



This is a review and discussion of actions from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) June 12-16 meeting in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL.

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Spiny Lobster – Final Action



- Managed jointly in federal waters by South Atlantic and Gulf councils
- Both councils took final action in June to approve:
 - Increase of annual catch limit (ACL) by 2.28 million pounds
 - Hopefully will result in fewer ACL overages in future years
 - Prohibited the use of traps by recreational fishermen in Atlantic federal waters north of Florida
 - This is already prohibited in all waters off Florida



Pending approval by U.S. Secretary of Commerce



The spiny lobster fishery is managed jointly by the South Atlantic and Gulf councils in federal waters. The councils took final action to approve management changes for spiny lobster at their respective June meetings.

The councils set a new spiny lobster annual catch limit (ACL) in addition to other benchmarks. The federal ACL applies to harvest of spiny lobster in state and federal waters. The councils approved an increase of the spiny lobster ACL from 7.32 million pounds (mp) to 9.6 mp, which is an increase of 2.28 mp. This increase was recommended by the Spiny Lobster Review Panel, which was convened to review the fishery after the ACL was exceeded twice in three consecutive fishing years. Currently, the ACL and other benchmarks are based upon a time period when landings were historically low. The Review Panel recommended the councils expand the time series upon which they base the ACL and other benchmarks so that the time series represents a broader range of fishery conditions. The councils hope basing the ACL on a time series that includes a wide variety of fishery conditions will result in fewer ACL overages in future years. Each council's Spiny Lobster Advisory Panel and industry stakeholders endorsed this change.

The councils also prohibited the use of spiny lobster traps by recreational harvesters in Atlantic federal waters north of Florida. Recreational use of spiny lobster traps had previously been banned in both state and federal waters off Florida.

These changes will be forwarded to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce for review and approval.

Atlantic Red Snapper



- No season in 2017
- Management changes under consideration in two tracks
 - Fast track to establish a quota before 2018 season
 - Slower track for items not likely to be implemented before the 2018 season
 - Measures to reduce discard mortality
 - Recreational snapper-grouper permit for bottom-fishing
 - Required recreational reporting of all snapper-grouper fishing via a mobile app
 - A new method for setting a quota
 - This will affect fishing seasons beginning in 2019



At the June Council meeting, NOAA Fisheries announced there will be no fishing season for red snapper in 2017. This is due to total removals (harvest plus estimates of dead discards) exceeding the allowable level by 286,025 fish in 2016 despite having no season. This will be the third consecutive year that red snapper harvest was not allowed in Atlantic federal waters.

During the meeting, the Council decided to split the multiple changes they are considering for the red snapper fishery into two tracks. One is a fast track to establish a quota before the 2018 season, which would allow for a limited fishery. The quota would be based on the number of fish harvested during the 2012 through 2014 seasons and data collected from research in the South Atlantic. The items on the other track are expected to move slower because they are complex.

Items included on the slower track are:

- Measures to reduce discard mortality, such as requiring descending devices, limiting harvesters to single-hook rigs, and closing deeper waters to all bottom fishing during a portion of the year;
- Requirements to improve estimates of recreational harvest and effort, like a recreational snapper-grouper permit and mandatory recreational reporting via a mobile application; and
- A new method for establishing a quota.

NOAA Fisheries and the Council are developing a new method for establishing a quota for Atlantic red snapper. Traditionally, in fisheries where there is an accepted stock assessment, the assessment is used to establish the quota. However, NOAA Fisheries determined the Atlantic red snapper stock assessment cannot be used in this manner due to high levels of uncertainty. Thus, they are attempting to develop a quota based upon an index of red snapper abundance. This would be unprecedented for the South Atlantic. If successful, this would establish a quota for fishing seasons beginning in 2019.

Other Items





[Atlantic red grouper stock status](#)

- 2017 assessment found stock is overfished and continues to undergo overfishing
 - 2010 assessment first determined the stock was undergoing overfishing and the Council implemented a rebuilding plan in 2011
- Assessment indicates current rebuilding plan will not meet timeline, so Council initiated development of a new rebuilding plan
 - Expect future regulation changes as part of plan

[Commercial yellowtail snapper fishery](#)

- 2016/2017 commercial quota met and fishery closed June 3, 2017
- Council is considering combining Gulf and Atlantic quota and trip limits prior to the 2019 stock assessment



At the June meeting, the Council received the Atlantic red grouper stock assessment which determined the stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing. The stock was first determined to be undergoing overfishing in 2010.

