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**NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
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NOAA Announces Temporary Fishing Rule to Protect South Atlantic Red Snapper

NOAA's Fisheries Service has announced an interim rule that will prohibit commercial and recreational fishing for red snapper in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and the Atlantic coast of Florida.

The six-month rule becomes effective on January 4. It can be extended an additional six months if necessary.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council requested the fisheries service implement this interim rule while the council explores long-term measures to address the critical condition of red snapper.

The most recent scientific assessment shows too many red snapper are being removed from the population too quickly, which indicates a need for protection under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Most of the remaining population consists of smaller, younger fish, who produce fewer eggs than older fish.

"The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires us to manage fish populations so they grow to a size that can sustain the largest average catch possible for the long term," said Roy Crabtree, southeast regional administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "Unfortunately, the red snapper population has not been able to reach that size; therefore, closing the fishery is the first step toward protecting this species, rebuilding the stock and ensuring fishing for generations to come."

The council is expected to recommend long-term measures to the fisheries service sometime in mid-2010. NOAA's Fisheries Service will provide additional public comment periods before implementing final long-term management measures.

For more information on South Atlantic red snapper, visit <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov> or <http://www.safmc.net/>.

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