



South Atlantic Council Issues

Review and Discussion

Report date: December 19, 2008

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This is a review and discussion of issues being considered by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council). The Council met during the same week as the December meeting of the FWC, from November 30-December 3, 2008. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for March 2-6, 2009 in Jekyll Island, Georgia. The following report summarizes the major issues currently under development and scheduled to be discussed during future meetings.

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South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Issues from the December meeting



Actions

- **Accepted new vermilion assessment**
 - Science approved
 - Reduces scope of harvest reductions
 - 5 instead of 4-fish bag
 - Reduces closed season by 2 months
 - Increases the commercial quota
- **No interim action for red snapper**
- **Continue planning for 10 “overfishing” species**
 - Major reductions for red snapper
 - Will set lowered harvest targets for 9 other species
 - Includes red and black grouper



The Council addressed the following issues at the December meeting:

Snapper-Grouper Species

-The Council's Science and Statistical Committee endorsed the recent stock assessment for vermilion snapper as suitable for management. Although the status of vermilion was improved from an earlier assessment, a reduction in harvest is still required to end overfishing. Under provisions already established in Amendment 16 for snapper grouper species, the results of the new assessment allow the National Marine Fisheries Service to adjust regulations. These adjustments would provide a recreational bag limit of 5 fish (the original proposal would have lowered the current bag limit from 10 fish to 4 fish). The length of the closed season will also be reduced by 2 months (the original proposal would have established an October to May closed season). The closed season will be November to April. The commercial quota reduction will also be adjusted up to account for the new assessment. That quota still represents a reduction over current harvest levels.

-The Council voted to **not** request an interim rule addressing the overfishing and severely overfished condition of red snapper. Instead the Council will incorporate proposals to reduce red snapper harvest in a plan amendment that will set annual catch limits and accountability measures for red snapper and 9 other species of snapper/grouper. These proposals would include setting catch limits for red and black grouper. Because of the recent stock assessment findings for red snapper, the Council is likely to implement very severe restrictions in this new amendment.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Issues from the December meeting



Actions

- **Accepted Spanish and king mackerel assessment**
 - Science accepted
 - No actions needed
- **Approved proposals for hearings**
 - Ecosystem-based planning
 - Protects deepwater coral areas
 - Restricts bottom-fishing
 - Allowances for shrimp and crab fishing



The Council addressed the following issues at the December meeting:

Mackerel – The Council’s Science and Statistical Committee endorsed the most recent stock assessment for Spanish and king mackerel as suitable for management. Based on the assessment results the Council concluded that no immediate management measures were necessary for these two species.

Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment – The Council approved a Fisheries Ecosystem Plan and Ecosystem-based Amendment for public hearings. Significant in this plan is the establishment of one or more deepwater coral protection areas. These areas generally would be located in federal waters in depths ranging from 350 to 1500 feet. Most areas are deeper than 600 feet. The largest zone under consideration is located from South Carolina to southern Florida and encompasses about 23,500 square miles. An additional zone is being considered off the Florida Keys and would encompass about 500 square miles. The primary purpose of these zones would be to protect deepwater coral communities from the impacts of bottom-fishing and gear. Bottom longlines, dredges, pots and traps, anchors, chains and grapples would be prohibited. Fishing that does not impact coral communities on the bottom would continue to be allowed. Allowances are being made for continued commercial harvest of golden crab and royal red shrimp in designated areas. This plan was developed in close coordination with representatives of both of these industries and also a number of environmental organizations.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Issues from the December meeting



Actions

- Spiny Lobster Public Scoping
 - Option to delegate to Florida
 - Annual Catch Limits
 - Reducing impacts of traps to coral
 - Tailing of lobsters and shorts



The Council addressed the following issues at the December meeting:

Spiny Lobster management coordination – The Council approved a number of concepts to be developed through a public scoping process. These concepts will be developed into a plan amendment for possible rulemaking. Among the issues are several that are important to Florida. The Council wishes to consider a provision that would effectively turn over management of the federal spiny lobster fishery to the State of Florida. Annual catch limits and associated management strategies will be developed by the Council. The Council will evaluate management actions that will help to minimize the impact of lobster traps on elkhorn and staghorn coral. Both species of coral are presently listed species. Additional measures to limit the tailing of lobsters in federal waters and possession of undersized lobsters as attractants in traps are also under consideration.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Pending and Ongoing Issues

- Grouper interim action
- Annual Catch Limits-
Overfishing
- Limited access programs



→ Staff has requested that NMFS remove consideration of red and black grouper from approved harvest restrictions and to make every effort to reduce the impact of a 4-month closed season.



The Council or National Marine Fisheries Service will be addressing the following in the coming months:

Interim Rules for gag, red and black grouper – The National Marine Fisheries Service is **not** expected to implement an interim rule. Proposed permanent rules for all shallow-water grouper (including gag, red and black grouper) are anticipated to be published for public comment in early 2009.

Annual Catch Limits for 10 species undergoing overfishing - The Council held off on significant actions during the December 2008 meeting because of reconsideration of key management benchmarks needed for setting catch limits. Work on this will continue at future Council meetings in 2009.

Other snapper grouper proposals – The Council is developing proposals that could lead to a limited access program for the commercial harvest of golden tilefish and black sea bass fisheries.