

South Atlantic Council Issues



Review and Discussion
July 17, 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) June 10 through 14 meeting in Stuart, FL. Commission direction is requested on increasing the king mackerel commercial vessel limit in state waters off Volusia through Miami-Dade counties.

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Red Snapper



2019 season

- Recreational: 5 weekend days
 - July 12-14 (Fri. – Sun.) and 19-20 (Fri. – Sat.)
 - FWRI sampling snapper and surveying anglers
- Commercial opened July 8 and closes when quota is met

Council reconsidering when future seasons occur

- Season start dates
- Recreational weekend season structure



Photo courtesy Teri Bowman



The 2019 Atlantic red snapper season will occur over five days: July 12-14 (Friday through Sunday) and July 19-20 (Friday and Saturday). The recreational season length, which is based upon estimated harvest rates from the 2018 recreational season, is set to constrain harvest below the quota. The daily recreational bag limit is one fish per person 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 and will maximize the scientific opportunity by collecting biological samples. The commercial season opened Monday, July 8, and will remain open until the commercial quota is met. The commercial vessel limit is 75 pounds per trip and 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 June, the Council continued discussions about creating more flexibility in setting future red snapper seasons. The start dates for recreational and commercial seasons are narrowly defined in federal rule. Per federal regulations, the recreational season will be consecutive 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 through September). Some Council members are interested in distributing the season days differently because they believe it would provide anglers greater opportunity to participate in the fishery. Using this year's five-day season as an example, instead of distributing it across two weekends, the Council members would have preferred a season comprising five consecutive Saturdays instead. This summer, the Council will hold meetings to collect public input on these ideas.

Dolphin and Wahoo – Re-evaluation of Management Plan



Potential changes

- Updating goals and objectives
- Reducing recreational vessel limits for dolphin
- Revising commercial gear requirements and restrictions
- Conserving important prey species
- Revising quotas and allocations
 - Quota sharing alternatives
 - Accountability measures



Considered but rejected

- Allowing sale of charter-caught dolphin



Photo courtesy Gabriel Bahra (top) and Sean Skakandy (bottom)

The Council continued discussion on the comprehensive re-evaluation of the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan (FMP). First implemented in 2004, the FMP is designed to maintain the historic character of these fisheries, which are predominantly recreational. As part of this broad review of the FMP, the Council is considering many potential modifications, including:

- Updating the goals and objectives to ensure they are relevant to today's dolphin and wahoo fisheries.
- Reducing the recreational vessel limit from the current 60-fish limit. This change may only occur off Florida where it is supported by fishermen, because it is opposed in North Carolina.
- Requiring commercial longline harvesters to abide by the same training requirements and gear and bait restrictions as those targeting Highly Migratory Species, which could provide conservation benefits to protected and prohibited species.
- Promoting the wahoo population by ensuring it has access to two very important prey species: bullet and frigate mackerel. These two species comprise about 50% of the wahoo diet.

The Council will revisit quotas and sector allocations, which are based on historic landings. In 2018, NOAA Fisheries' revision to estimating recreational effort resulted in much higher estimates of past recreational harvest. The Council's science advisors are currently deliberating how to incorporate the new estimates into management and setting quotas. Their recommendations are expected in December.

In addition, the Council may create flexible quota 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. Quota closures are rare, only happening once in each fishery since 2012. They may also adjust accountability measures to remove or reduce the likelihood of in-season closures.

Based on considerable public opposition, the Council is no longer considering allowing sale of charter-caught dolphin, a practice that ended in 2012. The Council's Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (AP) and charter captains from the Florida Keys had asked to regain the ability to sell their client's catch because it would be a significant source of additional income while also providing more local-caught fish to the market. The Council's Mackerel Cobia AP and other fishermen strongly opposed the idea, citing concerns about fairness (because it would only be allowed for dolphin) and seafood health safety standards.

