



Update: This document has been updated following the Council meeting.

This is a review and discussion of issues that were discussed at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) June 11-15, 2012, Council meeting in Orlando.

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Red Snapper – Emergency Action



- Red snapper closed in federal waters since Jan. 2010
- Allowance for limited harvest in 2012
 - Recreational: short, weekends-only season; 1 fish per person; keep first fish
 - Commercial: 7 day season intervals; trip limit of 50 lbs.
 - Harvest and biological data will be collected
- Development of tag program for future harvest under development



Red snapper has been closed in federal waters on the Atlantic coast since January 4, 2010. The Council reviewed total removals of red snapper (dead discards) that have occurred during 2010 and 2011 under the current moratorium and determined that harvest of 13,067 red snapper is feasible at this time. The Council voted to approve an emergency rule that would open red snapper for a limited harvest later this year. Details on the dates and length of this season will be worked out and announced by NOAA Fisheries Service, but it is expected that the season would be in late August at the earliest and that the recreational season would likely be two three-day weekends (Friday, Saturday, Sunday). If approved, recreational harvesters would be allowed one fish per person per day with no minimum size limit (harvesters would harvest the first fish). The commercial season would be open for seven day intervals with a trip limit of 50 lbs. until the quota is met. There is a 71.93% recreational / 28.07% commercial allocation for the red snapper fishery. FWC staff will collect data on harvested fish through carcass drop-offs and surveys during this open season.

The Council also approved a motion for staff to develop options for a harvest tag program for red snapper that would take effect in 2013 at the earliest. This tag program would likely be administered by NOAA Fisheries Service. Development of this proposed tag program will continue in September.

Golden Tilefish – Final Action



- Commercial endorsement program approved for longlining but not hook-and-line sector
- Modified commercial trip limits for hook-and-line



The Council approved final action on golden tilefish to create a commercial longline endorsement for golden tilefish and modify trip limits for the commercial fishery. The golden tilefish stock is not overfished nor undergoing overfishing; however, the Council is 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. Approximately 90% of commercially-harvested golden tilefish are harvested by longlines, but there is also a hook-and-line fishery. A commercial hook-and-line endorsement was considered but rejected by the Council. The Council also modified trip limits for golden tilefish that would allow commercial reef fish harvesters that do not qualify for the longline endorsement to catch golden tilefish on hook and line. 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. The preferred alternative chosen by the Council would allow Florida longliners that are already harvesting golden tilefish to continue harvest. Trip limits affect Florida commercial tilefish harvesters fishing in both state and federal waters.

Black Sea Bass – Final Action



- Trap endorsement transferability rules approved at June Council meeting
- Measures effective July 1, 2012:
 - Trap endorsement program
 - Limited number of commercial traps
 - Commercial trip limits
 - Modified size limits



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. Earlier this year, 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. These regulations were approved by the Secretary of Commerce and will take effect on July 1, 2012.

When this suite of measures was approved, the Secretary of Commerce disapproved proposed measures that would establish trap endorsement transferability rules because the wrong alternative was indicated to be the preferred alternative, and the wording of the alternatives for this action was not clear. In response, the Council approved final action that would establish endorsement transferability rules for the commercial black sea bass trap endorsement program.

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

Golden Crab – Final Action Delayed



- Catch shares program proposed
- Industry opinion divided
- Participants to meet to discuss if and how to move forward with catch shares development
- Discussions will continue in September



The Council delayed final action 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 total permits 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 is divided. The Council requested that staff hold a meeting of the golden crab endorsement holders so that fishery participants can discuss if and how to move forward with development of the catch shares program. This meeting is tentatively scheduled to be held on August 10 in Key Largo. The program will be discussed again at the September Council meeting.

Dealers and Data Collection Amendments – Approved for Public Hearings



- Requirement for electronic reporting
- Consolidation of dealer permits
- Public hearings to be held in August



The Council is also working on a joint amendment with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council that could require federal wholesale dealers to report their transactions electronically and could reduce the number of federal permits wholesale dealers would need to sell various federally-managed species. These changes could allow for more timely data, which could allow for more accurate tracking of commercial quotas and annual catch limits.

Public hearings on the dealer amendment and data collection (CE-BA 3) will be held in Jacksonville on August 7, Cocoa Beach on August 8, and Key Largo on August 9.

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 industry to meet and discuss available information and possible closure locations
- Discussions will continue in September



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. It is unknown whether either species is also overfished. The Council directed staff to ask the Council's Science and Statistical Committee to review the current fishing levels for speckled hind and Warsaw grouper and develop an overfishing limit for each species.

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. The Council discussed the findings and recommendations of this workgroup at the June Council meeting. There was much discussion on whether existing closed areas are adequate to protect these species, existing areas should be reconfigured, or new closed areas should be created. Two other workgroup meetings will be held in Florida and North Carolina to compile information on these species. The Council will continue discussion of this issue in September.

Mackerel and Cobia – Continued Development



- Permits, recreational sale, and quotas
- Management boundary and transit provisions
- South Atlantic and Gulf Council mackerel committees to hold a joint meeting



The Council is expected to continue discussions of management measures (Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendments 19 and 20) 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, management boundary changes, and transit provisions have also been proposed for these species. These are joint amendments with the Gulf Council.

The Council approved a motion to have a joint meeting with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's mackerel committee so that the committees can discuss these issues and work together to select preferred alternatives. After this meeting is held, the Council will consider scheduling public hearings for Amendments 19 and 20.

Other Discussions



- Spiny lobster trap closed areas for state waters to protect threatened corals
- Possible deepwater coral closed areas, transit allowances for deepwater shrimpers on hold
- Council to revisit dolphin allocation
- Council to examine concerns about mutton snapper overexploitation in the Keys



The Council approved a motion to send a letter to the FWC asking the Commission to create areas in state waters that are closed to spiny lobster trapping to protect elkhorn and staghorn corals, which are listed as threatened. The South Atlantic and Gulf councils approved a joint amendment (Spiny Lobster Amendment 11) earlier this year that will create similar closed areas in federal waters off the Florida Keys if approved by the Secretary of Commerce.

The Council is considering 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 voted to put this item on hold until after the Coral, Deepwater Shrimp, Habitat and Law Enforcement Advisory Panel representatives hold a joint meeting to craft joint recommendations for Council consideration.

At the request of the Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (AP), the Council voted to revisit the dolphin allocation, which was set at 92.70% recreational and 7.3% commercial in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment that took effect earlier this year. The Dolphin Wahoo AP felt that setting this allocation was unnecessary because dolphin is not overfished or undergoing overfishing, and the "soft" allocation of 13% commercial (not to exceed 1.5 million pounds) that was previously followed was working. This item will go out for public scoping next year.

During the Law Enforcement Committee meeting, concerns were raised that there is high fishing pressure on mutton snapper spawning aggregations in the Florida Keys and that some additional protections may be necessary. These aggregations occur in both federal and state waters. The snapper-grouper committee will look into this issue at a future Council meeting and could propose management changes such as a spawning season closure for spawning areas. FWC staff will work closely with the Council on this issue.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is September 10-14 in Charleston, SC



No Commission direction is requested at this time; however, staff welcomes any input on Council items. The next Council meeting will be held September 10-14 in Charleston, South Carolina.