

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: April 20, 2017
Subject: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Report

Purpose:

Staff will provide Commissioners a review of actions and discussions from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (SAFMC) March 5-10, 2017, meeting in Jekyll Island, GA.

Summary:

At their March meeting, the SAFMC delayed consideration of options for yellowtail snapper and dolphin sector allocations until recreational harvest estimates are recalibrated and an upcoming yellowtail snapper stock assessment is complete. The Council had been exploring options to combine, share, or redistribute quota between the commercial and recreational sectors in attempt to alleviate commercial quota closures and provide access to unused quota. Recalibration of recreational harvest estimates by the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) is expected to result in higher estimates of past recreational catch for both yellowtail snapper and dolphin. If recreational harvest was higher than currently thought, the options the SAFMC is considering may not alleviate quota closures.

NOAA Fisheries notified the SAFMC that current management efforts (i.e., fishery closures) are adequately addressing overfishing for red snapper. Due to uncertainty in the recent red snapper stock assessment, the SAFMC is unable to set a quota for the fishery. The SAFMC has requested its Science and Statistical Committee develop a means to establish a quota for red snapper.

As the red snapper fishery remains overfished, the SAFMC discussed ways to rebuild the stock while also providing harvest opportunities and improving recreational data collection. To reduce discard mortality, the SAFMC is considering requiring descending devices, limiting harvesters to single-hook rigs, and closing deeper waters to all bottom fishing during a portion of the year. To improve estimates of recreational catch and red snapper discards, the SAFMC is considering a permit for snapper-grouper fishing and required recreational reporting via a mobile app. If fishing is allowed, the SAFMC indicated they would likely limit anglers to small bag and vessel limits and commercial fishing would be constrained.

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