

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: February 8, 2018
Subject: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Report

Purpose:

Provide Commissioners a review of actions and discussions from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (SAFMC) Dec. 4-8, 2017, meeting in Atlantic Beach, NC.

Summary:

In December, the SAFMC took final action to reduce the red grouper quota. A 2017 stock assessment showed red grouper continues to be overfished and undergoing overfishing. Unexpected, low recruitment (i.e., too few fish joining the population each year) is a major contributor to the stock's poor status and the main reason why the stock is not expected to be rebuilt before 2030. The SAFMC approved the quota reduction to address overfishing. The recreational sector may experience shorter fishing seasons as a result. The commercial sector is not expected to meet its quota because harvest is low. The SAFMC is also considering other federal rule changes to promote stock rebuilding, such as a reduced recreational bag limit and a longer closed season off the Carolinas.

The SAFMC continued discussions on long-term management options for red snapper. They are considering ways to improve recreational effort and harvest estimates, such as requiring a bottom-fishing permit or recreational reporting. Improvements could also be accomplished by expanding the Gulf Reef Fish Survey statewide. The SAFMC is also considering ways to reduce discard mortality, such as requiring descending devices, limiting fishers to single-hook rigs, and revising the circle hook requirement. The SAFMC is no longer considering area closures to reduce red snapper discard mortality.

According to a 2016 stock assessment update, golden tilefish is undergoing overfishing and a 40% quota reduction is necessary to end overfishing. At the Council's request, NOAA Fisheries implemented an interim rule to reduce the 2018 quota. The SAFMC is considering long-term quota reductions and smaller commercial trip limits. A smaller commercial trip limit for the longline and hook-and-line commercial fleets may keep the fishery open longer. Under the 2014-2017 quotas, the longline season lasted between 6-18 weeks. The SAFMC is expected to take final action on golden tilefish quota reductions and commercial trip limits in June.

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