

South Atlantic Council Issues



Review and Discussion
October 2, 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) September 16-20 meeting in Charleston, SC.

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Atlantic Red Snapper



2019 Atlantic season update

- 95% of commercial quota landed
- Recreational effort was high
 - Florida catch estimates available in Dec.
- FWRI sampled over 2,900 fish



Future red snapper seasons

- Move commercial opening to May 1
 - Align with shallow-water grouper
 - Opposed by some FL fishermen
- Not considering changes for recreational season



The commercial and recreational Atlantic red snapper seasons are now closed. This year, the commercial sector caught 95% of their quota, which equals 118,504 pounds. Monitoring by FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI), indicates recreational effort was high. Florida's recreational catch estimates will be available in December. During the 2019 recreational and commercial seasons, FWRI staff collected biological data from over 2,900 red snapper, which provides data for the next stock assessment.

In September, the Council reviewed public comments on revising the commercial and recreational red snapper season start dates and season structure, which could increase harvester satisfaction without affecting continued red snapper stock rebuilding. While private recreational anglers provided little input, commercial and charter fishermen suggested changes to the season start dates. Start date requests from commercial fishermen were wide-ranging: Jan. 1, May 1, Aug. 1, and Sept. 1.

Currently, the Council is proposing moving the commercial season opening from the second Monday in July to May 1 to align with the opening of the shallow-water grouper (SWG) season. North Carolina commercial fishermen report red snapper discards in May are high because of SWG fishing, thus, this change would reduce regulatory discards. It would also further separate the commercial and recreational seasons, which has been requested by all sectors. However, Florida commercial fishermen raised concerns that a May 1 start date would not reduce discards in the area of highest red snapper abundance because commercial effort in shallow-water fisheries is low in May due to SWG being unavailable in Florida then and many shallow-water species, like vermilion snapper and gray triggerfish, commonly being in quota closures. They ask for an Aug. 1 start date, but if the Council is unwilling to select that option, they would prefer no change to the start date.

Charter captains in Florida asked for a Sept. 1 start date for the recreational season; however, the Council opposed this suggestion because it is peak hurricane season. After discussing other recreational options, the Council determined there was little they could do to increase angler satisfaction until the red snapper quota is increased. Thus, they are no longer considering any recreational changes. The Council is expected to make a final decision on the commercial season start date in December.

Best Fishing Practices



- Requirements to reduce snapper grouper release mortality – **FINAL**
 - Descending devices
 - Non-stainless-steel hooks (i.e., corrodible)
 - Non-offset circle hooks north of 28° N. latitude
- Pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce



In September, the Council approved requirements for “best fishing practices” to improve post-release survival of snapper grouper species. Under the Council’s plan, fishermen targeting or possessing snapper grouper species from a vessel will be required to have a descending device, which is a tool that can reverse some effects of barotrauma. Also, fishermen targeting snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits will be required to use non-stainless-steel (i.e., corrodible) hooks throughout South Atlantic federal waters. Additionally, these same fishermen must use non-offset circle hooks when fishing in federal waters north of 28° North latitude (approximately Melbourne, FL). Prohibiting stainless-steel hooks will benefit snapper grouper species because any hooks that cannot be removed from the fish will corrode away. The use of non-offset circle hooks is expected to reduce discard mortality because they cause less hooking trauma than offset circle hooks. The 28° North latitude boundary is intended to protect the traditional yellowtail snapper fishery, which uses J-hooks.

These requirements are now pending approval and implementation by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

Re-evaluation of Dolphin Wahoo FMP



- Potential regulation changes
 - Smaller recreational vessel limit for dolphin
 - New commercial gear requirements and restrictions
 - Ecosystem Component species
- Next steps: update quota and allocation review



Photo courtesy Gabriel Bahra



The Council continued their comprehensive review of the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan (FMP). They are considering revised FMP goals and objectives to better align with the current state of these fisheries, continue reflecting their predominantly recreational composition, and preserve the traditional hook-and-line commercial fishery. The Council is evaluating regulation changes, such as reducing the recreational vessel limit for dolphin, allowing buoy gear harvesters and lobster trap fishermen to possess dolphin and wahoo, and creating requirements and restrictions for pelagic longline commercial fishermen. Also, the Council may designate bullet and frigate mackerel as Ecosystem Component species, in recognition of their importance in the wahoo diet.

In December, the Council will receive quota recommendations for dolphin and wahoo based on the new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) effort survey. The Council will reconsider sector allocations based on the new quota recommendations. The current quotas and allocations are based on historic landings. The current allocations are 90% recreational and 10% commercial for dolphin, and 96.07% recreational and 3.93% commercial for wahoo.

