



This is a review and discussion of South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) issues from the December 5-9, 2011 Council meeting in Raleigh, NC. This document also provides an overview of items that are expected to be discussed at the Council's March meeting in Savannah, GA. This document may be updated with reports from public hearing and scoping meetings that are anticipated to be held in late January and early February.

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Black Sea Bass Final Action



- Stock assessment and final action in Dec.
- Fishing pressure increasing
- Measures approved:
 - Trap endorsement program
 - Limited number of commercial traps
 - Commercial trip limits
 - Modified size limits
 - No spawning season closure



The Council took final action at its December meeting on several items, including black sea bass. Black sea bass is in a rebuilding plan, and the 2011 stock assessment for black sea bass determined the Atlantic stock to be undergoing overfishing, and not yet fully rebuilt. As harvest restrictions on other species have increased, more fishermen have been fishing for black sea bass. Both the commercial and recreational sectors closed early in 2011 because quotas were met or exceeded. In June 2011, the recreational bag limit for black sea bass was reduced from 15 to 5 fish per person per day in Atlantic federal waters in an effort to extend the length of this year's fishing season. The recreational fishery met the adjusted recreational annual catch limit (ACL) and closed on October 17, 2011 through the end of the fishing year, May 31, 2012. The commercial fishery met its quota for 2011-2012 and closed on July 15, 2011, just 45 days after the season opened.

In response, the Council approved a suite of measures to limit commercial effort and reduce the rate of harvest in the recreational and commercial sectors, including establishing a commercial trap endorsement program, trap limitation, and trip limits for the commercial sector; and modifying size limits for both commercial and recreational sectors. The Council also considered but rejected creating a spawning season closure for black sea bass.

FWC staff will continue to work with the Council and Florida stakeholders on black sea bass management and will return to the Commission in the spring with recommendations for actions in state waters.

Final Actions on Red Grouper and Wreckfish



- Red grouper rebuilding plan finalized
 - Overfished and undergoing overfishing
 - Set annual catch limits (ACLs), accountability measures (AMs), and allocation
 - No additional regulations needed
- Wreckfish ITQ program
 - Redistributed inactive shares to active fishery participants



For red grouper, the Council took final action to set a rebuilding plan for red grouper that includes annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AM) and allocates red grouper quota to the commercial and recreational sectors. The Council choose the 44% commercial and 56% recreational allocation that was recommended by the Commission at the November FWC meeting. Red grouper is overfished and undergoing overfishing, but no additional regulations, such as bag limit or size limit changes, are needed at this time because of the spawning season closure already in place off Florida.

The Council also took final action to approve Snapper Grouper Amendment 20A, which modifies the wreckfish individual transfer quota (ITQ) program. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, this amendment will redistribute inactive fishing shares to active fishery participants.

Both of these amendments are pending final approval by the United States Secretary of Commerce. No changes to FWC rules are needed for these fisheries.

Items for Upcoming Public Hearings

- Lobster
 - Closed areas to limit coral damage
 - Trap line marking requirements (Council preferred alternative is no action)
- Golden Crab
 - Creation of a catch shares program
 - Industry supported
- Public hearings in Jan. and Feb.



The Council approved Spiny Lobster Amendment 11 and Golden Crab Amendment 6 for public hearings. Potential new regulations for the spiny lobster fishery include trap line marking requirements and closed areas that would be established to limit damage to *Acropora* corals, which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. In December, the Council selected a preferred alternative that would require no action on trap line marking requirements.

For golden crab, Council action was taken that would create a catch share program for the golden crab fishery. Golden crab is a commercial fishery that is exclusive to deep areas of federal waters. The golden crab fishing industry has been supportive of a catch share program.

Public hearings for lobster and golden crab will be held on January 30 in Key Largo, January 31 in Cocoa Beach, and February 1 in Jacksonville.

Golden Tilefish – Public Scoping



- Commercial endorsement program under development
 - Preferred alternative would create an endorsement for longlining and hook and line
- Commercial trip limits
- Public scoping in Jan. and Feb.



The golden tilefish stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing; however, the Council is also concerned about effort shifting to the golden tilefish fishery. The commercial golden tilefish fishery closed early in 2011 because of high effort, which prevented fishermen who harvest golden tilefish later in the year, including Florida hook-and-line fishermen, from participating in this fishery. The Council is proposing action (Amendment 18B) to limit participation in the commercial fishery by creating a longline and hook and line endorsement for golden tilefish. Approximately 90% of commercially-harvested golden tilefish are harvested by longlines, but there is also a hook-and-line fishery. The Council is also proposing trip limits for both the longline and hook-and-line fisheries. Because longlining is prohibited in Florida state waters and golden tilefish is a deepwater species, this endorsement program is not expected to affect commercial harvest in state waters. However, the hook and line endorsement could affect Florida fishermen.

The Council is expected to hold public scoping meetings for golden tilefish in January and February. The purpose of public scoping meetings is to gather stakeholder opinions about potential fishery management issues early in the amendment development process. Following public scoping meetings, the Council will review the testimony it receives, refine possible management alternatives, and usually choose preferred alternatives that are presented at public hearings. FWC staff will continue to work with the Council and Florida stakeholders on this issue.

Mackerel and Cobia – Public Scoping



- Possible changes to king and Spanish mackerel permits, creation of cobia permit
- Prohibition of recreational sale, tournament sales
- State by state quotas being considered
- Public scoping in March



The Council is also considering management measures (Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 19) for king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia that could modify permitting for king and Spanish mackerel, create a permit for cobia, and prohibit recreational and tournament sales of these species. State by state quotas have also been proposed as an option for these species.

