



This is a review and discussion of South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) issues from the March 5-9, 2012, Council meeting in Savannah, GA.

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## Spiny Lobster – Final Action



- Closed area boundaries for protecting coral, chosen with industry input
- Line marking – no action
- FWC line marking study begins this summer



The Council approved Spiny Lobster Amendment 11, which would create 60 areas closed to spiny lobster trapping in federal waters off Florida but will not require trap lines to be marked. The 60 closed areas were chosen with industry input and will prohibit spiny lobster trapping in approximately 5.9 square miles of federal waters to protect threatened elkhorn and staghorn corals. This is a joint amendment with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. The Gulf Council took final action to approve this amendment in February.

This amendment will not require lobster trap lines to be marked. However, rules requiring trap lines to be marked must be in place by August 9, 2017 to comply with federal requirements to minimize and monitor the spiny lobster fishery's interactions with federally-listed species including sea turtles, smalltooth sawfish, and elkhorn and staghorn corals. The FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute is partnering with trap fishermen to test the suitability of rope marking techniques to assist with the identification of spiny lobster traps using various line marking techniques. This study is anticipated to begin this summer and results should be available in fall 2013. This study is being funded by a NOAA Cooperative Research Grant.

## Black Sea Bass – Emergency Rule Approved



- Measures approved in Dec.:
  - Trap endorsement program
  - Limited number of commercial traps
  - Commercial trip limits
  - Modified size limits
- Season normally opens June 1
- Emergency rule to delay opening of the commercial season until new rules are in place, but no later than July 1, 2012



The Council took final action at its December meeting on 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 was closed 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 harvest season for black sea bass normally opens June 1 each year. At its March meeting, the Council learned that these measures would likely not be in place by June 1. In response, the Council approved an emergency rule to delay opening of the commercial season for black sea bass until these new rules take effect, but no later than July 1, 2012. The recreational season will still begin on June 1. No changes are needed to the commercial season for state waters because both state and federal rules require commercial black sea bass harvesters to abide by federal seasons, even when fishing in state waters.

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 Tilefish – Final Action and Discussions



- Final action to increase ACL
- Commercial endorsement program under development
  - Preferred alternative would create an endorsement for longlining but not hook and line sector
- Discussion modifying commercial trip limits
- Final action in June



The golden tilefish stock is neither overfished nor undergoing overfishing; however, the Council is also concerned about effort shifting to the golden tilefish fishery. Because the latest assessment for golden tilefish was positive and indicated that the acceptable biological catch could be raised, the Council took final action to increase the annual catch limit for golden tilefish from 326,557 pounds whole weight to 625,000 pounds whole weight.

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. In response, the Council is also proposing action (Amendment 18B) to limit participation in the commercial fishery by creating a longline endorsement for golden tilefish. 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 also considered but rejected by the Council. The Council is also proposing modifying 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, trip limits could affect Florida fishermen fishing in state waters.

The Council is expected to take final action on this amendment in June. FWC staff will continue to work with the Council and Florida stakeholders on this issue.

## Mackerel and Cobia – Approved for 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 this spring



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 occur this spring.

## Shrimp – Discussions on Closed Areas off East Florida



- Council is proposing expansion of CHAPCs off east Florida to protect deepwater coral
- Alternatives that would allow shrimpers to transit closed area and reduce size of proposed expansions are under consideration
- Discussions will continue in June



The Council is considering expansion of the Oculina Bank and Stetson-Miami 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. Expansion of these areas could negatively impact the rock shrimp and royal red shrimp fisheries by closing historical fishing grounds and prohibiting shrimpers from bringing shrimp legally harvested east of the closed area back to their homeport. The Commission sent the Council a letter asking the Council to work with the shrimp industry in modifying the CHAPC boundaries and to consider provisions that would allow shrimpers to transit through the area with legally-harvested shrimp aboard to return to port. 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 the proposed CHAPC expansions.

The Council is expected to select preferred alternatives and continue discussion of these areas and their regulations for the rock and royal red shrimp fisheries in June. FWC staff will continue to work with Council staff and Florida's deepwater shrimp industry on this issue.

