

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management

**Date:** June 25, 2015

**Subject:** Joint South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) Report

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**Purpose:**

Staff will report on actions taken by both Councils at their June 8-12 meetings in Key West. Topics include: management of South Florida species, mackerel, red snapper, gag grouper, and various snapper/grouper species.

**Summary:**

The Gulf Council continued discussions on red snapper issues including regional management of the recreational sector, sector reallocation, and potential improvements to the red snapper IFQ program. Because there have been significant changes to the potential options for regional management, the Council voted to hold additional public hearings on this issue during the fall. Red snapper sector reallocation is slated for final action at the August Council meeting. For gag grouper, the Council received updated information that indicates that the gag grouper stock is not doing as well as indicated in the last stock assessment, which concluded that the stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing. Therefore, the Council is no longer considering an increase to the annual catch limit. However, the Council is considering removing the December 3-31 portion of the gag grouper federal recreational closed season and may consider increasing the recreational minimum size limit from 22 to 24 inches total length for gag and black groupers, which are easily mistaken for each other. Staff requests Commission direction on these options for gag grouper and black grouper. Finally, the Council approved industry-requested changes to the commercial king mackerel gill net fishery including a trip limit increase, creation of a payback provision, fishery monitoring, and elimination of latent permits.

The South Atlantic Council took final action to remove several snapper-grouper species from federal management and clarify golden tilefish longline endorsement regulations. They approved a number of management items for public hearings including snapper grouper spawning special management zones and commercial black sea bass pot time-area closures. The Council initiated development of new management measures for mutton snapper in response to the positive results of the 2015 stock assessment. For Atlantic red snapper, NOAA Fisheries Service recently announced there will be no federal recreational or commercial season this year due to a quota overrun during last year's federal season; this was largely attributed to discard mortalities. Because the Council

foresees that unavoidable discard mortalities may continue to prevent season openings, they have directed their staff to explore means to allow for some small level of harvest to occur in 2016.

Both councils met to discuss the jointly-managed king mackerel fishery and south Florida issues. For king mackerel, the Councils are considering modifications to management benchmarks, annual catch limits, stock boundaries, and trip limits. The Councils discussed at length a Joint Amendment to improve the regulatory environment for fisheries in south Florida through consistent regulations. One management approach being considered is delegation of limited management authority to the State of Florida for yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and black grouper in federal waters. While the Councils did not agree on every approach, they will continue to try to address this south Florida issue. Meanwhile, the Councils requested the State of Florida conduct additional outreach with fishermen to detail how the process of delegation would, and would not, change federal fisheries management. This can occur during the scheduled state-wide marine fisheries workshops in July.

The next Gulf Council meeting will be August 10-14 in New Orleans, LA. The next South Atlantic Council meeting will be September 14-18 in Hilton Head, SC.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends the Commission direct staff to support eliminating the December portion of the recreational closed season for Gulf gag grouper, maintaining the current annual catch limit, and raising the recreational minimum size limit from 22 to 24 inches for both gag and black grouper.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter**

Jessica McCawley Director, Division of Marine Fisheries Management  
Martha Bademan, Division of Marine Fisheries Management