

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management  
**Date:** February 8, 2017  
**Subject:** South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Report

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## **Purpose:**

Staff will provide Commissioners with a review of actions and discussions from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) December 5-9, 2016, meeting in Atlantic Beach, NC.

## **Summary:**

At their December meeting, the Council discussed several items related to snapper-grouper species and approved several actions to go out for public scoping and hearings in January 2017:

- **Yellowtail snapper sector allocations:** The Council is considering options for managing yellowtail snapper sector allocations to allow both the commercial and recreational sectors access to unused quota and to prevent quota closures. Options include quota sharing, temporary transfer of quota between sectors, permanent reallocation, and combining the Atlantic and Gulf yellowtail snapper quotas. The Council is also considering some of these measures for dolphin; however, action on dolphin has been delayed and will not go out for public comment in January. The Commission wrote a letter requesting the Council implement a strategy to allow harvest of unused quota for both yellowtail snapper and dolphin as soon as possible.
- **Red snapper:** The 2016 stock assessment, as well as harvest and discard estimates, suggest discard mortality is the driving cause of overfishing for red snapper. The Council is considering ways to reduce discard mortality for red snapper, such as requiring the use of descending devices and closing areas to all bottom fishing. Other actions being considered include measures to improve recreational data collection, as well as closed seasons, minimum size limits, recreational bag limits, and commercial trip limits. The Council is seeking direct public input on how to reduce red snapper dead discards. Closing areas for bottom fishing may disproportionately affect Florida.
- **Other snapper-grouper items:** The Council discussed and is seeking public input on several actions suggested by stakeholders:
  - New aggregate recreational bag limits for species that are frequently caught on the same trip, such as a deep-water species aggregate, and revisions to existing aggregate bag limits, such as the three-fish grouper aggregate.
  - Decreasing the black sea bass recreational minimum size limit to allow anglers to retain more of their catch. The current 13-inch recreational minimum size limit is larger than the 11-inch commercial minimum size limit.
  - Revisions to the recreational and commercial January through April shallow-water grouper closed season to accommodate regional variations in the timing of grouper spawning. This could allow fishermen greater access to grouper in south Florida.
  - Establishment of or modification to commercial split seasons and trip limits to lengthen fishing seasons. This could allow fish to be available to the market throughout the year.

The Council discussed establishment of a limited-entry program for for-hire permits. They indicated that further discussion is necessary for snapper-grouper permits; however, they decided against pursuing limited-entry for dolphin/wahoo and coastal migratory pelagic permits.

The Council took final action to approve regulation changes for mutton snapper and weekly, mandatory electronic reporting requirements for for-hire vessels. The approved mutton snapper changes are consistent with rules recently adopted by the Commission. Both items now await approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

**Staff Recommendation:**

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

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management