



This is a review and discussion of actions and deliberations from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) March 2-6, 2015, meeting in St. Simon's Island, GA.

Authors: Martha Bademan, Jessica McCawley, and Erika Burgess

Report Date: March 16, 2015

## Coastal Migratory Pelagics



- Considering a joint amendment for king mackerel with the Gulf Council that would:
  - Set new annual catch limits (ACLs)
  - Redefine the location of the stock mixing zone
  - Allow sale of bycatch by shark gillnet fishery
- No longer considering separate management of South Atlantic and Gulf king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia



The South Atlantic Council jointly manages coastal migratory pelagic species (king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia) with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

The two councils are considering an amendment that proposes three major management actions for king mackerel. The first would set new annual catch limits (ACLs) for king mackerel based on the results of a 2014 stock assessment. The second action would redefine the location of the stock mixing zone, as the currently designated location where Gulf and Atlantic migratory groups are believed to overlap is not appropriate. The actual mixing zone is a smaller area off South Florida between the Dry Tortugas and Miami. Finally, the proposed amendment would allow fishermen in the shark gillnet fishery to sell their king mackerel bycatch.

Both councils were considering separating the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Fishery Management Plan (FMP) into two separate plans so that each council would manage only the fish in their respective jurisdictions. The South Atlantic Council voted to no longer pursue this strategy and would like to continue joint management of the species based on public comments heard at recent workshops.

As this is a joint FMP, both councils have to take corresponding actions in order for management changes to take place. Both councils will convene in a joint session in June to further discuss the king mackerel amendment and any other coastal migratory pelagic issues.

## Snapper Grouper Discussions



- Under consideration and evaluation:
  - Modifications to the time-area closure for the black sea bass commercial pot fishery
  - Establishment of Spawning Special Management Zones in Florida at Daytona Steeples and Warsaw Hole
  - Changing the golden tilefish fishing year and developing a longer commercial season
- Requested federal emergency action for blueline tilefish in the mid-Atlantic to support the rebuilding plan
- Recreational harvest tag program discussion suspended



The Council is considering and evaluating many actions for the Snapper Grouper fishery. The first is a potential modification to the time-area closure for the black sea bass commercial pot fishery. Currently, fishing for black sea bass with pots is prohibited from Nov. 1-April 30 throughout the South Atlantic. The closure is in place to protect endangered right whales from risk of entanglement in pot gear. The alternatives being considered include variations in the size of the closed area and the time period of the closure. Most of the options under evaluation would allow fishermen more access to the fishery in currently closed months. The Council will review the action again in June and potentially hold public hearings in August 2015.

The Council is evaluating locations to designate as Spawning Special Management Zones, which are intended to protect snapper grouper spawning aggregations and spawning sites by prohibiting bottom fishing. There are several areas under consideration in federal waters off the southeastern U.S. The proposed areas off Florida, Daytona Steeples and Warsaw Hole, were suggested by fishermen. Daytona Steeples is part of the Oculina Bank and is located about 50 miles offshore of Ponce Inlet. Warsaw Hole is approximately 20 miles southwest of the Marquesas. The Council will hold a public hearing for this action in April.

At the request of commercial fishermen, the Council is exploring options to establish separate start dates for the longline and hook-and-line golden tilefish fisheries. This action is expected to have positive economic effects for users of both gear types. The Council is also evaluating means by which they can extend the length of the commercial longline season, which typically does not last more than two months due to quota closures.

The Council has developed a rebuilding plan for blueline tilefish that drastically reduces the allowable harvest for recreational and commercial fishermen; however, these rules apply only to the South Atlantic region. Blueline tilefish are also caught in the mid-Atlantic where the South Atlantic Council has no jurisdiction. To supplement the rebuilding plan, both the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and South Atlantic Council are requesting that NOAA Fisheries take emergency action to establish blueline tilefish harvest regulations in the mid-Atlantic region.

Lastly, for some time, the Council had been weighing the option of creating a recreational harvest tag program to monitor the harvest of species with low ACLs. Due to feasibility concerns, the Council has suspended efforts to design and establish a harvest tag program at this time.

## South Florida Issues Update



- South Atlantic and Gulf councils will review changes during a joint meeting in June
  - Possible methods to streamline management of South Florida-centric species:
    - Yellowtail snapper
    - Mutton snapper
    - Black grouper
  - Considering ways to create consistent regulations for:
    - Grouper harvest limits, size limits, and season closures
    - Gear requirements
- Hogfish management changes also being considered



The South Atlantic Council reviewed the Joint South Florida Amendment developed by the Joint South Florida Committee. The committee is comprised of representatives from both the South Atlantic and Gulf councils and is chaired by the FWC staff representatives on each council.

The jurisdictions of both councils and the state of Florida converge in the Florida Keys. The Joint Amendment is being developed to attempt to create uniform fishing regulations in the waters off South Florida, particularly in the Keys, in order to reduce confusion for fishermen and to simplify law enforcement efforts. One management approach being considered is the delegation of management authority in federal waters for yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and black grouper to the state of Florida. These species are infrequently seen or harvested outside of the state of Florida.

Federal action is also being considered to make the harvest limits, size limits, and seasonal closures for shallow water grouper species more uniform across jurisdictions. These management changes, if adopted, may apply throughout the South Atlantic and Gulf.

The Joint South Florida Committee had suggested addressing hogfish management through the Joint South Florida Amendment because the East Florida/Florida Keys hogfish stock, which occurs in all three jurisdictions, was identified as overfished with overfishing occurring. The South Atlantic Council decided that they would prefer to address hogfish in a separate amendment. Both councils will meet jointly to discuss the Joint South Florida Amendment at their June meeting.

## Spiny Lobster



- 2013/14 ACL exceeded
- Council is requesting an exemption to manage the fishery without an ACL due to the unique life history characteristics of lobster



The 2013/14 spiny lobster harvest exceeded the ACL; an ACL is required for this fishery by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The quota overage led the Council to discuss ways to manage the fishery to avoid future quota overages. Lobster is unique in that harvest levels in Florida are not believed to be strongly tied to annual recruitment and a large portion of recruitment comes from outside U.S. waters. Additionally, spiny lobster have the longest larval stage of any species managed by the Council. Due to the unique biology of spiny lobster, the Council is requesting that NOAA Fisheries exempt lobster from the ACL requirement.

## No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Council meeting is June 8-12 in Key West, FL
  - Joint meeting with Gulf Council



No specific direction is requested at this time, but staff welcomes Commission input on any Council issues. The next Council meeting will be held in Key West, FL, from June 8-12, 2015. This will include a joint meeting with the Gulf Council to discuss joint management issues.