

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: May 1, 2019
Subject: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Report

Purpose:

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

Summary:

NOAA Fisheries announced dates for the 2019 federal Atlantic red snapper seasons. The recreational season is July 12-14 and 19-20, and anglers will have a one-fish bag limit with no minimum size limit. The commercial season opens July 8 with a 75-pound commercial vessel limit and closes when the commercial quota is met. Following the announcement, the SAFMC expressed interest in changing when future federal seasons occur. The federal rule for recreational and commercial seasons is narrowly defined. Stakeholders have requested the season avoid the peak spawning period (June – September) and for recreational fishing to open before the commercial season. The Council intends to consider changes prior to the 2020 season.

The SAFMC is considering a wide range of changes for dolphin. Some were requested by stakeholders, such as allowing sale of charter-caught fish and reducing the 60-fish recreational vessel limit. They are also considering additional gear restrictions and training for commercial longline vessels harvesting dolphin. Additionally, the SAFMC is examining ways to manage sector allocations to avoid future quota closures. This might include allowing temporary transfer of quota between sectors or allowing sectors to share quota.

The SAFMC discussed modifying the dolphin quota and sector allocations based on revised recreational harvest estimates, because the quota and allocations are based on historic catches. New revisions to how NOAA Fisheries estimates recreational fishing effort resulted in unrealistically high catch estimates for dolphin and most recreational fisheries in the southeastern U.S. This has implications for assessing and managing fisheries. State and federal partners will meet to determine how to incorporate the new recreational estimates into management.

To increase survival rates of discarded snapper grouper species, the SAFMC may require anglers to have a descending device, use non-stainless steel hooks, and, in areas where circle hooks are required, ban use of off-set circle hooks. Stakeholders support these best fishing practices, especially descending devices.

The SAFMC continues to develop a policy that specifies when sector quota allocations should be reviewed. The purpose of allocation reviews is to ensure current allocations meet management objectives and are relevant to current fishery conditions and the needs of fishery participants.

Staff Recommendation:

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

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management