



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

News Release

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Council Approves Measures to Modify Catch Limits; Delays Action on VMS *Yellowtail snapper limits increase, trigger for shallow water grouper removed, red snapper dates set for 2013*

Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council met last week in Wilmington, North Carolina to discuss a wide range of federal fisheries issues, including management of several species within the snapper grouper management complex, habitat protection for deepwater corals, and improvements to data collection. The Council considered public input as well as recommendations from its Scientific and Statistical Committee and various advisory panels before it approved three amendments to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan for review by the Secretary of Commerce. The following amendments were approved by the Council last week for submission to the Secretary:

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 13 – Adjustments Using Updated Recreational Data

If approved by the Secretary, the amendment will modify harvest levels using adjusted recreational data for unassessed species in the snapper grouper management unit. NOAA Fisheries has implemented a new statistical method for calculating recreational landings as part of the Marine Recreational Information Program's work to improve recreational fisheries statistics. These new methods have been used to recalculate previous recreational catch estimates, dating back to 2004, and will be the basis for all new estimates moving forward. The new values modify Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limits (ACLs), and Annual Catch Targets (ACTs) for unassessed species. Species for which stock assessments have been conducted, such as vermilion snapper, black sea bass, and red snapper will not be affected.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 15 – Yellowtail Snapper; Removal of Gag Trigger for Closure

A new stock assessment conducted in 2012 for yellowtail snapper shows the stock is healthy and not undergoing overfishing and is not overfished. At the Council's request, NOAA Fisheries implemented a temporary rule effective November 7, 2012 to allow for an increase in the commercial ACL for yellowtail snapper from 1,142,589 pounds (whole weight) to 1,596,510 pounds (whole weight). The temporary rule allowed the fishery to remain open, avoiding negative social and economic impacts to commercial fishermen. The Amendment will make the increases implemented through the temporary rule permanent until modified and allow for an increase in the recreational ACL as well. The Council chose not to modify the fishing year nor recommend a spawning season closure for yellowtail snapper.

Regulatory Amendment 15 also proposes removal of an accountability measure currently in place for gag grouper that requires closure of the shallow-water grouper complex (gag, black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney) once the commercial gag ACL is met. Originally implemented to help reduce bycatch of gag, the accountability measure triggered a closure for shallow-water grouper effective October 20, 2012. That closure coupled with a four-month spawning season closure from January through April, effectively closes the commercial fishery until May 2013. New regulations in place for co-occurring species and seasonal closures have led to reductions in the bycatch of gag, allowing the Council to remove the accountability measure. In addition, the commercial ACL is specified as landed catch only, with a reduction to account for discards.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 28 – Limited Harvest of Red Snapper

The amendment addresses methods for specifying an ACL for red snapper and establishes criteria for commercial and recreational red snapper fishing seasons based on the available ACL. Beginning in 2013, and continuing until modified, the amendment specifies a commercial season beginning on the second Monday in July, with the length to be determined by the ACL. The recreational season would begin on the second Friday in July and consist of consecutive

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Council Approves Measures (Continued)

weekends only (Friday, Saturday and Sunday). NOAA Fisheries will complete an analysis each year estimating the length of the recreational red snapper fishing season and announce the recreational ACL and opening of the fishing season. The end of the recreational season will be pre-determined and announced before the start of the recreational season. The recreational season will not open if the projected season length is three days or less. The amendment establishes a commercial trip limit of 75 pounds (gutted weight), eliminates the minimum size limit for both commercial and recreational sectors, and sets a bag limit of one red snapper per person per day in the recreational fishery.

Other Actions:

Data Collection, Bycatch Monitoring, and Vessel Monitoring System Requirements

After reviewing actions in the Comprehensive Ecosystem-based Amendment 3 (CEBA3), the Council chose to remove actions relative to data collection requirements for both commercial and for-hire fisheries, as well as a requirement for vessels with a federal Commercial Snapper Grouper Permit to use vessel monitoring systems (VMS). Measures for data collection, including electronic reporting requirements, will be addressed in separate amendments to be developed in 2013. The Council will also address the use of VMS in the commercial snapper grouper fishery in a separate amendment and will hold public hearings later this spring. Actions to address bycatch remain in CEBA3 and will be addressed during the Council's March 2013 meeting.

Marine Protected Areas

The Council determined last week that it will continue to develop management alternatives to use MPAs as added protection for speckled hind and warsaw grouper. The Council will hold an additional MPA Expert Workgroup Meeting February 4-6, 2013 in Charleston, SC and discuss alternatives during its March meeting. Details regarding the MPA Expert Workgroup meeting will be posted on the Council's website as they become available.

The next meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is scheduled for March 4-8, 2013 in St. Simons Island, GA. Details for the meeting and meeting materials will be posted at www.safmc.net as they become available.

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.