



This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) June 9-13, 2014, meeting in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL.

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Report Date: June 13, 2014

Recreational Snowy Grouper and Golden Tilefish



- NOAA Fisheries requesting state recreational rules match federal rules in Atlantic waters
- Snowy grouper federal rules - Atlantic
 - 1 fish per vessel per day (state limit is 1 fish per person per day)
 - Federal season shortened if average landings from previous 3 years exceed catch limit
- Golden tilefish federal rules – Atlantic
 - 1 fish per person per day (same as state rules)
 - Harvest closes if catch limit met or projected to be met

Direction requested



NOAA Fisheries recently sent a letter the Commission requesting that the State of Florida adopt recreational regulations for snowy grouper and golden tilefish that are consistent with Atlantic federal rules. These are deepwater species that primarily occur in federal waters, but may be caught in some areas of state waters off Florida. Most recreational landings of these species in the South Atlantic occurs off Florida. The Council is discussing an amendment that would modify annual catch limits and other management measures to help rebuild snowy grouper, which is overfished. Public hearings will be held in August.

For snowy grouper in Atlantic federal waters, there is a recreational vessel limit of one fish per vessel per day within the three-fish grouper aggregate bag limit, and the federal season is shortened if average landings from the previous three years exceed the catch limit. Last year snowy grouper closed in Atlantic federal waters on May 31 and this year it closed on June 7 (the fishery opens January 1 each year). For Atlantic state waters, the recreational bag limit is one fish per person per day within the three-grouper aggregate, and there is no seasonal closure.

For golden tilefish, the recreational bag limit in both state and federal waters of the Atlantic is one fish per person per day within the three-fish grouper aggregate bag limit. In federal waters, in-season closures occur if the recreational annual catch limit is met or projected to be met. Recreational harvest of golden tilefish in Atlantic federal waters closed on June 3 and June 7 in 2013 and 2014, respectively. There is no recreational closure of golden tilefish in state waters.

NOAA Fisheries is asking the Commission to modify the snowy grouper recreational limit and apply in-season closures for state waters that match the federal closures to help avoid overfishing these species, since recreational annual catch limits were exceeded for these species in 2013 and a significant part of this harvest occurred after the fishery had closed. Staff requests direction on recreational management of snowy grouper and golden tilefish in Atlantic state waters.

Bringing Fish Back From the Bahamas - Update



- Council is considering action that would allow recreational anglers to bring dolphin and wahoo caught in the Bahamas back to the U.S. through federal waters as fillets
 - Can already bring snapper and grouper back as fillets
 - Public hearings to be held in August
 - Could be finalized in September



The Council continued discussions on an amendment that would 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.

The Council chose several preferred alternatives for this amendment, such as requiring that skin be left intact on fillets for identification purposes and requiring anglers bringing fillets from the Bahamas to have stamped and dated passports onboard their vessel. These options could help aid in enforcement. The Council will continue to discuss this amendment at future meetings and is trying to finalize the amendment at their September meeting.

Public hearings on these options will be held in August. Florida meetings will be held in Key West on August 11, Cocoa Beach on August 12, and Jacksonville on August 13.

Bottomfishing Closed Areas to Protect Warsaw Grouper and Speckled Hind - Discussion



- Harvest of speckled hind and warsaw grouper prohibited in federal waters
- New approach to conserving these species through spawning area closures
 - Scoping meetings to be held in August



Speckled Hind



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.

The Council had been considering modifying or creating additional areas closed to bottomfishing to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper and replace the 240-foot closure that was removed in 2012. However, the Council directed staff to take a new approach that would instead look at spawning area closures for multiple snapper grouper species. These areas have not been determined yet and the closures might not necessarily be year-round. Artificial reefs could be used to enhance the areas for spawning sites. Scoping meetings will be held in August in conjunction with the public hearings mentioned on the previous slide to get public input on where spawning closures may be appropriate. This item would not be finalized until spring 2015 at the earliest.

Snapper Grouper Discussions



- Removing or modifying the Nov. 1 – April 30 black sea bass commercial pot closure
- Modifications to acceptable biological catches for data-poor species
- Gray triggerfish measurement method
- Accountability measures for snapper grouper species
- Remove species from federal management and turn over management to State of Florida



The Council continued discussions on several snapper grouper management measures.

The Council discussed an amendment that could modify the annual Nov. 1 – April 30 commercial black sea bass pot closure that was originally enacted to help minimize fishery interactions with Endangered Species Act-listed right whales. The Council is considering modifying this closure to balance the economic needs of the commercial black sea bass pot fishermen while still protecting endangered right whales. There are currently several other restrictions on the use of black sea bass pots that may help limit risk of right whales interacting with black sea bass pots.

The Council also discussed modifying acceptable biological catches for several data-poor species that have not had stock assessments and have limited data available. Also in this amendment, the Council is considering modifications to gray triggerfish management, including setting recreational and commercial size limits and commercial seasons and trip limits.

Finally, the Council is discussing changes that would make accountability measures in the snapper grouper fishery more consistent across species. Accountability measures are management tools designed to prevent annual catch limits from being exceeded and are established for both recreational and commercial fisheries. There are both in-season accountability measures to prevent the annual catch limits from being exceeded when monitoring of the fishery allows and post-season accountability monitoring (e.g., an annual catch limit reduced by the amount of the quota overage) when fishery monitoring is much more delayed as in most recreational fisheries.

Direction Requested



- Recreational snowy grouper and golden tilefish in Atlantic state waters
- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is Sept. 15-19 in Charleston, SC



Staff requests direction on recreational management of snowy grouper and golden tilefish in Atlantic state waters. NOAA Fisheries has requested that the State of Florida adopt state regulations for these species that match Atlantic federal recreational rules. Staff also welcomes Commission direction on any other Council issues. The next Council meeting will be held in Charleston, SC on Sept. 15-19.