

This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Sept. 16-20, 2013, meeting in Charleston, SC, and issues that will be discussed at the Council's meeting on Dec. 2-6, 2013, in Wilmington, NC. This document may be updated prior to the November Commission meeting.

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Snapper Grouper – Final Actions



- Adjusted fishing year for greater amberjack and black sea bass
- Modified black sea bass and gag commercial trip limits
- Modified accountability measures for black sea bass and vermilion snapper



In September, the Council passed Regulatory Amendment 14, which contained actions for multiple snapper grouper species. For greater amberjack, the Council changed the May 1 through Apr. 30 fishing year for the recreational and commercial sectors to Mar. 1 through Feb. 28. Greater amberjack spawn from January through June, so a Mar. 1 opening could benefit the species if the annual catch limit (ACL) is caught before the spawning season begins. Additionally, some fishermen requested the fishery be open during the month of March because it is a productive month for fishing and consumers are buying more fish during this time. The April closure for commercial harvest of greater amberjack will remain in place.

For black sea bass, the Council changed the June 1 through May 31 recreational fishing year to Apr. 1 through Mar. 31. These dates were chosen to reduce discards of snapper and grouper species closed to harvest when anglers are targeting black sea bass early in the year. For the commercial sector, the Council chose a Jan.1 through Dec. 31 fishing year. This would begin the vermilion snapper and black sea bass fishing years at the same time, and could reduce discards of black sea bass by vermilion snapper hook-and-line fishermen. The Jan.1 opening would also benefit commercial fishermen by allowing them to harvest black sea bass when other snapper and grouper species are closed. The Council also set a 1,000 pound (lb) gutted weight (gw) trip limit for the commercial black sea bass pot fishery. For the commercial hook-and-line fishery, the Council selected a 300 lb gw trip limit from Jan. 1 through Apr. 30, and a 1,000 lb gw trip limit from May 1 through Dec. 31. These trip limits were modified to extend the commercial season and allow incidental harvest of black sea bass when fishing for other species.

For gag grouper, the Council modified the commercial trip limit to extend the commercial season. The trip limit will remain at 1,000 lbs gw until 75 percent of the commercial ACL is reached, then drop to 500 lbs gw for the remainder of the season.

Lastly, the Council modified recreational accountability measures for black sea bass and vermilion snapper. For vermilion snapper, these measures would require the ACL to be reduced in the year following an ACL overage, but only if the species is considered overfished and the overall ACL is exceeded during the year of the overage. For black sea bass, the Council removed the requirement that the ACL be reduced in the year following an ACL overage. Neither black sea bass nor vermilion snapper are considered to be overfished or undergoing overfishing.

If these changes are approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, staff will bring the fish year changes before the Commission to consider federal consistency. However, trip limits will not need to be addressed by the Commission for federal consistency. Florida's Reef Fish rule requires commercial harvesters to follow federal limits when fishing in state waters. This means that harvesters in state waters must abide by the new federal commercial trip limits when they take effect and no changes to FWC rules are needed for consistency.

King Mackerel, Spanish Mackerel, and Cobia – Final Action



- Joint amendments with Gulf Council
- Prohibited bag limit sales in Atlantic waters
 - Exception for tournaments
 - Current Gulf preferred alternative would allow bag limit sales by for-hire vessels
- Modified commercial trip limits and adjusted fishing year for king mackerel zones
- Gulf Council scheduled to take final action in October



Also at the September 2013 meeting, the Council took final action approving the king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia amendments developed jointly with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council). The Council's preferred alternatives and the resulting final amendments must be approved by the Gulf Council before being sent to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

The South Atlantic Council chose to prohibit sale of king mackerel caught under the recreational bag limit in the Council's jurisdiction. The current Gulf Council preferred alternative would allow the sale of king mackerel caught under the recreational bag limit in the Gulf Council's jurisdiction only, and only on for-hire trips in which the vessel also holds a federal king mackerel commercial permit. Both Councils have a preferred alternative that would allow tournament-caught fish to be donated to and sold by a wholesale dealer if all proceeds go to charity and the state issues the tournament a permit allowing such activity.

For the commercial sector, the Council chose to increase the commercial king mackerel trip limit for the Eastern Zone Southern Subzone (Gulf waters off southwest Florida). The commercial trip limit will increase from 1,250 pounds to 2,000 pounds. This limit was seen as a compromise between fishermen who wanted the limit to remain 1,250 pounds and others that favored a 3,000 pound trip limit. The Council also modified the commercial king mackerel fishing seasons for the Western Zone (federal waters off Texas - Alabama) from a July 1 opening date to a Sept. 1 opening, and the Eastern Zone (federal waters off Florida) from a July 1 opening date to an Oct. 1 opening. Opening the season later in the fall would set the seasons to be when fish are available locally, and discourage commercial king mackerel fishermen from the Atlantic coast from moving over into the Gulf during the Gulf's commercial fishing season. For several years, some fishermen from the Atlantic coast of Florida have fished in the Gulf once the Atlantic season closes or becomes non-profitable. This influx of fishermen to the Gulf has shortened the season for commercial king mackerel fishermen in the Gulf for several years. The Council also approved a transit provision that allows commercial king mackerel vessels to travel through closed areas with gear stowed to land legally harvested king mackerel.

