



Update: This document has been updated to include items that are expected to be discussed at the Council's Dec. 3-7, 2012, meeting in Wilmington, NC.

This is a review and discussion of issues that were discussed at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Sept. 10-14 meeting in Charleston, SC and items proposed for the upcoming meeting that will occur the same week as the Commission meeting.

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Report Date: November 28, 2012

Red Snapper – 2012 Season and Future Harvest



- 2012 limited harvest season
 - Recreational: Harvest opened Sept. 14-17 and 21-24; 1 fish per person; keep first fish
 - Commercial: Harvest opened Sept. 17-24; reopened Nov. 13-20; trip limit of 50 lbs
 - Over 2,000 fish sampled by FWRI
- 2013 season options to be considered
- Tag program for future harvest under development



Red snapper has been closed in federal waters on the Atlantic coast since Jan. 4, 2010. In June, the Council reviewed total removals of red snapper (dead discards) that occurred during 2010 and 2011 under the current moratorium and determined that harvest of 13,067 red snapper in 2012 was feasible. In response, the Council voted to approve an emergency rule that opened red snapper for a limited harvest. This rule was approved and allowed for recreational harvest during the weekends of Sept. 14-17 and Sept. 21-24, 2012, and commercial harvest from Sept. 17-24, 2012. Recreational harvesters were allowed one fish per person per day with no minimum size limit (first fish caught was harvested). The commercial trip limit was 50 pounds gutted weight with no minimum size limit. Commercial harvest was re-opened Nov. 13-20, 2012 because the commercial annual catch limit was not caught during the September open season.

FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute staff made a tremendous effort to collect life history information from harvested fish during the season opening. Anglers contributed to this data through carcass drop-offs and dockside surveys, and by reporting their catches through online surveys. Over 2,000 fish were sampled in Florida and data from these fish could be used in future red snapper stock assessments.

In December, the Council will discuss red snapper harvest options for 2013 and beyond. The Council is considering a harvest tag program for red snapper and deepwater snapper-grouper species (snowy grouper, golden tilefish, and wreckfish), but if approved this program would not take effect until 2014 at the earliest. This tag program would be administered by NOAA Fisheries Service.

Golden Crab – Final Action Delayed



- Catch shares program proposed
- Industry opinion divided
- Participants met to discuss if and how to move forward with catch shares development
- Council will convene Golden Crab Advisory Panel to choose industry-preferred options
- Action delayed until March



The Council delayed final action at its June meeting to create a catch shares program for golden crab. Golden crab is an exclusively commercial fishery that is limited to deep areas of federal waters, including areas off Florida. This fishery requires a high level of experience and has a relatively low number of participants (11 permits total in the entire South Atlantic). The purpose of the catch share program is to facilitate maximum harvest while 1) ensuring participants are well-qualified and experienced in the golden crab fishery, and 2) protecting the sensitive coral habitats near which the fishery occurs.

Industry opinion on the proposed catch shares program has been divided. Council staff held a meeting of the golden crab endorsement holders in August so that fishery participants could discuss if and how to move forward with development of the catch shares program. After hearing the results of the meeting, the Council decided that the Golden Crab Advisory Panel, which is composed of industry representatives, should meet to choose their preferred options for the fishery before the Council makes a decision. Thus, Council action on golden crab has been delayed until March 2013.

Yellowtail Snapper



- Commercial ACL was projected to be reached on Sept. 11, but recalculation indicated there was additional unused quota
- New assessment indicates stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing
 - SSC increased ABC based on assessment
- Emergency rule to increase the ACL for 2012 to minimize fishery closure took effect Nov. 7
- Council looking into long-term ACL increase and options to avoid closures in the future



The annual catch limit (ACL) for yellowtail snapper was set in the Comprehensive ACL amendment that took effect on April 16, 2012. In late August, NOAA Fisheries Service announced that the commercial ACL for yellowtail snapper was projected to be reached and that commercial harvest would close on September 11, 2012. However, NOAA Fisheries Service later announced that the closure was not yet necessary because there was additional uncaught quota. Although the fishery did not close, there was concern that the ACL would be met before the end of 2012 and that fishing would be disrupted by a closure.