Following the release of the first assessment, the Council implemented a rebuilding plan for Atlantic red grouper in 2011. The 2017 stock assessment revealed the 2011 rebuilding plan is not working and the stock cannot be rebuilt before the original plan's 2020 deadline. Thus, the Council initiated development of a new rebuilding plan at their June meeting. Federal law specifies that a new rebuilding timeline must be established within two years. FWC staff anticipates changes to federal red grouper regulations, including a reduced quota, as part of the new rebuilding plan.

On June 3, 2017, the Atlantic commercial yellowtail snapper fishery closed because it had met the quota. This closure occurred two months prior to the end of the 2016/2017 season on June 3, 2017. This is the second closure in three years.

At the request of the commercial fishermen, the Council decided to consider commercial trip limits and will request the Gulf Council consider combining the Gulf and Atlantic yellowtail snapper quotas. A commercial trip limit could help to stretch out quota until the season ends. Combining the Gulf and South Atlantic quotas, which has been considered off and on since 2013, would give harvesters in the South Atlantic access to more quota. FWC staff will work with commercial yellowtail snapper fishermen to determine acceptable trip limits. These changes, and potentially others, would be considered prior to the 2019 yellowtail snapper stock assessment.

For-hire Limited-entry Program



- Council is considering creation of a limited-entry program for federal snapper grouper for-hire permits
 - Would limit the number of vessels that could operate as for-hire vessels targeting snapper grouper in federal waters
- 957 of the 1,649 permits are held by entities in Florida
- Florida's Atlantic charter captains have expressed mixed support for limited-entry
 - Staff has noted increased support in recent months



Direction requested on whether to support limited-entry

In June, the Council decided to consider creation of a limited-entry program (limited-entry) for snapper grouper charter/headboat permits. This would limit the number of vessels allowed to operate for-hire trips targeting snapper-grouper species in federal waters. Limited-entry is already in effect in the Gulf of Mexico for reef fish and coastal migratory pelagic for-hire vessels. Currently, there is no limit to the number of federal Atlantic snapper grouper charter/headboat permits NOAA Fisheries may issue.

As of June 15, 2017, there are 1,649 valid federal permits for snapper grouper for-hire vessels in the South Atlantic region. Fifty-eight percent of these permits (957 permits) are held by entities in Florida. The number of issued permits has been stable for many years.

In the past, Florida's Atlantic for-hire captains expressed mixed support for limited-entry. Those in support argue that it would result in a professionalized fishery, where full-time operators are more accountable, and provide businesses stability. One counter argument is that this impedes free markets, which should allow individuals to make decisions that are best for their business.

Limited-entry may reduce overcapacity in the for-hire fleet if the number of vessels exceeds the demand for their services. It could also make a for-hire permit valuable, thereby creating an asset for the permit holder. Some are concerned, however, that if permits are unavailable or their cost is too high that limited-entry could prevent new people from entering the for-hire business and reduce opportunities for charter passengers. Those opposed to limited-entry are also concerned that it will lead to a separation of the recreational sector into for-hire and private angler, which has happened for red snapper in the Gulf.

Some argue that limited-entry could benefit fisheries management by limiting the number of for-hire vessels interacting with red snapper and creating dead discards.

In recent months, staff has noted increased support from Florida's federal snapper grouper for-hire permit holders for limited-entry.

Staff requests Commission direction on whether to support a limited-entry program for federal snapper grouper charter/headboat permits.

Direction Requested

- Staff requests direction on whether to support a limited-entry program for federal Snapper Grouper for-hire permits
- Input on other Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is Sept. 11-15 in Charleston, SC



Photo courtesy of SAFMC Staff

At this time, staff is seeking direction on whether to support a limited-entry program for federal South Atlantic snapper grouper for-hire permits. Input on other Council items is always welcome.

The next Council meeting is September 11-15 in Charleston, SC.