



Update on Recently Submitted and Developing SAFMC Amendments

April 12, 2017

Snapper Grouper

Snapper Grouper Amendment 36 (Spawning Special Management Zones)

The Council received a letter (dated April 4, 2017) from the National Marine Fisheries Service announcing approval of Amendment 36. The letter indicated that regulations would become effective in Spring 2017. Amendment 36 proposes prohibiting fishing for and/or possessing snapper grouper species in the following areas designated as Spawning Special Management Zones (SMZs):

1. South Cape Lookout (5 square miles), NC
2. Devil's Hole/Georgetown Hole (3.1 square miles), SC
3. Area 51 (2.99 square miles), SC
4. Area 53 site (2.99 square miles), SC
5. Warsaw Hole (4 square mile), FL

The amendment also revises the boundary of the Charleston Deep Reef MPA, and addresses transit and anchoring provisions within newly designated Spawning SMZs. A 10-year sunset provision whereby the Spawning SMZs designation would be discontinued unless spawning were documented is included, as well as a framework provision to reauthorize the Spawning SMZs. The amendment includes a System Management Plan (SMP) to specify the outreach, law enforcement, and monitoring/research projects necessary to effectively monitor and evaluate the Spawning SMZs.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 37 (hogfish)

Actions in Amendment 37 include modifying the fishery management unit for hogfish (genetic evidence indicates three distinct stocks); revising fishing levels and biological benchmarks, as appropriate, for the two stocks in the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction; establishing a rebuilding plan for the Florida Keys/East Florida stock; and commercial and recreational management measures for each stock.

The proposed boundary between the two hogfish stocks in Florida is a line due west of 25°09' N. lat. near Cape Sable in the Gulf of Mexico. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council would continue to manage hogfish in Federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico, except in Federal waters south of the proposed boundary. Therefore, the South Atlantic Council would establish the management measures for the entire range of the Florida Keys/East Florida hogfish stock, including in Federal waters south of 25°09' N. lat. near Cape Sable in the Gulf of Mexico.

Commercial and charter vessel/headboat vessels fishing for hogfish in Gulf of Mexico Federal waters, i.e., north and west of the jurisdictional boundary between the two Councils, would be required to have the appropriate Federal Gulf of Mexico reef fish permits.

Commercial and charter vessel/headboat vessels fishing for hogfish in South Atlantic Federal waters, i.e., south and east of the jurisdictional boundary, would be required to have the appropriate Federal South Atlantic snapper grouper permits. Those permit holders would be required to follow the sale and reporting requirements associated with the respective permits.

Proposed regulations for the Florida Keys/East Florida hogfish stock include:

- The total annual catch limit (ACL) for 2017 would be 17,034 fish, the commercial ACL would be 3,510 pounds whole weight (lbs ww) (1,345 fish), and the recreational ACL would equal 15,689 fish. The ACLs would increase annually through 2027 as the stock rebuilds.
- Commercial and recreational minimum size limit of 16 inches fork length.
- Commercial trip limit of 25 lbs ww.
- Recreational bag limit of one fish per person per day.
- Six-month recreational fishing season from May-October.

Proposed regulations for the Georgia-North Carolina hogfish stock include:

- The total ACL (for 2017 and beyond until modified) would be 33,930 lbs ww, the commercial annual catch limit would be 23,456 lbs ww, and the recreational annual catch limit would be 988 fish.
- Commercial and recreational minimum size limit of 17 inches fork length.
- Establish a commercial trip limit of 500 lbs ww.
- Establish a recreational bag limit of two fish per person per day.

The amendment is in the final stage of review and regulations are expected to become effective in Summer 2017.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 41 (mutton snapper)

The Council approved the amendment for formal review in December 2016, and the amendment was submitted for formal review on February 28, 2017. Proposed actions in Amendment 41 (South Atlantic only) include:

- Total ACL for 2017 would be 129,150 fish. The commercial ACL would be 100,015 lbs ww and the recreational ACL would be 116,127 fish. The ACLs would increase annually through 2020 and remain at that level until modified.
- Commercial and recreational minimum size limit of 18 inches total length.
- For regulatory purposes, designate April-June as “spawning months.” The remainder of the year would be the “regular season.”
- Retain mutton snapper within the recreational 10 snapper aggregate bag limit, but specify a year-round bag limit of 5 fish/person/day within the aggregate.
- Establish a commercial trip limit of 500 pounds during the “regular season” (i.e., non-spawning months).
- Specify a commercial trip limit during the “spawning months” of 5 fish/person/day or 5 fish/person/trip, whichever is more restrictive.