## Closed Areas for Warsaw Grouper and Speckled Hind



- Harvest prohibited in federal waters
- Closed areas would replace 240-foot depth closure
- Workgroup of experts and industry to discuss available information and possible closure locations
- Discussions will continue in June



Harvest of Warsaw grouper and speckled hind is prohibited in federal waters, but both species are undergoing overfishing. It is unknown whether 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 the Council voted to eliminate last year. Council staff will convene 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. This workgroup is expected to meet this spring. The Council will discuss the findings and recommendations of this workgroup at the June Council meeting.

## Golden Crab and Wreckfish



- Golden Crab
  - Creation of a catch shares program
  - Final action scheduled for June
- Wreckfish ITQ program
  - Update to meet requirements of Magnuson Stevens Reauthorization delayed



Development of the Council's amendment that would recreate a catch shares program for golden crab continues. Golden crab is a commercial fishery that is exclusive to deep areas of federal waters. Council staff will be reaching out to participants in the golden crab fishery before the June Council meeting to gauge their continued interest in the catch shares amendment. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this amendment in June.

Due to a full schedule for the upcoming year, the Council delayed moving forward with Snapper Grouper Amendment 20B, which would modify the wreckfish individual transfer quota (ITQ) program. Amendment 20B will include actions to modify the wreckfish ITQ program to bring it into compliance with Reauthorized MSA requirements for Limited Access Privilege Programs (LAPPs), such as cost recovery, and implement provisions for program maintenance. Amendment 20B will likely be revisited in 2013.

## Data Collection and Review of Annual Catch Limits



- Dealer reporting and permitting amendment
  - Electronic reporting
  - Consolidation of federal wholesale permits
- New Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimates indicate some ACLs need to be revised
  - Current annual catch limits (ACLs) set based on MRFSS data
  - Council will begin review this year



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. Development of this amendment will continue at the June Council meeting.

The Council also received a report on the new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimates of recreational fishing effort and harvest. In some cases, the MRIP differences are substantially different from the old Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS) data estimates. Many of the annual catch limits for the recreational sector are based on MRFSS data, so some of these ACLs will need to be revised using the updated MRIP data. The Council will begin a review of annual catch limits in light of this new information this year.

## Items Delayed until at least 2013



- 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
- Recreational tag for golden tilefish, snowy grouper, and wreckfish
- Snapper Ledge protected area postponed until 2014




The Council postponed further development of several actions that were included in the scoping document for Comprehensive Ecosystem-based Amendment 3 (CEBA-3). Consideration of the following items have been delayed until at least 2013: a prohibition on use of powerheads in federal waters, increasing the minimum size limit for hogfish, increasing the size limit and establishing a recreational bag limit for gray triggerfish, and a recreational tagging program for golden tilefish, snowy grouper, and wreckfish.

The Council may proceed with management changes for hogfish and triggerfish after the stock assessments for these species are completed in 2013. More time is needed to develop options for the recreational tagging program, because it is possible that each state fishery management agency could play a role in administration of the program and distribution of tags.

Additionally, Council action that would designate Snapper Ledge as a protected area has been delayed until at least 2014. The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) is currently in the process of a review of its regulations. Designation of Snapper Ledge as a Sanctuary Preservation Area is expected to be considered as part of this process.

## Red Snapper



- South Atlantic benchmark assessment delayed
  - SSC and Science Center analyzing data with models from last assessment
  - Stock assessment date will be finalized after discussions



Finally, the Council learned that the benchmark assessment for South Atlantic red snapper that was scheduled for 2013 has been delayed. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) expressed concern that sufficient data may not be available to conduct a robust and useful stock assessment. Instead, the Science and Statistical Committee and SEFSC will review the available fisheries independent monitoring data along with the rebuilding projections from the last red snapper assessment. After discussion of this analysis, the date for the stock assessment will be finalized.

## No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is June 11-15 in Orlando



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 June 11-15 in Orlando.