

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management  
**Date:** December 7, 2017  
**Subject:** South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Report

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## **Purpose:**

Staff will provide Commissioners a review of actions and discussions from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (SAFMC) Sept. 25-29, 2017, meeting in Charleston, SC, as well as a preview of discussions scheduled for their Dec. 4-8 meeting in Atlantic Beach, NC.

## **Summary:**

In September, the SAFMC requested NOAA Fisheries take emergency action to open Atlantic red snapper to harvest in 2017 and approved a quota for the 2018 season. In October, NOAA Fisheries announced they would allow a recreational and commercial season via emergency action. The SAFMC reasoned, and NOAA Fisheries agreed, that substantial population increases shown in recent scientific research demonstrate limited harvest will not impede stock rebuilding nor cause overfishing. The quota for each season is 42,510 fish, which is equal to the highest level of harvest during the 2012-2014 mini-seasons. The 2017 Atlantic red snapper recreational season was two three-day weekends (Friday – Sunday), Nov. 3-5 and Nov. 10-12. The length of the 2018 recreational season, which is expected to consist of weekends beginning in mid-July, would be announced prior to the season opening. Over the last several years, fishermen have requested the fishery reopen, citing increased encounters with red snapper and the negative economic impact of the closure which began in 2010. At their December meeting, the SAFMC will discuss potential red snapper management changes for 2019 and beyond, including measures to reduce dead discards, recreational permits and reporting, and seasonal, deep-water closures.

The SAFMC will take final action in December to reduce the red grouper quota, thereby stemming overfishing and promoting rebuilding. The 2017 stock assessment showed red grouper is unlikely to be rebuilt before 2030. In 2018, the SAFMC may adopt additional regulatory changes, like reduced bag limits, for federal waters off east Florida and the Keys.

In December, the SAFMC will discuss a potential moratorium on the issuance of federal for-hire snapper-grouper permits to new applicants. This could be the first step in creating a limited-entry program to restrict the number of vessels in the federal snapper-grouper for-hire fishery. The SAFMC will also discuss increasing king mackerel commercial trip limits off Florida during the month of March at the request of stakeholders who believe the trip limit is too restrictive.

## **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