The Council approved Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 19 for public scoping. This is a joint amendment with the Gulf Council. Mackerel and cobia public scoping meetings for both Councils will likely occur in March.

Shrimp – Public Scoping



- Allow states to request EEZ closures directly from the NMFS Regional Administrator if certain environmental and shrimp abundance criteria are met
- Options to improve the method used to determine minimum stock size threshold for pink shrimp



The Council is also considering changes to shrimp management. The Council is considering allowing states to request Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) waters closures directly from the National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Administrator if certain environmental and shrimp abundance criteria are met. The Council is also developing options to improve the method used to determine minimum stock size threshold for pink shrimp.

Public scoping meetings for shrimp will be held in conjunction with the public hearings on lobster and golden crab on January 30 in Key Largo, January 31 in Cocoa Beach, and February 1 in Jacksonville.

Other Items for Public Scoping



- Powerhead prohibition in federal waters
 - Harvest with powerheads prohibited in state waters
- Increased minimum size limit for hogfish
- Gray triggerfish size limits and recreational bag limit
- Modification of Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern
- Warsaw grouper and speckled hind
 - Possible spawning area closures
- Creation of a universal dealer permit
- Recreational tag for golden tilefish, snowy grouper, and wreckfish



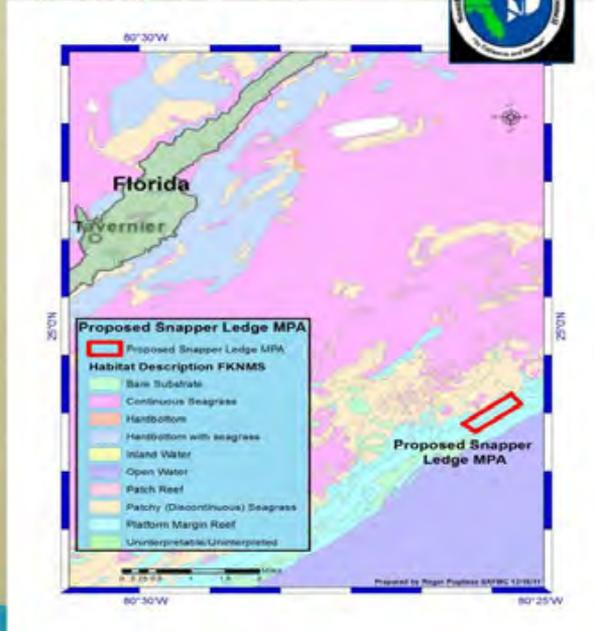
The Council approved other items for scoping under its Comprehensive Ecosystem-based Amendment 3 (CEBA-3). The first potential management measure in this amendment is to prohibit use and possession of powerheads (also known as bangsticks) in Atlantic federal waters. Harvest of fish with powerheads is already prohibited in state waters, but powerheads may be possessed by divers for personal protection.

Other potential management options include size limit changes for hogfish from 12" to 18" FL and gray triggerfish from 12" to 14" FL, and a reduction in the recreational bag limit for gray triggerfish to five fish (there is no bag limit in state waters). These changes were suggested by the Council's Snapper-Grouper Advisory Council. The Council is also considering modifying the boundaries for the Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern off Florida's coast that protect deepwater corals. Additionally, the Council is looking into management options, including possible spawning area closures, to protect Warsaw grouper and speckled hind.

Public scoping for the potential actions in CEBA-3 will be held in conjunction with the public scoping on shrimp and public hearings on lobster and golden crab on January 30 in Key Largo, January 31 in Cocoa Beach, and February 1 in Jacksonville.

Proposed Snapper Ledge MPA

- Creation of Snapper Ledge MPA in Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary



This map shows the location of the proposed Snapper Ledge Sanctuary Preservation Area. In 2011, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) Advisory Council passed a resolution to designate an area of federal waters in the Florida Keys known as Snapper Ledge as a Sanctuary Preservation Area. The FKNMS has requested that the Council consider creating this marine reserve area at Snapper Ledge, which is located off Tavernier (Key Largo). No fishing would be allowed in this area that is about 0.17 square miles in size.

This area is currently being used as a coral transplant research and repopulation site for the threatened Elkhorn coral. This area is a popular underwater photography site. There are lots of snappers found there, particularly mangrove snappers. The trapping community agreed this area is an appropriate site for coral protection. The dive community has been asking the FKNMS for protection of this area for about three years.

Other Council News



- Red snapper
 - Benchmark assessment scheduled for 2013
- FWC officer receives law enforcement award



Also at its November meeting, the Council learned that the next benchmark assessment for Atlantic red snapper will be in 2013. This is welcome news and FWC staff will likely take an active role in this assessment.

Finally, the Council named FWC Officer Clay McDonough its first ever Officer of the Year. Officer McDonough's primary patrol area is coastal Volusia County. Officer McDonough prevailed over tough competition from other state and federal agencies based on his outstanding efforts in fisheries enforcement through teamwork and public outreach, excellence and innovation, attitude and leadership, and achievements and accomplishments. Other nominees represented North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and the U.S. Coast Guard.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is March 5 - 9 in Savannah, GA



No Commission direction is requested at this time; however, staff welcomes any input on Council items from the Commission. The next Council meeting will be held March 5-9 in Savannah, GA.