Other Council Discussions



King mackerel commercial fishery: Volusia – Miami-Dade counties

- Emergency action requested for 2019/20 season – pending
- Working on permanent increase for winter vessel limit
 - Final action expected in December 2019



Coral and shrimp

- Reevaluating boundaries for deep-water coral protected areas
 - May allow rock shrimp harvest in historic fishing areas
 - May create additional coral protection
- Exploring a uniform provision for shrimp vessel transit of closed areas

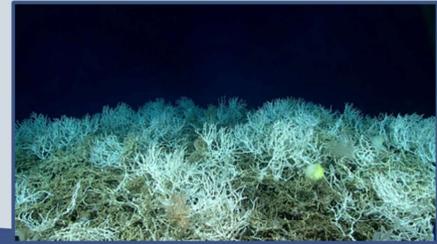


Photo courtesy NOAA Ocean Exploration and Research



In June, the Council requested NOAA Fisheries take emergency action to increase the winter (October through February) king mackerel vessel limit from 50 to 75 fish for the 2019/20 season in federal waters off Volusia through Brevard counties. At the July FWC meeting, Commissioners noted support for increasing the state waters commercial vessel limit to match the potential emergency action by NOAA Fisheries. A larger vessel limit addresses fishermen's concerns that the current 50-fish limit minimizes profit and discourages fishermen from carrying crew, which affects safety-at-sea issues. It will also help them catch more of their quota, which they have been under by 60% since the 2015/16 season. NOAA has not yet issued the Emergency Action.

In September, the Council discussed a permanent increase to the winter king mackerel commercial vessel limit for this area off Florida. They are considering vessel limits up to 150 fish. The Council is expected to make a final decision on permanently increasing winter king mackerel commercial vessel limits in December.

At the September meeting, the Council discussed several items related to deep-water coral and shrimp. The first topic involved restoring access to historic rock shrimp fishing grounds that were closed when the Oculina Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC), a protected area for deep-water corals, was created in 2015. The boundaries for the Oculina HAPC were based, in part, on the predicted presence of deep-water coral. At the time, the Council agreed to revisit the Oculina HAPC boundaries after new data, including bottom mapping and documentation of coral presence and absence, became available. These data have been gathered, thus, the Council is considering whether they can re-open the historic rock shrimp fishing grounds and whether new coral protected areas are warranted.

The second topic concerned creation of a uniform provision for shrimp vessel transit of closed areas. The current rules for transit vary by the type of closed area (e.g., coral protected area or special management zone), which creates confusion. Additionally, some of the gear stowage requirements in the transit provisions pose safety-at-sea risks. Commercial shrimp harvesters asked for a new, uniform transit provision that addresses these issues. The Council will review public input on a uniform provision at their December meeting.

Blueline Tilefish and Snowy Grouper

- Deep-water species accessible in some Atlantic state waters
- Small federal quotas
 - State waters harvest contributes to early federal closures

Inconsistent state and federal recreational regulations

- Higher bag limits and no seasonal closures in state waters
- Federal partners requested consistent regulations because of overfishing or overfished status
- Staff is gathering stakeholder input and will present findings at future Commission meeting



Blueline tilefish and snowy grouper are deep-water fish that can be targeted by fishermen in state waters off southeast Florida (mainly Pompano Beach and Ft. Lauderdale) and the Keys. Blueline tilefish experienced overfishing in recent years. Overfishing for snowy grouper began in the 1970s, and the stock has been overfished since the early 1980s. To end or prevent overfishing for both species, and to rebuild the snowy grouper stock, the Council manages these fish in federal waters with relatively small quotas, small bag limits, and a May through August open season. Harvest of these fish in state waters counts against the federal quota, and can contribute to in-season closures in federal waters.

State waters bag limits and fishing seasons for blueline tilefish and snowy grouper do not align with the federal waters limits. In state waters, recreational bag limits are higher and there are no seasonal closures. NOAA Fisheries and the Council have requested FWC match federal regulations for blueline tilefish and snowy grouper in state waters to help end overfishing for blueline tilefish and rebuild the snowy grouper stock.

Staff is currently gathering public input on including blueline tilefish in the three-fish grouper aggregate recreational bag limit for state waters. Blueline tilefish currently fall under the default recreational bag limit of 100 pounds in state waters. Staff is also seeking input on reducing the snowy grouper recreational bag limit from one fish per person within the three-fish grouper aggregate to one fish per vessel within the three-fish grouper aggregate. These limits match the limits in federal waters. Additionally, staff is asking for input on setting a recreational season for blueline tilefish and snowy grouper in state waters.

Staff will present the public feedback on blueline tilefish and snowy grouper to the Commission at a future meeting.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next meeting is Dec. 2-6 in Wilmington, NC



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

The next Council meeting is December 2-6 in Wilmington, NC.