

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Meeting Summary
October 1-5, 2018
Charleston, SC

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council held their regularly scheduled September meeting October 1-5, 2018 in Charleston, SC. The meeting was postponed due to Hurricane Florence. Below are highlights from the Council's weeklong meeting. Additional information from the meeting is available from the Council's website at: <http://safmc.net/september-2018-council-meeting-details/>, including a Meeting Report, Story Map, final committee reports, public comments, and briefing book materials.

Amendments Approved for Secretarial Review

The Council approved four amendments to fishery management plans for formal Secretarial review. NOAA Fisheries will solicit additional public input on the amendments as part of the review process. Regulatory actions in the amendments will be implemented following the review process, if approved by the Secretary of Commerce.

Spiny Lobster Amendment 13

The amendment includes actions to update federal regulations to align with the State of Florida and update the enhanced cooperative management procedure between the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission and NOAA Fisheries. The new regulations would apply to commercial harvesters using bully net gear and include permit requirements, vessel markings, and prohibitions on the use of trap pullers or underwater breathing apparatus (excluding dive masks or snorkels) when commercial bully net fishing. The amendment would also establish a daily vessel limit of 250 lobsters per day/vessel for the commercial bully net fishery and for the commercial dive fishery, in specified areas.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 27 (Commercial Visioning)

In response to input received as part of the Council's Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery addressing long-term management, the actions in this amendment are designed to address concerns over equitable access for commercial fishermen, minimize discards, and improve marketability. The amendment would: establish a commercial split season and modify trip limits for blueline tilefish, greater amberjack, and red pogy; establish a split season for snowy grouper, modify the trip limit for vermilion snapper; specify a minimum size limit for almaco jack and a trip limit for the Other Jacks Complex; remove the minimum size limit for queen snapper, silk snapper and blackfin snapper; and reduce the commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off east Florida.

(Continued)

Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework Amendment 2 (Vermilion Snapper and Black Sea Bass)

Based on results of the latest stock assessments, the framework amendment would adjust fishing levels for both vermilion snapper and black sea bass. Actions in the amendment would increase the overall annual catch limit (ACL) for vermilion snapper and decrease the annual catch limit for black sea bass. The ACL for vermilion snapper would increase from 1,269,000 pounds whole weight (ww) to 1,579,000 pounds (ww) beginning in 2019. For black sea bass, the ACL would be reduced from 1,756,450 pounds (ww) to 760,000 pounds beginning in 2019 with the recreational ACL effective at the start of the 2019/2020 fishing year (starting April 2019). The Council is considering the amendment an “interim adjustment” until new recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) are incorporated into the assessment. The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee will review the MRIP recalibrations and updated assessments using the new MRIP numbers for both species during its October 15-17, 2018 meeting and provide a report to the Council during its December 2018 meeting.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics Framework Amendment 6 (Commercial trip limits for king mackerel)

The amendment modifies commercial trip limits for Atlantic king mackerel in the Atlantic Southern Zone (NC/SC line to the Miami-Dade/Monroe County Line, Florida). The amendment addresses concerns voiced by mackerel fishermen that lower trip limits are making it difficult to make enough money to make trips profitable. The amendment would increase the trip limit in specified areas from 50-fish to 75-fish for the month of March, and from 75-fish to 3,500 pounds for the remainder of Season 1 (April 1 – September 30), providing profitability for vessels that make multi-day trips while constraining harvest to the annual catch limit and providing year-round access.

Other Items

Snapper Grouper Amendment 47 (Modifications for For-Hire Permits)

After reviewing public scoping comments from webinars held in August and much discussion, the Council voted in a split vote (7 to 5) to not move forward with the amendment which contained options for limiting entry within the for-hire snapper grouper fishery and changes to the for-hire permit. Council members against the amendment noted the majority of public comments received opposed limited entry for the for-hire sector, with most comments coming from private recreational anglers, and generally felt there wasn’t strong enough rationale for implementing such a program. Those supporting moving forward with developing the amendment noted the need to continue public scoping to receive public input and consider if the options would address issues with illegal fishing operations and help to professionalize the for-hire fleet.

(Continued)

NOTE: In-person public scoping meetings for Snapper Grouper Amendment 47 scheduled to begin this week have been cancelled.

New Council Chair and Vice-Chair Elected

The Council elected Jessica McCawley, Council representative for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, as the new Council Chair and Mel Bell, representative for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources' Marine Resources Division as its new Council Vice-Chair.

Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award

Officer Randy Hering with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources' Law Enforcement Division was presented with the Council's 2017 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award for his distinctive service.

On the Table for December

- **Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 32 (Yellowtail Snapper)**
The amendment would revise in-season accountability measures for yellowtail snapper with the intent to alleviate socio-economic impacts due to in-season closures. Final approval is scheduled for December.
- **Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 30 (Red Grouper)**
According to the most recent stock assessment, the red grouper stock is undergoing overfishing and efforts to rebuild the stock are not making adequate progress. The amendment would update the rebuilding schedule, modify the spawning season closure off the Carolinas, and establish a commercial trip limit for red grouper in the entire South Atlantic Region. Final approval is scheduled for December.
- **Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 (Recreational)**
The amendment includes several measures for the recreational snapper grouper fishery to address issues identified in the Council's Vision Blueprint. These include a recreational season for deepwater species, revising aggregate bag limits for deepwater species and the 20-fish aggregate, reducing the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off of east Florida to match state regulations, and other measures. Final approval is scheduled for December.
- **Recreational Accountability Amendment**
The amendment would remove the in-season closure for the recreational sector. The Council will review actions/alternatives and provide guidance.

The Council will discuss the items above as well as additional issues affecting federal fisheries management during its next meeting, scheduled for December 3-7, 2018 in Kitty Hawk, NC. Briefing book materials will be available from the Council's website two weeks prior to the meeting at: <http://safmc.net/safmc-meetings/council-meetings/>.