A stock assessment for yellowtail snapper was recently completed. This assessment was led by FWC scientists and indicates that the stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing. The assessment was reviewed by the Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSC). The SSCs felt that an increase of the acceptable biological catch (ABC) from 2.9 to 4.1 million pounds for yellowtail snapper was warranted. At the last Council meeting, the Council approved an emergency rule to increase the ACL for 2012 to minimize the time the fishery may be closed in 2012. Because yellowtail snapper is an important Florida fishery, the FWC Council representative was supportive of this action. This emergency rule took effect Nov. 7, 2012, and increased the commercial ACL for 2012 from 1,142,589 pounds whole weight to 1,596,510 pounds whole weight.

In an effort to avoid similar closures in the future, the Council is looking into taking over management of yellowtail snapper in the Gulf of Mexico if permitting and jurisdictional issues can be resolved. Currently, yellowtail snapper is managed by both Councils, and the amount of yellowtail snapper that can be harvested is divided between the Atlantic and Gulf. The Gulf Council discussed this issue at their October meeting and felt this issue could be addressed by the joint-Council committee that is being formed to examine fisheries issues in South Florida. The Council will also begin development of long-term rules to increase the ACL beyond 2012 and will also consider changing the fishing year and establishing a commercial spawning season closure to avoid ACL closures in the future.

Possible Closed Areas for Warsaw Grouper and Speckled Hind



- Harvest prohibited in federal waters
- Closed areas would replace 240-foot depth closure that was recently eliminated
- Workgroup of experts and public met and discussed available information and possible closure locations
- Development to continue in Dec. 2012



Harvest of warsaw grouper and speckled hind is prohibited in South Atlantic federal waters. Both species have been considered to be undergoing overfishing, but it is unclear whether overfishing is still occurring or if either species is also overfished.

The Council is proposing the creation of closed areas to protect these species and replace the 240-foot depth closure that was eliminated effective May 10, 2012. Council staff convened a workgroup of experts and knowledgeable representatives from the industry to compile available information and discuss possible options for closure locations and seasons to ensure continued protection of these species. Council staff also held public workshops to gather input from the public. The Council is working to determine if existing closed areas are adequate to protect these species, existing areas should be reconfigured, or new closed areas should be created. Discussions about how to best protect these species will continue in December.

December Expected Actions and Discussions



- Possible expansion of deepwater coral protection areas with allowance for deepwater shrimpers to transit
- Possible emergency action to increase vermilion snapper ACL based on assessment update
- Final action to adjust ACLs based on new MRIP calculations expected



The Council will discuss possible expansion of the Oculina Bank and Stetson-Miami Terrace Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (CHAPCs) off East Florida to protect newly-documented deepwater coral outside of the current areas. Trawling, as well as harvest and possession of rock shrimp, is prohibited in the current CHAPCs. Council staff has been working with the deepwater shrimp industry on this issue, and the Council is considering alternatives based on these discussions that would allow shrimpers to transit the closed area and reduce the size of the proposed CHAPC expansions. The Council's Coral, Deepwater Shrimp, Habitat and Law Enforcement Advisory Panels recently held a joint meeting to craft joint recommendations on these closed areas and transit for Council consideration.

The Council will also consider emergency action that would increase the ACL for vermilion snapper based on an assessment update that was completed earlier this year. Vermilion snapper is neither overfished or undergoing overfishing, and the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee has indicated that the acceptable biological catch can be increase for this species. If the Council approves an emergency rule to increase the vermilion snapper ACL, the commercial fishery, which is currently closed, may be reopened.

Finally, the Council is scheduled to take final action to adjust annual catch limits (ACLs) for unassessed species based on the new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) harvest estimates.

December Expected Actions and Discussions



- Discussion of data reporting requirements for for-hire and commercial vessels
- Joint-Council meeting to be held for king and Spanish mackerel and cobia: permits, recreational sale, and quotas



The Council is scheduled to continue discussion of data reporting requirements for charter boats, headboats, and commercial vessels. The Council is considering requiring electronic reporting by the headboat industry and is considering requiring vessel monitoring systems (VMS) on commercial snapper-grouper vessels.

The Council mackerel committee will hold a meeting with the Gulf Council's mackerel committee to discuss potential joint-Council management measures (Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendments 19 and 20) for king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia. Management changes that are under consideration include modified permitting for king and Spanish mackerel, creating a permit for cobia, and prohibiting recreational and tournament sales of these species. State-by-state quotas have also been proposed as an option for these species. After this joint meeting is held, the Council will consider scheduling public hearings for Amendments 19 and 20.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is Dec. 3-7 in Wilmington, NC



No Commission direction is requested at this time; however, staff welcomes Commission direction on any Council issues. The next Council meeting will be held in Wilmington, NC the week of the Commission meeting, which is Dec. 3-7, 2012.