A Proposed Rule is expected to publish in mid-May. Regulations would likely be effective by early Fall 2017.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 (yellowtail snapper)

In March 2016, the Council directed staff to begin development of a joint dolphin wahoo and snapper grouper amendment to examine different ways to allocate or share quota between the commercial and recreational sectors for dolphin and yellowtail snapper. Under consideration for yellowtail snapper are in-season allocations shifts as well as permanent re-allocation. Scoping meetings were held in August 2016. In December 2016, the Council separated the two amendments, and approved Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 (yellowtail only) for public hearings in late January/early February 2017 with an additional action that would consider merging the ACLs of yellowtail snapper for the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic regions. In March 2017, the Council decided to postpone the amendment until revised MRIP data are available.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 43 (red snapper and recreational reporting)

The Council requested that staff begin development of Amendment 43 in June 2016 to address red snapper management and other related actions that would ultimately result in an adaptive management approach and respond to items in the Vision Blueprint (i.e., recreational stamp, recreational season, time-area closures, etc.). In September 2016, the Council provided further guidance to staff on possible actions and alternatives and public scoping meetings were held in late January/early February 2017. The Council reviewed the document in March 2017 and requested that the Scientific and Statistical Committee and staff from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center collaborate on a methodology to obtain an Acceptable Biological Catch for red snapper. In the meantime, Amendment 43 will continue to be developed for the Council to review at their June 2017 meeting and possibly approve for public hearings. Management measures affecting red snapper would be developed further once a level of harvest is known.

Currently, options in the amendment include:

- Commercial management measures to allow restricted harvest of red snapper (i.e., trip limits, season, gear restrictions, size limit)
- Recreational management measures to allow restricted harvest of red snapper (i.e., harvest allowed on certain days per month, allowable fishing area defined by depth where bottom fishing would be prohibited, recreational fishing season, harvest prohibition tied to red snapper abundance or discards)
- Recreational permit to fish for snapper grouper species
- Reporting requirements for private recreational anglers
- Best Fishing Practices (i.e., descending devices, modification of circle hook-requirement, single-hook rigs)

Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 (recreational management measures)

The Council instructed staff to begin development of an amendment addressing management measures for the *recreational sector* that would respond to items in the 2016-2010 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery. Scoping hearings for this amendment (conducted via webinar and in-person) were held from January 14 to February 8, 2017. Actions in this amendment include:

- Aggregate bag limit and recreational season for deep-water species;
- Aggregate bag limit for shallow-water grouper species;
- Modify the 10-snapper and 20-fish recreational aggregate bag limits;
- Modify the seasonal prohibition on recreational harvest and possession of shallow-water groupers;
- Remove the recreational minimum size limits for deep-water snapper species (silk snapper, queen snapper, and blackfin snapper);
- Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for black sea bass; and

- Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off East Florida.

The Council will review preliminary analyses at their June 2017 meeting and possibly approve the amendment for public hearings.

Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 (commercial management measures)

The Council instructed staff to begin development of an amendment addressing management measures for the *commercial sector* that would respond to items in the 2016-2010 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery. Scoping hearings for this amendment (conducted via webinar and in-person) were held from January 14 to February 8, 2017. At the March Council meeting, staff presented a summary of the scoping comments and the Council provided guidance on actions and alternatives that should remain in the document and be further analyzed. Actions being considered in this amendment include:

- Commercial split season for blueline tilefish;
- Commercial split season for red porgy;
- Commercial split season for snowy grouper;
- Commercial split season for greater amberjack;
- Modify the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper in the second season;
- Commercial trip limit for the Other Jacks Complex (almaco jack, lesser amberjack, banded rudderfish);
- Modify the seasonal prohibition on commercial harvest and possession of shallow-water groupers;
- Remove the commercial minimum size limits for deep-water snapper species; and
- Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off East Florida.

