



Gray Triggerfish – Atlantic
Consent Agenda Item #2 – Proposed
Adoption of Federal Standards
April 15, 2015



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 1

This is a summary of proposed rules to change the minimum size limit for both gray triggerfish in state waters of the Atlantic and for importation and sale of gray triggerfish in Florida. This action would make state gray triggerfish regulations in the Atlantic consistent with federal regulations that were approved at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) September 2014 meeting and that are now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

Authors: Erika Burgess, Martha Bademan, and Jessica McCawley

Report date: March 16, 2015

Background – Federal Atlantic Gray Triggerfish



- Pending federal management measures intend to:
 - Prevent early commercial season closures
 - Address concerns regarding stock status
- Will increase the recreational and commercial minimum size limit from 12 inches total length to 14 inches fork length for federal waters
- Will establish a commercial split season of Jan. 1-June 30 and July 1-Dec. 31
- Will set a 1,000 lb. commercial trip limit



The South Atlantic Council developed management measures for gray triggerfish in response to concerns voiced by fishermen and the Council's Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel. It was the Council's intent to consider changing regulations for gray triggerfish after the completion of a stock assessment; however, delays in the assessment and concerns raised by fishermen regarding early closures of the commercial sector and the stock health of gray triggerfish led the Council to take action in 2014.

The Council modified management measures for gray triggerfish through Amendment 29 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The Council forwarded the amendment to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce for review, and it is currently pending Secretarial approval. This amendment will increase the recreational and commercial gray triggerfish size limit from 12 inches to 14 inches and change the measurement method from total length to fork length in Atlantic federal waters. The change in size limit and measurement method was requested by FWC staff in order to make the size limit for gray triggerfish consistent between Gulf and Atlantic waters. The amendment will also establish a commercial split season that would run from Jan. 1-June 30 and July 1-Dec. 31. The commercial quota will be split 50:50 between each season. Lastly, the amendment will create a commercial trip limit of 1,000 pounds (lbs.).

Current State Gray Triggerfish Regulations – Atlantic

- 12-inch fork length minimum size limit
- Allowable gear:
 - Hook-and-line
 - Spearing
- Recreational:
 - Open year-round
 - 100-lb. daily bag limit
- Commercial harvesters follow federal regulations for harvest
- Statewide 12-inch fork length minimum size limit for sale and importation



In state waters of the Atlantic, the current recreational and commercial size limit for gray triggerfish is 12 inches fork length. Today, the Commission will consider specifying a minimum size limit of 14 inches fork length for both sectors. Gray triggerfish may be harvested by hook-and-line gear or by spearing. The recreational fishery is open year-round and statewide regulations, such as fishing license requirements, gear restrictions, and the statewide definition of “commercial quantities” apply. The definition of commercial quantities designates harvest greater than 100 lbs. as commercial quantities for any species without otherwise established limits, making the recreational bag limit for gray triggerfish in state waters 100 pounds.

Per Florida Administrative Code (FAC) 68B-14.0045, which governs commercial harvest requirements for reef fish, commercial fishermen harvesting gray triggerfish in state waters are bound to the trip limits, seasons, and closures that apply to adjacent federal waters. Current commercial regulations specify no trip limit and the season begins Jan. 1; however, management measures approved in Amendment 29 to the federal Snapper Grouper FMP will result in changes to the commercial fishery. Therefore, following the approval of Amendment 29 by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, a trip limit will be established at 1,000 pounds and the fishery will operate under a split season. The statewide minimum size limit for the importation and sale of gray triggerfish is 12 inches fork length, which corresponds with the smallest legally-harvestable commercial size limit for gray triggerfish in Florida.

While the federal amendment will standardize the measurement method for gray triggerfish in state and federal waters, it sets up an inconsistent size limit between state waters of the Atlantic and federal waters of the Atlantic, as well as state and federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico. The minimum size limit will be 12 inches fork length in Atlantic state waters and 14 inches fork length elsewhere. Having different size limits in state and federal waters is problematic for anglers and law enforcement. Changing the size limit for gray triggerfish in Atlantic state waters to 14 inches fork length would make the size limits the same statewide.

The following slide outlines changes that could be made to FWC rules to be consistent with changes pending for Atlantic federal waters.

Proposed Rules

68B-14.0035 Size Limits: Amberjack, Black Sea Bass, Gray Triggerfish, Grouper, Hogfish, Red Porgy, Snapper

- *Set the gray triggerfish minimum size limit at 14 inches fork length for Atlantic state waters*

68B-14.00355 Size Limits for Importation and Sale

- *Raise the minimum size limit for the importation and sale of gray triggerfish to 14 inches fork length statewide*



Currently, Chapter 68B-14.0035, FAC, (Size Limits: Amberjack, Black Sea Bass, Gray Triggerfish, Grouper, Hogfish, Red Porgy, Snapper) specifies different minimum size limits for gray triggerfish in state waters of the Atlantic and Gulf. The current regulations set minimum size limits of 12 inches fork length in the Atlantic and 14 inches fork length in the Gulf. The first proposed rule amendment would specify a minimum size limit of 14 inches fork length for gray triggerfish in Atlantic state waters. This size limit would apply to commercial and recreational harvest.

Chapter 68B-14.00355, FAC, (Size Limits for Importation and Sale) specifies the minimum size limit allowed for importation and sale of gray triggerfish, which is based on the smallest minimum size limit allowed for commercial harvest. As the first proposed rule amendment increases the lowest minimum size limit, FWC Staff recommend to amend this rule to specify a minimum size limit of 14 inches fork length for the importation and sale of gray triggerfish.

Staff Recommendations

Approve the proposed rules to:

- Specify a 14-inch fork length minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in Atlantic state waters
- Specify a 14-inch fork length minimum size limit for importation and sale of gray triggerfish statewide

If approved by the Commission, the rules will be noticed and filed without further hearing as allowed under the adopting federal standards provision



Staff recommend approving the proposed rules specifying a 14-inch fork length minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in Atlantic state waters and a 14-inch fork length minimum size limit for the importation and sale of the species, using the process of adopting federal standards under Chapter 120.54(6), Florida Statutes. These proposed rules would only be filed for state waters if the 14-inch fork length minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off Florida is approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and implemented by NOAA Fisheries.

If the Commission approves these proposed rule amendments, this decision would be final and the rules will be filed without further hearing.

Staff have evaluated the rules under the standards of 68-1.004, FAC, and found them to be in compliance.

The following slides are considered backup material and are not anticipated to be part of the Commission meeting presentation



Recreational Gray Triggerfish Landings by Year, 2012-2014

Year	Recreational Harvest (lbs)	Annual Catch Limit (ACL) (lbs.)	Percentage of ACL Harvested
2012	383,466	367,303	104%
2013	373,983	353,638	106%
2014	312,325	353,638	88%



The recreational ACL for gray triggerfish has been exceeded twice since it has been in place. The size limits created in Amendment 29 are intended to reduce harvest overages.

Commercial Gray Triggerfish Landings by Year, 2012-2014

Year	Commercial Harvest (lbs)	Annual Catch Limit (ACL) (lbs.)	Percentage of ACL Harvested
2012	317,161	305,262	104%
2013	322,117	272,880	118%
2014	275,116	272,880	101%



The commercial ACL for gray triggerfish has been exceeded each year it has been in place. Size limits and trip limits will be implemented through Amendment 29 in an attempt to reduce overages and protect the stock due to concerns about the condition of the fishery. These management measures, along with a split season, were initiated in part to keep the season open longer.