



South Atlantic Council Review

Review and Discussion

February 8, 2017

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Final Action – Mutton Snapper and For-hire Electronic Reporting



Changes to mutton snapper regulations approved

- All changes consistent with recent FWC rule changes
 - 18-inch minimum size limit
 - 5-fish recreational bag limit
 - 5-fish per person commercial bag limit, April – June
 - 500-lb. per vessel commercial trip limit, July – March



Mandatory electronic reporting for the for-hire fleet approved

- Requires weekly reports
- A mobile app will be created for easy reporting



Pending approval by U.S. Secretary of Commerce

January 2017 Public Hearings and Scoping Meetings



Topics

- Yellowtail snapper quota allocations
- Red snapper management
- Various snapper-grouper regulations

Locations

- Jacksonville
- Cocoa Beach
- Stuart
- Key Largo
- Marathon
- Key West





Yellowtail Snapper Sector Allocations

- Considering strategies to maximize commercial and recreational access to unused quota and prevent quota closures
 - Quota sharing
 - No sector closures until overall quota is met
 - Temporary transfer of allocation between sectors
 - Permanent sector reallocation
 - Combining Atlantic and Gulf quotas into a single quota
- Delayed consideration of similar actions for dolphin



Photo courtesy of Don DeMaria



Public Hearing Feedback – Yellowtail Snapper Allocation

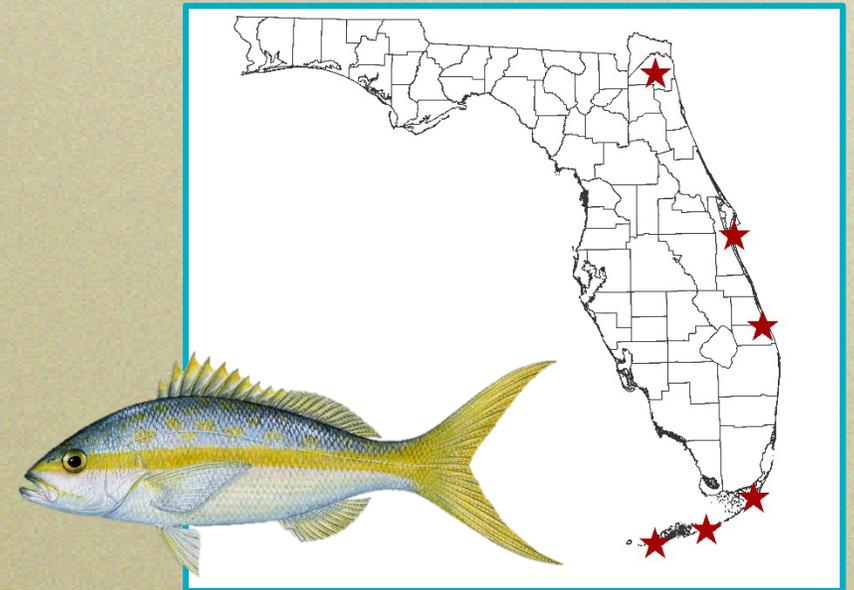


Commercial perspectives

- Opposition to closures when one sector consistently under-harvests its quota
- Requests to not close a sector until the overall quota is met
- Mixed opinions about combining the commercial and recreational quotas
- Support for combining South Atlantic and Gulf quotas

Private recreational and for-hire perspectives

- Opposition to concept of giving recreational quota to the commercial sector
- Belief in biological and socioeconomic benefits of leaving fish in the water
- Some opposition to combining South Atlantic and Gulf quotas



Approved for Public Scoping – Red Snapper

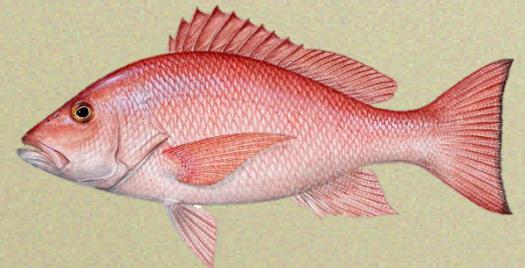


Current population status

- Continues to be overfished and undergoing overfishing

Management changes under consideration

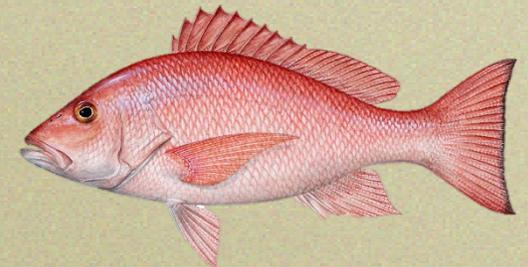
- Create large bottom-fishing closures
- Establish very limited snapper-grouper fishing seasons
- Require use of descending devices
- Require a recreational stamp for bottom-fishing
- Require a recreational tag for red snapper harvest
- Mandate recreational reporting via a mobile app
- Size limits, recreational bag limits, and commercial trip limits



