

This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) June 10-14, 2013, meeting in Stuart, FL and issues that will be discussed at the Council's meeting on Sept. 16-20, 2013, in Charleston, SC. This document may be updated prior to the September Commission meeting.

Author: Martha Bademan, Jessica McCawley, and Tony Bresnen

Report Date: July 29, 2013

## Red Snapper – 2013 Federal Harvest Season



- Recreational harvest open Aug. 23-25
  - 1-fish bag limit, keep first fish
- Commercial harvest open Aug. 26 until quota projected to be met
  - 75-pound trip limit
- Increased data collection by FWC
- Seasons after 2013 (if quota is available)
  - Recreational open weekends starting 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend in July
  - Commercial open 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in July



NOAA Fisheries Service recently announced that red snapper will open in Atlantic federal waters for a short harvest season in 2013. Recreational harvest will be open for one 3-day weekend, Aug. 23-25, 2013. Recreational harvesters must keep the first fish (no minimum size limit) and have a one-fish bag limit. Commercial harvest will open on Monday, Aug. 26 with a 75-pound trip limit and will remain open until the quota is projected to be met. The commercial and recreational annual catch limits for 2013 are 21,447 pounds gutted weight and 9,585 fish, respectively.

FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) will be enhancing their data collection efforts during this short open season to collect biological samples and gauge red snapper fishing effort and harvest on Florida's Atlantic coast.

In future years if quota is available, recreational red snapper will open for three-day weekends (Friday through Sunday) starting the second weekend in July. The number of open weekends will depend on available quota and projected harvest rates. Commercial harvest will open the second Monday in July with a 75-pound trip limit until the commercial quota is projected to be met. The commercial and recreational allocations for red snapper are 28.07% and 71.93%, respectively. 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.

## Black Sea Bass – Annual Catch Limits Increased



- Assessment update indicates stock is rebuilt
- Special Council meeting held via webinar to increase the ACL for 2013-2016 seasons
  - ACL increases will likely result in longer federal recreational and commercial seasons
  - Pending approval by U.S. Secretary of Commerce



A stock assessment update for Atlantic black sea bass was recently completed and indicates that the stock is fully rebuilt and no longer undergoing overfishing. This is excellent news because the stock had been in a rebuilding plan since 2006. The Council held a special meeting via webinar on May 13 to increase the recreational and commercial annual catch limits (ACLs) for black sea bass harvest from 2013-2016 based on the updated assessment results. If the increases are approved by the United States Secretary of Commerce, the 2013 recreational ACL will increase from 409,000 to 1,033,980 pounds (the recreational annual catch target (ACT) would be 903,905 pounds). The 2013 commercial ACL would increase from 309,000 to 780,020 pounds. These increases would apply to the 2013 season and would likely result in longer recreational and commercial harvest seasons in federal waters.

## Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) for Commercial Snapper Grouper Rejected



- Council rejected requirement for VMS on commercial snapper grouper vessels
  - Costs associated with VMS concerned fishermen
  - Council will explore other options for improving enforcement and data collection



At its June meeting, the Council decided to not require commercial snapper grouper vessels to have a vessel monitoring system (VMS) onboard when fishing. The Council was considering requiring VMS to improve enforcement of regulations, including in closed areas, as well as improve fisheries dependent data, which could in turn improve management of the snapper grouper fishery. Many commercial fishermen opposed this requirement because of economic hardships and the costs associated with VMS. Some federal funding would have been available to reimburse fishermen for the purchase of VMS units, but fishermen would have been responsible for paying monthly service fees and maintenance costs. The Council will explore other options for improving enforcement and data collection in the snapper grouper fishery at future Council meetings.

## South Florida Issues – Public Workshops Held



- Committee formed to address South Florida issues such as
  - Yellowtail and mutton snapper management
  - Grouper harvest in Monroe County
  - Special management process for South Florida
- FWC lead on public workshops held July 29 – Aug. 5 throughout South Florida



The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council recently convened their joint-committee to address South Florida fishery management issues. The FWC is taking a lead role on this committee, and held workshops in South Florida to get input from the public on South Florida fisheries management issues and approaches. Workshops were held in Dania Beach, Key Largo, Key Colony Beach, Key West, and Marco Island from July 29 – Aug. 5. Some of the topics discussed at the workshops include yellowtail and mutton snapper management, grouper harvest in Monroe County and the Florida Keys, and potentially creating a special management unit or process for South Florida fisheries. The joint-Council committee will likely meet later this year to 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.

## Public Hearings on Potential Management Changes



- Public hearings scheduled in Florida for Aug. 6-8
  - Snapper grouper
  - Mackerel and cobia
  - Deepwater shrimp and deepwater coral protection areas
  - Dolphin and wahoo
- Final action expected in September



In June, the Council voted to hold public hearings on management changes for snapper grouper; mackerel and cobia; deepwater shrimp and deepwater coral protection areas; and dolphin and wahoo. Florida public hearings were held in Jacksonville on Aug. 6, Cocoa Beach on Aug. 7, and Key Largo on Aug. 8.

Many of the potential changes for snapper grouper are requests from anglers or the commercial industry. The Council is considering modifying the fishing year start dates for amberjack and black sea bass to better align fishing seasons with availability of fish. Additionally, the Council is considering changing the commercial trip limit for gag grouper, commercial season for vermilion snapper, and recreational accountability measures for black sea bass and vermilion snapper.

For mackerel and cobia, the Council is considering changes to regulations regarding sale of king and Spanish mackerel (including allowing tournament sales with a state permit); as well as transit, management boundaries, and management targets for cobia.

The Council is also seeking input on 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.

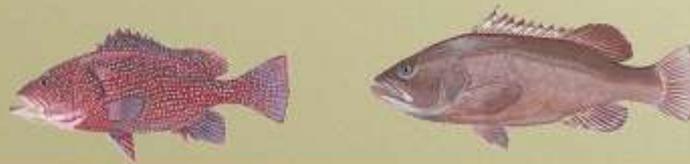
Finally, dolphin-wahoo management options for public workshops include updating ACLs and other management targets for these species based on the new Marine Recreational Information Program data, setting commercial trip limits, and revising accountability measures.

The Council will consider taking final action on these changes at its September meeting.

## 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 to consider options for reconfiguration and expansion of existing closed areas as well as new closed areas in Sept.
  - Could include additional closed areas off Florida



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 on 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, 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 the Florida east coast and Florida Keys. The Council will continue to discuss alternatives during its September meeting.

## No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is Sept. 16-20 in Charleston, SC



No specific direction on Council issues is requested at this time, but staff welcomes Commission direction on any Council issues. The next Council meeting will be held in Charleston, SC on Sept. 16-20.