



This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Sept. 15-19, 2014, meeting in Charleston, SC.

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Council Final Actions



- Adjustments to snowy grouper rebuilding plan, commercial and recreational management measures, and allocations
- Modifications to acceptable biological catches for data-poor species
- Gray triggerfish management
- Spanish mackerel commercial management measures



The Council took final action on several amendments at its September meeting that are now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

For snowy grouper, the Council approved an amendment that would adjust the rebuilding plan in response to the 2013 stock assessment that indicated the stock is overfished but overfishing is no longer occurring. This amendment would increase the commercial trip limit from 100 to 200 pounds gutted weight and set a fixed recreational harvest season opening May 1 and closing on Sept. 1 each year. In past years, recreational harvest opened Jan. 1 and closed when the recreational quota was projected to be met (in 2014, recreational harvest closed June 7). This set recreational harvest season could help the stock recover and prevent the recreational sector from exceeding the quota. This amendment would also increase annual catch limits (ACLs) for snowy grouper as the stock rebuilds and shift allocation of snowy grouper from the commercial sector to the recreational sector. Currently, snowy grouper is allocated 95 percent to the commercial sector and 5 percent to the recreational sector. The new sector allocation would be 83 percent commercial and 17 percent recreational.

The Council also approved modifications to acceptable biological catches for several unassessed, data-poor species and changes to gray triggerfish management. Recreational and commercial size limits for gray triggerfish in federal waters off Florida were changed to match the size limits in state waters off Florida. Consistent size limits should eliminate angler confusion and improve enforceability. For the commercial sector, the Council created a split season and trip limits, which could make trips more efficient by reducing discards of co-occurring species such as vermilion snapper and lengthen the commercial season by reducing harvest rates.

For Spanish mackerel, the Council approved an amendment that would simplify the quota system and trip limits for commercial harvest in federal waters off Florida. The current commercial trip limits are complex because they change seasonally and are based on the percentage of the overall landed commercial quota. This amendment would likely keep the fishery profitable for a longer time period and make commercial regulations easier to understand and enforce.

Bringing Fish Back From the Bahamas – Final Action Delayed



- 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
- Council requested discussion with FWC Law Enforcement
- Final action delayed until December



The Council delayed final action 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. The Council has asked to discuss this amendment firsthand with FWC Law Enforcement before taking final action at the December meeting.

Current regulations require that most federally-regulated species, including 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.

If approved, this amendment would also require that skin be left intact on fillets for identification purposes, and that anglers bringing fillets from the Bahamas have stamped and dated passports onboard their vessel. These options could aid in enforcement.

Snapper Grouper Discussions



- Spawning area closures to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper
- Removing species from federal management and allowing Florida to manage in federal waters
- Accountability measures for snapper grouper species
- Adjustments to gag and wreckfish ACLs and gag recreational management measures



Finally, the Council continued discussions on several snapper grouper management measures.

The Council is taking a new approach to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper through spawning area closures for multiple snapper grouper species. The Council reviewed public input from scoping meetings on where and when spawning closures may be appropriate. More detailed analysis of spawning sites will be presented at the Council's December meeting.

The Council also continued work on an amendment that would remove several species from federal management. Many of these species have very low or no reported landings, or are rarely landed anywhere but Florida. If species are removed from federal management, the Commission could consider extending state rules into federal waters for these species.

The Council discussed changes that would make accountability measures (AMs) in the snapper grouper fishery more consistent across species. AMs are management tools designed to prevent ACLs from being exceeded. This amendment is expected to be finalized at the Council's December meeting.

Finally, the Council discussed an amendment that could increase future ACLs for gag and wreckfish based on recent stock assessments that indicated these species are not overfished or undergoing overfishing. This amendment could also increase the recreational bag limit for gag. This amendment is scheduled for public hearings this fall.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is Dec. 1-5 in New Bern, NC



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 in New Bern, NC on Dec. 1-5.