King and Spanish Mackerel



King mackerel commercial fishery: Volusia – Miami-Dade counties

- Requested emergency action to increase Season 2 vessel limit
 - Working on a permanent increase
- FWC could increase state waters commercial vessel limit through EO
- Council and FWC recently approved an increase for Season 1 vessel limits

Spanish mackerel commercial fishery

- Council will explore concerns that there are too many fishermen
 - Especially in the federal waters gillnet fishery



The Council requested NOAA Fisheries take emergency action to increase the Season 2 (October through February) king mackerel commercial vessel limit off Volusia through Miami-Dade counties from 50 fish to 75 fish. Commercial king mackerel fishermen petitioned the Council for emergency action because the 50-fish limit often minimizes profit and discourages fishermen from carrying crew, which affects safety at sea issues.

Since 2015/2016, the commercial fishery in the Southern Zone (South Carolina through Florida) has harvested under 60% of their quota. Commercial fishermen blame low commercial vessel limits for preventing them from achieving their quota, resulting in lost economic opportunities.

If approved by NOAA Fisheries, the emergency action will take effect October 1, 2019. Emergency actions are temporary, so the Council is working to adopt a permanent vessel limit increase for Season 2. The Council and FWC recently approved an increase to the Season 1 (March through September) king mackerel commercial vessel limits, which will take effect by March 2020.

The Council also heard concerns about growing participation in the commercial Spanish mackerel fishery from the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel (AP). They expressed specific concern about the federal waters gillnet fishery operating off Florida between Cape Canaveral and Ft. Pierce. The AP proposed making the federal commercial Spanish mackerel permit a limited-entry permit or limiting the number of people allowed to use gillnets. The Council will explore the AP's concerns at a future meeting.

Other Discussions



Red grouper – final action

- Approved rebuilding plan
- Establishes 200-lbs. commercial trip limit

Sector allocation

- Established triggers to prompt future reviews of sector allocation

Best fishing practices for snapper grouper

- Potential requirements to reduce release mortality
 - Descending devices
 - Non-stainless steel hooks (i.e., corrodible)
 - Non-offset circle hooks when using natural baits north of 28° N. latitude



*Red grouper actions
pending approval by U.S. Secretary of Commerce*

In June, the Council took final action to approve a 10-year rebuilding plan and a 200-pound commercial vessel limit for red grouper. The Council was required to adopt a new rebuilding plan after a 2017 stock assessment showed the overfished stock would not be rebuilt by the last rebuilding plan's 2020 deadline. The commercial vessel limit is expected to help contribute to rebuilding, but is anticipated to have minimal negative impact on commercial fishermen because fewer than 6% of trips landing red grouper exceed 200 pounds. The Council also extended the January through April closed season for red grouper off the Carolinas to include May because timing of red grouper spawning is later there than in Florida. These actions are pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

The Council established triggers that will prompt consideration of allocation reviews for all fisheries with allocations. Some triggers are based on how much of their allocated quota a sector lands. Reviews can also be triggered by completion of a stock assessment, performance report, or the amount of time since the last review. When an allocation review occurs, the Council will consider if allocations meet management objectives and are relevant to current fishery conditions and the needs of participants. These reviews will not necessarily result in reallocation of quota between sectors. On a similar note, the Congressional Government Accountability Office is currently conducting a review of allocations in mixed-use fisheries and will present their report to Congress later this year.

The Council continues to discuss requiring fishermen use best fishing practices to improve post-release survival for snapper grouper species. The Council may require harvesters to have a descending device on board vessels; this tool can reverse some affects of barotrauma. The Council is also proposing requiring anglers targeting snapper grouper species to use non-stainless steel (i.e., corrodible) hooks. They also propose requiring non-offset circle hooks be used when targeting snapper grouper with natural baits north of 28° North latitude (approximately Melbourne, FL). The use of non-offset circle hooks is expected to reduce discard mortality. The Council is expected to take final action on these proposals in September.

Direction Requested



- Staff recommends increasing the king mackerel commercial vessel limit in state waters via Executive Order
 - Consistent with federal emergency action, if issued
- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next meeting is Sept. 16-20 in Charleston, SC



Staff recommends increasing the king mackerel commercial vessel limit in state waters off Volusia through Miami-Dade counties through Executive Order if NOAA Fisheries issues an emergency action to do the same. This would create consistent vessel limits between state and federal waters.

Input on Council items is always welcome. The next Council meeting is September 16-20 in Charleston, SC.