

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: July 11, 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) June 12-16, 2017, meeting in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL.

Summary:

In June both the SAFMC and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council took final action to increase the spiny lobster annual catch limit (ACL) by 2.28 million pounds (mp). If approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, the spiny lobster ACL would be 9.6 mp. Industry supports this action because, unlike the current ACL, it is based upon a longer time series of data that includes a broad range of fishery conditions.

The SAFMC discussed Atlantic red snapper, a stock that remains overfished and continues to undergo overfishing. Discussions included:

- NOAA Fisheries announced there will not be a 2017 federal red snapper season;
- How to set a quota for federal season in 2018;
- Developing a new method to establish a quota for 2019 and beyond that is not dependent upon a stock assessment;
- Methods to increase survival of released fish;
- Ways to improve estimates of recreational harvest and fishing effort.

The SAFMC agreed to consider establishing a program to limit the number of federal snapper grouper for-hire permits. The SAFMC also agreed to consider commercial trip limits and explore other options for yellowtail snapper to prevent the commercial fishery from closing as early as it did in 2015 and 2017.

The SAFMC took steps to develop a new rebuilding plan for red grouper because the 2017 stock assessment found (1) the stock is overfished and continues to undergo overfishing, and (2) the stock cannot be rebuilt before the current rebuilding plan's 2020 deadline.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff may request direction on SAFMC-related items following the SAFMC meeting.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management