



Update: This document has been updated based on the agenda for the Council's September meeting.

This is a review and discussion of issues that are expected to be discussed at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) September 10-14 meeting in Charleston, SC.

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Red Snapper – 2012 Season Approved and Future Harvest



- Red snapper closed in federal waters since Jan. 2010
- Allowance for limited harvest in 2012
 - Recreational: harvest open Sept. 14-17 and 21-24; 1 fish per person; keep first fish
 - Commercial: harvest open Sept. 17-24; trip limit of 50 lbs.
 - Harvest and biological data will be collected
- Tag program for future harvest under development



Red snapper has been closed in federal waters on the Atlantic coast since January 4, 2010. In June, 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. This rule was recently approved by NOAA Fisheries Service and will allow recreational harvest during the weekends of September 14-17 and September 21-24, 2012, and commercial harvest from September 17-24, 2012. Recreational harvesters would be allowed one fish per person per day with no minimum size limit (harvesters would harvest the first fish). The commercial trip limit will be 50 pounds gutted weight with no minimum size limit. There is a 71.93% recreational / 28.07% commercial allocation for the red snapper fishery and there are 13,067 fish available for harvest. FWC staff will collect data on harvested fish through carcass drop-offs and surveys during this open season.

The Council will begin development of options for a harvest tag program for red snapper and deepwater snapper-grouper species (snowy grouper, golden tilefish, and wreckfish) that would take effect in 2013 at the earliest. This tag program would likely be administered by NOAA Fisheries Service.

Golden Crab – Final Action Possible



- Catch shares program proposed
- Industry opinion divided
- Participants met to discuss if and how to move forward with catch shares development
- Council will review the results of this meeting and decide if final action should be taken



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. The Council will review the results of this meeting and decide if final action should be taken on the golden crab catch shares amendment.

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 discuss available information and possible closure locations
- Public input and timeline to be discussed



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 specked 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. In August, Council staff held three public workshops in Florida and one in North Carolina. The Council will review this public input and decide on the timeline for moving forward with this action at the September Council meeting.

Other Discussions



- Final action on dealer reporting and permitting improvements
- Emergency rule to delay commercial golden tilefish season opening until after new endorsement program takes effect
- King and Spanish mackerel and cobia: permits, recreational sale, and quotas
- Adjust ACLs based on new MRIP calculations



The Council is 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. The Gulf Council took final action to approve this amendment in August, and the South Atlantic Council will take final action on the amendment at the September meeting.

The Council is also scheduled to consider an emergency rule for the golden tilefish fishery that would delay opening harvest until the newly-approved commercial longline endorsement program is implemented. This endorsement program was approved by the Council in June. The fishing year for golden tilefish is currently January 1 through December 31. The commercial fishery has been closed since February 17, 2012, which is when the 2012 commercial ACL was projected to be met.

The Council is also expected to continue discussions of 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. This is a joint amendment with the Gulf Council. The Council mackerel committee is expected to hold 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.

Finally, the Council will begin review of annual catch limits (ACLs) that may need to be adjusted based on the new MRIP harvest estimates.

No Direction Requested



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



No Commission direction is requested at this time; however, welcomes Commission direction on any Council issues. The Council meeting will be held in Charleston the week following the Commission meeting, which is September 10-14.