The Council also approved a framework action for the South Atlantic only that would allow at-sea transfer of commercially-harvested Spanish mackerel between vessels with Spanish mackerel commercial permits. The framework action also modified king mackerel commercial limits during March in most Atlantic federal waters off Florida.

Other Final Actions



- Deepwater coral protected areas expanded
 - Trawling for deepwater shrimp prohibited in protected areas
 - Transit will be allowed through Oculina Bank
- Increased annual catch limits for dolphin and wahoo
- Modified dolphin and wahoo accountability measures for recreational and commercial sectors



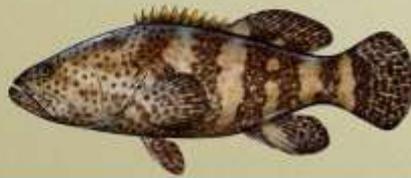
The Council approved an expansion of the Oculina Bank and Stetson-Miami Terrace Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (CHAPCs) off east Florida to protect newly-documented deepwater coral outside of the current protected areas. Trawling, as well as harvest and possession of rock shrimp, is prohibited in the current CHAPCs. However, the Council approved a provision for shrimpers to transit through Oculina Bank with gear stowed, and also approved an area where shrimpers can haul gear through an area historically used by shrimp fishermen that is now part of the Stetson-Miami Terrace CHAPC. This amendment is now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

For dolphin and wahoo, the Council approved small increases to ACLs for each species. Additionally, the Council approved revisions to commercial and recreational accountability measures for dolphin and wahoo that would require the ACL to be reduced in the year following an ACL overage, but only if the species is considered overfished and the overall ACL is exceeded during the year of the overage. Currently, neither dolphin nor wahoo are considered to be overfished. This amendment is also pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

South Florida Issues Update



- Joint Council committees on South Florida and goliath grouper issues to reconvene in early 2014
 - Stakeholders have provided input on South Florida management issues
 - University of Florida evaluation of stakeholder views on goliath grouper ongoing



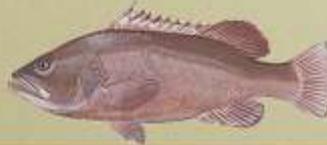
The joint-Council committees on South Florida and goliath grouper issues will hold a joint meeting in early 2014. Stakeholders provided input about South Florida management issues during five workshops held earlier this summer in South Florida and hosted by FWC staff. The committees will discuss workshop input and next steps for addressing management issues that require Council action. Staff will bring management issues that can be addressed through FWC action to the Commission at a future meeting.

Later this fall, University of Florida researchers will complete an evaluation of stakeholder views on the goliath grouper management. Earlier this year, these researchers conducted a survey that provided information on a large number of stakeholder's views, and held a workshop that allowed representatives from different stakeholder groups to exchange perspectives and develop a shared understanding of the issues surrounding goliath grouper management. The committees will review this information at their upcoming meeting.

Closed Areas for Warsaw Grouper and Speckled Hind - Update



- Harvest prohibited in federal waters
- Council to receive update on research and law enforcement activities within areas already closed to bottomfishing
- Council will consider options for reconfiguration and expansion of existing closed areas as well as new areas closed to bottomfishing for additional protection
- Could include additional closed areas off Florida



Harvest of warsaw grouper and speckled hind is prohibited in all 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.

In December, the Council will receive updates on research and law enforcement activities occurring in the eight deepwater areas currently closed to bottomfishing created in 2007 to protect deep-water snapper-grouper species, including speckled hind and warsaw grouper. The Council is working to determine if existing closed areas are adequate to protect these species, if existing areas should be reconfigured, or if new closed areas should be created. Some of these potential new closed areas could be created in federal waters off east Florida and the Florida Keys. Existing closed areas and any new sites to be considered by the Council would only be closed to bottomfishing. Surface trolling for pelagic fish in these areas would be permitted.

The Council is proposing modifying or creating additional areas closed to bottomfishing to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper and replace the 240-foot depth closure that was eliminated on May 10, 2012. The Council eliminated this closure after reviewing scientific reports that stated speckled hind and warsaw grouper were rarely found in association with other deepwater species that were a part of the 240-foot depth closure. Additionally, by eliminating the 240-foot depth closure, the Council could minimize social and economic impacts incurred by fishermen when the closure was in place.

The Council will continue to discuss alternatives during its December meeting.

Other Council Discussions



- Begin amendment that would allow recreational anglers to bring dolphin and wahoo fillets caught in the Bahamas back to the U.S. through federal waters
- Already allowed for snapper and grouper species



At the June 2013 Council meeting, several recreational anglers requested that the Council allow anglers fishing in the Bahamas to bring dolphin and wahoo fillets back to the U.S. through federal waters. Current federal regulations require that dolphin and wahoo must be maintained in whole condition until landed. However, federal regulations provide an exception that allows anglers to bring lawfully harvested snapper and grouper back from the Bahamas through U.S. waters as fillets instead of whole fish. Recreational anglers who fish in Bahamian waters would like to be able to bring back filleted dolphin and wahoo in addition to snapper and grouper. At the September meeting, the Council directed staff to develop an amendment that would allow recreational anglers to bring back dolphin and wahoo fillets lawfully harvested in Bahamian waters. The amendment will be discussed by the Council at their December meeting.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is Dec. 2-6 in Wilmington, NC



No specific direction on Council issues is requested at this time, but staff welcomes Commission input on any Council issues. The next Council meeting will be held in Wilmington, NC, on Dec. 2-6.