



This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions that are expected to occur at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) September 15-19, 2014, meeting in Charleston, SC.

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Red Snapper - 2014 Federal Harvest Season



- Recreational harvest opened for 8 days (weekends)
 - 1-fish bag limit, no minimum size limit
- Commercial harvest opened July 14
 - 75-pound trip limit
- Increased data collection efforts by FWC staff
- Stock assessment is underway



In 2014, recreational harvest of red snapper was open for eight weekend days in Atlantic federal waters: July 11, 12, 13 (Friday through Sunday); July 18, 19, 20 (Friday through Sunday); and July 25 and 26 (Friday and Saturday). Recreational harvesters were encouraged to keep the first fish caught and had a one-fish bag limit with no minimum size limit. Commercial harvest opened on Monday, July 14 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 (ACL) for 2014 are 50,994 pounds gutted weight and 22,576 fish, respectively. Red snapper is allocated 28.07% to the commercial sector and 71.93% to the recreational sector. 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 staff from the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute and Division of Marine Fisheries Management surveyed offshore anglers along the Atlantic coast to collect information about fishing effort and red snapper harvested during the open season. Staff also collected important biological data (such as length, weight, and age information) from individual red snapper.

The latest stock assessment for red snapper is underway and scheduled to be completed in spring 2015. All of the data collected during the 2012 and 2013 weekend seasons are available for scientists to use in the this assessment. The data from 2014 are currently being processed and will be available for future red snapper stock assessments.

Anticipated Final Actions



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



The Council is expected to take final action on several amendments at its September meeting. Public hearings on these amendments were held in August.

For snowy grouper, the Council will consider adjusting 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 adjust ACLs and commercial management measures, including creating two commercial fishing seasons and modifying commercial trip limits. The Council also considered allowing recreational harvest only during certain months (May through August or just a single summer month) as part of this amendment, but thus far, the Council has preferred the current approach in which the recreational fishery closes when the quota is expected to be met. In addition, this amendment could 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 Council will consider 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 changes to gray triggerfish management, including modifying recreational and commercial size limits and commercial seasons and trip limits.

The Council will also consider modifying the quota system and trip limits for commercial harvest of Spanish mackerel 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. The Council is considering simplifying the trip limits and quota system to keep the fishery profitable for a longer time period. This would also make commercial regulations easier to understand and enforce.

Bringing Fish Back From the Bahamas – Final Action Possible



- 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 held in August
 - Could be finalized in September



The Council will also consider 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. Current federal regulations require that most 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.

At their June meeting, 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 aid in enforcement. Public hearings on this amendment were held in August.

Snapper Grouper Discussions



- Removing or modifying the Nov. 1 – April 30 black sea bass commercial pot closure
- 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



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

The Council will consider modifying 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 whale interactions in this fishery.

In June, the Council directed staff to take a new approach to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper through spawning area closures for multiple snapper grouper species. The Council will review public input from scoping meetings to help determine where and when spawning closures may be appropriate.

The Council will also continue 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, staff will bring certain species back to the Commission at a later date to consider extending state rules into federal waters.

Finally, the Council is discussing 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.

South Florida Issues Update



- Joint South Florida Committee met July 22–24
 - Discussed possible methods to streamline management of South Florida-centric species
 - Delegating management of certain species to Florida
 - Yellowtail snapper
 - Mutton snapper
 - Recreational harvest of black grouper
 - FWC would set bag limits, size limits, and seasons
 - Must remain within the ACL set by the Council
 - Considering ways to simplify grouper season closures

Direction requested on whether FWC would consider delegation



The Joint South Florida Committee met July 22–24 in Key Largo. This committee is comprised of representatives from both the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils and is chaired by the FWC staff representatives on the Councils.

The committee discussed possible methods to streamline management of important South Florida species to help make regulations more compatible across jurisdictional boundaries. The committee discussed possible delegation of authority to the State of Florida for some species, such as yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and recreational harvest of black grouper. If management of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper is delegated to the State of Florida, the Commission would be responsible for setting recreational size limits, bag limits, seasons, minor adjustments to gear requirements, and commercial management measures. If recreational management of black grouper is delegated to the State of Florida, the Commission would be responsible for setting recreational size limits, bag limits, seasons, and minor adjustments to gear requirements. However, harvest of these species would be required to be managed within the ACL that would still be set by the Council. The committee also discussed possible methods to simplify the Gulf and the South Atlantic shallow-water grouper spawning season closures in South Florida, making these closures more compatible across the South Florida region. Modifying these closures in South Florida could address the needs of anglers and grouper fisheries in the region, and help law enforcement and compliance, especially in waters off Monroe County. Staff will bring management issues that can be addressed through FWC action to the Commission at a future meeting.

The committee will meet again in early 2015 to review progress before presenting management recommendations to the councils. Staff requests direction on whether FWC would consider delegation of yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper to the State of Florida.

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 to 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 occur in Florida.

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 closed this year on June 7 (the fishery opens Jan. 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. The Council is scheduled to take final action on an amendment modifying ACLs and other management measures to help rebuild snowy grouper, which is overfished. This amendment is described in more detail on the following slide, and does not include changes to recreational regulations at this time.

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 ACL 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 apply in-season closures for both species in state waters that match federal closures and modify the snowy grouper recreational limit to help avoid overfishing these species, since recreational ACLs were exceeded for both species in 2013 and a significant portion of this harvest occurred after the fisheries had closed. Staff requests direction on recreational management of snowy grouper and golden tilefish in Atlantic state waters.

Direction Requested



- Consider accepting delegation of management for yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and recreational harvest of black grouper
- Consider state consistency with Atlantic federal recreational snowy grouper and golden tilefish regulations in Atlantic state waters
- Input on other Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is Sept. 15-19 in Charleston, SC
- Council holding a visioning meeting Oct. 14-16 in Charleston, SC



Staff requests direction on whether FWC would consider accepting delegation of management for yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and the recreational harvest of black grouper. Staff also 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 consistent 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. The Council will also have a special meeting on Oct. 14-16 to discuss the strategic planning process being used to develop long-term management goals for the snapper grouper fishery.