on these proposals in September, and the final rule may take affect as soon as 2020.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is June 10-14 near Stuart, FL



Photo courtesy Gabriel Bahra

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

The next Council meeting is June 10-14 at Hutchinson Island near Stuart, FL.

The following slides are considered backup material
and are not anticipated to be part of the actual
presentation



2018 Red Snapper Recreational Landings



Harvest source	Data source	Preliminary 2018 landings (number)
NC private recreational and charter	MRIP	402
SC private recreational and charter	State red snapper survey	96
GA private recreational and charter	State red snapper survey	405
FL private recreational and charter	State red snapper survey	33,234
South Atlantic headboats	Headboat survey	4,181
Total		38,318



For 2018, NOAA Fisheries estimates recreational anglers caught 38,318 fish, which is greater than the recreational quota of 29,656 fish. This table shows the data NOAA Fisheries used to develop the overall estimate of 2018 recreational red snapper harvest, which includes results from state agency and federal surveys conducted during the six-day 2018 season. The 2018 recreational season was open for two three-day weekends, August 10-12 and 17-19. State agencies and NOAA Fisheries conducted surveys to estimate recreational harvest during the six-day season.

In 2018, the commercial red snapper season opened July 26 and closed November 7. When NOAA Fisheries determined commercial quota was still available, they reopened the commercial fishery December 5 and closed it for a final time on December 12. During 2018, the commercial fishery harvested 124,558 pounds of red snapper, 99.8% of their quota.

Note: NOAA Fisheries does not require a payback for exceeding the Atlantic red snapper quota.

HMS Longline Requirements and Restrictions



- Must possess valid Safe Handling, Release, and Identification Workshop certificate on board for both the owner and operator
- May only have corrodible (i.e., non-stainless steel) circle hooks on board
- Offset circle hooks must be size 18/0 or larger hooks with an offset not to exceed 10 degrees
- Non-offset circle hooks must be 16/0 or larger
- Must use whole finfish or whole squid as bait
- Gangions must be long enough to allow incidentally-caught air-breathing animals to surface
- Pelagic longline cannot exceed 20 nautical miles in length in the Mid-Atlantic Bight

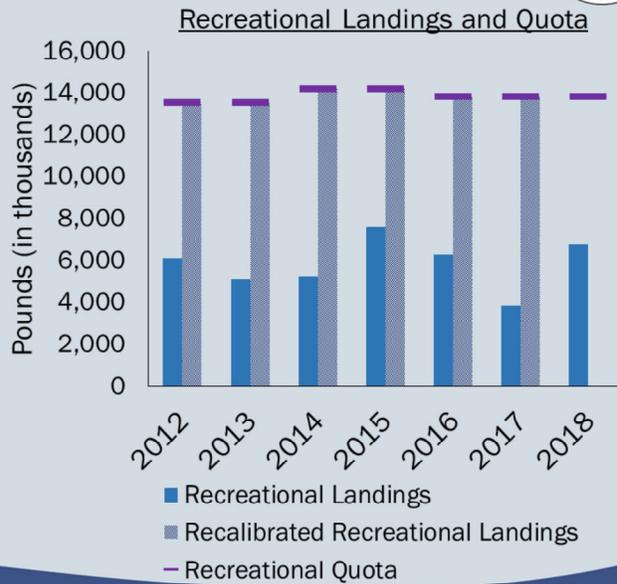
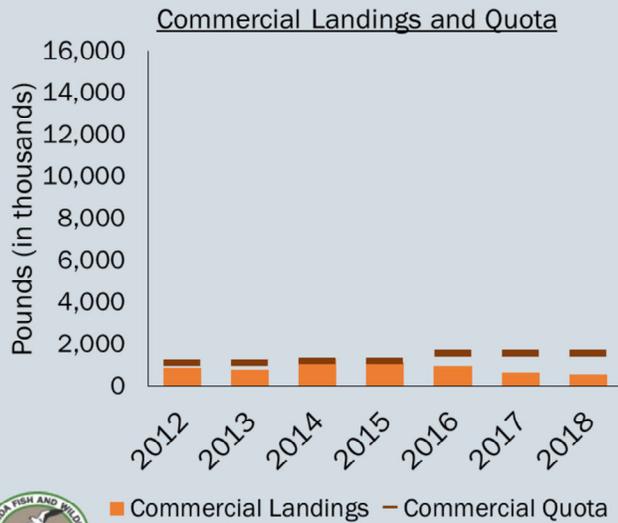


The Council is considering requiring commercial longline harvesters who target dolphin to abide by the same requirements and restrictions as harvesters permitted to target Highly Migratory Species (HMS) with longlines. Many of these requirements are intended to prevent bycatch of protected species (e.g., sea turtles, sea birds) or decrease bycatch mortality for protected and prohibited species (e.g., prohibited sharks, dolphins, sea turtles, and sea birds). HMS-permitted longline vessel owners and operators must be trained on handling protected species. There are also several gear and bait restrictions:

- May only have corrodible (i.e., non-stainless steel) circle hooks on board the vessel.
- Offset circle hooks must be size 18/0 or larger with an offset not to exceed 10 degrees.
- Non-offset circle hooks must be size 16/0 or larger.
- Only whole finfish and whole squid may be used as bait with longline gear.
- Gangions (i.e., the line with the hook that is attached to the main line) must be long enough to allow incidentally-caught air-breathing animals (e.g., sea turtles, sea birds, marine mammals) to surface.
- Deployed pelagic longline cannot exceed 20 nautical miles in length in the Mid-Atlantic Bight.

Requiring longline harvesters without HMS permits to abide by these regulations when targeting dolphin would provide conservation benefits to protected and prohibited species.

Atlantic Dolphin Landings



Commercial and recreational dolphin harvest has been managed under a quota since 2012. Currently, the commercial fishery is allocated 10% of the stock's quota and the recreational fishery is allocated 90% of the quota. It is uncommon for either sector to meet their quota, although the commercial fishery did in 2015. As the figures show, recreational harvest is the largest source of dolphin landings. The recalibrated recreational estimates for 2012 through 2017 are over two times higher than previous estimates. For 2018, recreational landings are incomplete and the recalibrated recreational landings are unavailable.