



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 6, 2020

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Federal Fisheries Managers Address Broad Range of Issues During Meeting This Week

This week's meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council in Jekyll Island, Georgia reflected the diversity of issues involved in managing fisheries in federal waters in the Southeast. During the meeting the Council developed recommendations on measures proposed in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, approved an amendment to modify transit provisions for shrimp vessels during cold-weather closures, addressed designating Special Management Zone areas off the coasts of the Carolinas, and received updates on the 2020 red snapper season, shark depredation, and wind farms.

The Council received presentations from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) as well as the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary regarding proposed measures in the Sanctuary's *Restoration Blueprint* affecting fishing within the South Atlantic Council's portion of the Sanctuary. The proposed measures include expansion of the Sanctuary boundaries, modifying designated marine zones where fishing would be restricted or prohibited, eliminating baitfish permits, and prohibiting fish feeding activities. FWC held a series of stakeholder workshops in January 2020 and has developed recommendations based on input received at the workshops and other meetings. After reviewing the FWC recommendations, the Council discussed their role in the process and began drafting a letter to provide formal comments to the superintendent of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary by mid-March. A final copy of the letter will be posted on the Council's website as part of the March 2020 meeting materials.

Council members voted to approve Amendment 11 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan that would modify current transit provisions for commercial shrimp vessels during cold-weather closures. The Council created the cold-weather closures and associated transit provisions to protect overwintering shrimp. During the most recent cold-weather closure for penaeid shrimp (brown, pink, and white shrimp) in 2018, shrimp fishermen indicated that gear stowage requirements were no longer feasible and asked that they be adjusted. Working together with members of the Council's advisory panels to find a solution, the amendment would modify the gear stowage requirements within the transit provisions. The amendment must undergo Secretarial review before the measures may be implemented.

At the request of state marine resource agencies in North Carolina and South Carolina, the Council is considering designating a series of artificial reef sites within federal waters (3 miles or greater) offshore of each state as Special Management Zones. Amendment 34 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan would designate 30 artificial reef sites off of North Carolina and four sites off of South Carolina, where gear restrictions would be put into place for fishermen targeting species in the snapper grouper management complex. The Council approved the amendment for public hearings to be held via webinar prior to the June Council meeting. The hearings will be publicized as details become available.

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Other Items

The Council received an update from NOAA Fisheries regarding a possible recreational season for red snapper in the South Atlantic of three days beginning the second Friday in July. The number of fishing days is determined by NOAA Fisheries each year. The 2020 opening is contingent on changing current regulations that prohibit opening the season for three days or less. The Council approved Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 33 in December 2019 requesting the minimum number of days requirement be eliminated. The amendment is currently under review by NOAA Fisheries. [Read more.](#)

The Council also received a presentation from NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Division addressing concerns about shark depredation. The presentation acknowledged growing concerns about the impacts of shark depredation on fishing activities and outlined the challenges in addressing the concerns, including data needed to quantify shark encounters by fishermen. Council members also received an update on the status of the Kitty Hawk Wind Farm project proposed off the east coast of North Carolina, took action to table proposed changes for commercial Spanish mackerel trip limits in the northern zone, moved forward with developing an amendment to designate bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as Ecosystem Component Species and began preliminary discussions of allocations. For additional meeting details, view the interactive [Story Map](#) for the March Council meeting or visit the Council's website at: <https://safmc.net/safmc-meetings/council-meetings/> for committee reports and other meeting materials.

The next meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is scheduled for June 8-12, 2020 in Key West, Florida.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils, conserves and manages fish stocks from three to 200 miles offshore of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida.