



This is a review and discussion of issues that were discussed at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Dec. 3-7, 2012, meeting in Wilmington, NC and issues that are scheduled to be discussed at the Council's March 4-8, 2013, meeting in St. Simons Island, GA.

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## Red Snapper 2013 Season – Final Action



- Recreational
  - If quota is available, open 3-day weekends starting 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend in July until quota projected to be met
  - Keep 1st fish (no minimum size limit)
  - 1-fish bag limit
- Commercial
  - Harvest opens 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in July until quota projected to be met
  - 75 pound trip limit



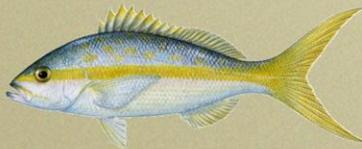
Red snapper has been closed in federal waters on the Atlantic coast since Jan. 4, 2010, with the exception of a short red snapper harvest season that was allowed by emergency rule in 2012. In December, the Council took final action to create red snapper mini-seasons for 2013 and beyond. The commercial and recreational allocations for red snapper are 28.07% and 71.93%, respectively. If quota is available and this action is approved by the Secretary of Commerce, recreational red snapper will open for three-day weekends (Fri.-Sun.) starting the second weekend in July. The number of open weekends will depend on available quota and projected harvest rates. Recreational harvesters would keep the first fish (no minimum size limit) and have a one fish bag limit. Commercial harvest would open the second Monday in July with a 75 pound trip limit until the commercial quota is projected to be met. July was chosen for both the recreational and commercial harvest seasons because species that are caught with red snapper (i.e., black sea bass) are also open during this time. FWC and other state agencies will work with NOAA Fisheries to increase monitoring efforts during these season openings.

At future meetings, the Council will also consider a harvest tag program for red snapper and deepwater snapper grouper species that have very limited recreational quotas. The purpose of this program would be to allow harvest of these species while staying within the catch limits established by law.

## Yellowtail Snapper – Final Action



- New assessment indicates stock is not overfished nor undergoing overfishing
  - SSC increased ABC based on assessment
- Final Council action to increase annual catch limit
- Joint-Council South Florida committee will consider additional changes for this fishery



A stock assessment for yellowtail snapper was recently completed. This assessment was led by FWC scientists and indicates that the stock is not overfished nor undergoing overfishing. The assessment was reviewed by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The SSC 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 September Council meeting, the Council approved an emergency rule to increase the commercial annual catch limit (ACL) for 2012 to avoid a fishery closure. In December, the Council approved long-term measures to raise the commercial ACL from 1,142,589 to 1,596,510 pounds whole weight and the recreational ACL from 1,031,218 to 1,440,990 pounds whole weight. Because yellowtail snapper is an important Florida fishery, the FWC Council representative was supportive of this action.

In an effort to avoid ACL closures in the future, the joint-Council committee that is being formed to examine fisheries issues in South Florida will consider additional management options for the yellowtail snapper fishery. 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 joint-Council South Florida committee will consider ways to avoid ACL closures for this fishery in the future, such as creating a single ACL for this species (instead of separate Gulf and Atlantic ACLs), changing the commercial fishing year, and establishing a commercial spawning season closure.

## Adjustments to Management Targets for Unassessed Species – Final Action



- ABCs, ACLs, allocations, and ACTs adjusted for 37 unassessed species based on new recreational harvest estimates (MRIP)



The snapper grouper committee recommended that the Council take final action to adjust ABCs, ACLs, allocations, and annual catch targets (ACTs) for 37 unassessed species based on the new recreational harvest estimates from Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) calculations. The ABCs, ACLs, allocations, and ACTs currently in place for these species are based on the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) calculations. It is important to make these adjustments based on the MRIP recreational harvest estimates because MRIP is now considered the best available data and is used to monitor recreational harvest. Some of the species included in this change are almaco jack, lane snapper, yellowedge grouper, and white grunt.

In general, this change is not expected to affect fisheries at current harvest levels. These adjustments also do not affect assessed species like black sea bass, greater amberjack, and gag grouper. Adjustments to management targets for assessed species will be made separately during stock assessment updates and revisions.

## Possible Closed Areas for Warsaw Grouper and Speckled Hind



- Harvest prohibited in federal waters
- Closed areas would replace the recently-eliminated 240-ft depth closure
- Council could consider reconfiguration of existing closed areas, including possible expansion of area off St. Lucie, FL
- Workgroup of experts to reconvene and consider other closed area options



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. In December, NOAA Fisheries staff presented an analysis of the distribution of speckled hind and warsaw grouper in the South Atlantic and how existing marine protected areas (MPAs) could be reconfigured to provide more protection for these species. One of the current closed areas that was identified is the St. Lucie Hump MPA, which could be expanded to include known speckled hind and warsaw grouper aggregation sites and speckled hind habitat. 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. The Council will hold an additional expert workgroup meeting on Feb. 4-6, 2013, in Charleston, SC to consider other closed area options. The Council will continue to discuss alternatives during its March meeting.

## Other Actions and Discussions



- Dolphin-wahoo issues approved for public scoping
- Possible changes to data collection
  - Electronic reporting by headboats
  - Commercial logbooks
  - Bycatch and discard reporting
  - VMS requirement in commercial snapper grouper fishery



The Council approved dolphin-wahoo management options for scoping including updating ABCs, ACLs, and ACTs for these species based on the new MRIP data, adjusting dolphin allocation, and revisions to accountability measures. The Council also considered including management measures that would allow bag limit sales of dolphin and wahoo from for-hire vessels to be included in this scoping process, but this was ultimately rejected by the Council. Scoping meetings on these issues will be held in Jacksonville on Jan. 28, Cocoa Beach on Jan. 29, and Key Largo on Jan. 30.

The ad hoc data collection committee discussed electronic reporting by the headboat fishery, bycatch reporting, commercial log book reporting, and possible vessel monitoring systems (VMS) for the commercial snapper grouper fishery. The committee selected a preferred alternative to require VMS on commercial snapper-grouper vessels, contingent on available funds from NOAA Law Enforcement for purchase of VMS units for the entire fleet. The committee will continue work on data collection issues at its March meeting, and is expected to take the VMS issue out to public hearings after that. Final action requiring electronic reporting by headboats could be taken at the March Council meeting.

## March Expected Actions and Discussions



- Possible expansion of deepwater coral protection areas with allowance for deepwater shrimpers to transit
- Joint-Council meeting for king and Spanish mackerel and cobia: permits, recreational sale, and quotas
- Snapper grouper management
- Golden crab management



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. Further discussion on this action will occur in March, when trawl data from fishermen has been fully analyzed.

In March, 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.

The Council is also expected to discuss several snapper grouper management issues, including new ACLs for red porgy and vermilion snapper based on recent stock assessments, and modifying various management measures such as seasons, trip limits, bag limits, and fishing years for a variety of species.

Finally, the Council will also revisit golden crab management, including a possible catch shares program, at its March meeting. Golden crab is an exclusively commercial fishery that is limited to deep areas of federal waters, including areas off Florida. Industry opinion on the proposed catch shares program has been divided. In September, the Council decided that the Golden Crab Advisory Panel, which is composed of industry representatives, should meet to choose their preferred management options for the fishery before the Council makes a decision. This meeting is scheduled for Jan. 31 in Fort Lauderdale.

## No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is March 4-8, 2013, in St. Simons Island, GA



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 St. Simons Island, GA, the week of March 4-8, 2013.