Public Scoping Feedback – Red Snapper



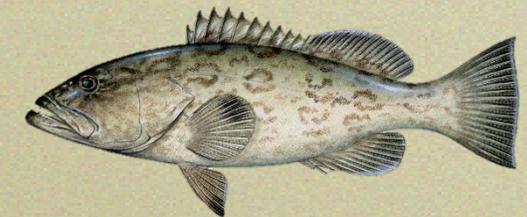
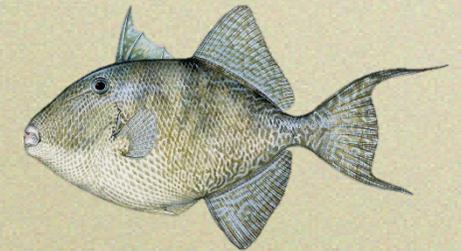
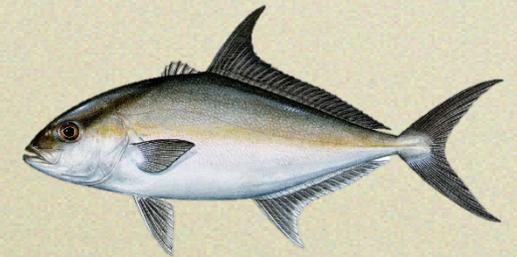
- Perception that the population is more abundant than ever and the stock assessment is flawed
- Overwhelming opposition to closed areas to protect red snapper
 - Commercial fishermen prefer red snapper remain closed instead of area closures
- Recreational anglers requested access to the fishery with a small bag limit and a slot limit, and closures during the spawn
- Support for a requirement to use descending devices
- Concern that recreational discard numbers are inaccurate has generated a desire to improve recreational data collection
 - Support for a recreational offshore permit, like the Gulf Reef Fish Survey



Approved for Public Scoping – Recreational and Commercial Snapper-Grouper Regulations



- New and revised aggregate recreational bag limits
- Removal of size limits for deep-water species
- Lower recreational minimum size limit for black sea bass
- Adjustments to the recreational and commercial shallow-water grouper seasonal closure
- Decrease the minimum size limit for recreational and commercial harvest of gray triggerfish off Florida
- New and revised commercial trip limits and reserving quota for later in the year to lengthen fishing seasons



Public Scoping Feedback – Recreational and Commercial Snapper-Grouper Regulations



- Support for revisions to the timing of the shallow-water grouper closure
 - Recommendations to allow harvest of grouper in January and February
 - Suggestions for closure dates to vary by region
- Support for reducing the gray triggerfish minimum size limit to 12 inches and reducing the bag limit
- Requests that the popular practice of reserving quota for later in the year be implemented in other fisheries
- Requests for new or lower commercial trip limits to lengthen fishing seasons and reduce discards
- Mixed opinions regarding a reduction in the recreational black sea bass minimum size limit



Other Items



Snapper-grouper for-hire limited-entry program

- Council will continue to discuss a limited-entry program for the snapper-grouper fishery only

Bahamas/China fisheries partnership

- Bahamas announced they will no longer pursue a partnership that would grant Chinese corporations fishing rights
- Council will send a letter in support of this decision



Pelagic Longline Exempted Fishing Permit Request

- Request to allow research on pelagic longline catch and bycatch rates in federal waters closed to pelagic longlines off Florida's east coast
 - Area closed in 2001 to reduce bycatch and incidental catch of overfished and protected species (ex. swordfish, sailfish)
 - Swordfish no longer overfished and management of longline fishery has changed to address bycatch of some species
 - Sailfish, marlins and several sharks in this area remain overfished
- FWC has opposed similar EFP requests in the past
 - Concerns about expansion of commercial harvest, loss of conservation gains, and risk to economically- and socially-important recreational swordfish and billfish fisheries



Commission direction requested

Commercial Allocation Exempted Fishing Permit Request



- Request to test viability of an individual fishing quota (IFQ) allocation program for snapper-grouper fishermen
- Proposed program description
 - Voluntary, 2-year pilot test
 - Limited to 8 snapper-grouper species
 - Individual allocations based upon landings history
 - Eligibility requirements include documentation of recent landings and agreement to use VMS
- Unique, grass-roots effort to resolve long-standing issues in South Atlantic commercial fishery
- Catch share programs are controversial in the South Atlantic



Photo courtesy of Amber Von Harten/SAFMC



Commission direction requested

Direction Requested

- Pelagic longline EFP
- Commercial allocation EFP
- Input on other Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is March 6-10 in Jekyll Island, GA