The Council will review preliminary analyses at their June 2017 meeting and possibly approve the amendment for public hearings.

Dolphin Wahoo

Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 10 (allocations for dolphin)

In March 2016, the Council directed staff to begin development of a joint dolphin wahoo and snapper grouper amendment to examine different ways to allocate or share quota between the commercial and recreational sectors for dolphin and yellowtail snapper. Options included a common pool allocation, a reserve category, temporary or permanent shifts in allocation, combined annual catch limits, and creating gear allocations in the commercial dolphin fishery. In December 2016, the Council directed staff to continue to develop Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 10 separately from the yellowtail snapper amendment and include an action to revise the ABC Control Rule to include a carry-over provision from one fishing year to the next. The Council also directed staff to develop an action that would eliminate the operator card requirement in the Dolphin Wahoo FMP. In March 2017, the Council decided to stop work on the amendment until the revised MRIP data are available.

Mackerel Cobia

Joint Amendment 26 (king mackerel)

This amendment contains actions to modify management of Gulf and Atlantic king mackerel based on the results of the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 38). The final rule published on April 11, 2017, and new regulations will be effective on May 11, 2017.

Actions in the amendment include:

- Revisions to reference points, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limits, commercial quotas, and recreational annual catch targets for Atlantic migratory group king mackerel.
- Modification to the management boundary for the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic migratory groups of king mackerel to create a year-round boundary at the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will be responsible for management measures in the mixing zone, which includes federal waters off the Florida Keys.
- Incidental catch allowance of Atlantic migratory group king mackerel caught as bycatch in the shark gillnet fishery. Changes allow for the harvest and sale of three king mackerel per crew member per trip from the Northern Zone and two king mackerel per crew member per trip from the Southern Zone, caught incidentally on shark gillnet trips.
- Commercial split season for Atlantic migratory group king mackerel in the Atlantic Southern Zone. This split season allocates 60% of the quota to Season One (March 1 - September 30) and 40% to Season Two (October 1 - the end of February).
- Commercial trip limit system for Atlantic migratory group king mackerel in the Atlantic Southern Zone. The commercial trip limit of 3,500 pounds remains in the area north of the Flagler/Volusia county line and remains in effect year-round when the fishery is open. South of the Flagler/Volusia county line, the trip limit is 50 fish from March 1 - March 31. After March 31, the trip limit increases to 75 fish for the remainder of Season One. For Season Two, the trip limit is 50 fish, except that beginning on February 1, if less than 70 % of the Season Two quota has been landed, the trip limit will be 75 fish.
- Increase to the recreational bag limit for Gulf of Mexico migratory group king mackerel from two to three fish per person per day.
- Revises the annual catch limits and commercial zone quotas for Gulf of Mexico migratory group king mackerel.

Framework Amendment 4 (Atlantic cobia)

In March 2016, the Council directed staff to develop an amendment with actions that could lengthen the recreational season for Atlantic cobia. In 2016, the recreational season closed on June 20 due to the landings in 2015 exceeding the recreational ACL. The proposed rule for the amendment was published on February 21, 2017, and the comment period closed on March 23, 2017. Proposed actions in Framework Amendment 4 include:

- Recreational limits of 1 fish per person or 6 fish per vessel, whichever is more restrictive.
- Recreational minimum size limit of 36" fork length (FL). The commercial minimum size limit will remain at 33" FL.
- Revise the recreational accountability measures so that if the recreational ACL and the total ACL are exceeded, NMFS will reduce the recreational vessel limit for the next fishing season to no fewer than 2 fish per vessel. If the reduced vessel limit is not sufficient to slow harvest and/or mitigate the overage, NMFS will also shorten the recreational season for the following fishing year so that landings reach the annual catch target (ACT) but do not exceed the ACL.

Additionally, the proposed regulations will remove the use of a three-year moving average in the evaluation of an overage (only the previous year's landings will be used).

- Commercial limit of 2 fish per person or 6 fish per vessel, whichever is more restrictive.

Framework Amendment 5 (permit restrictions)

This amendment includes one action to modify regulations to remove restrictions on commercial king mackerel and Spanish mackerel permits that prohibit retaining the bag limit on recreational (non-commercial and non-charter/headboat) trips on federally permitted vessels when commercial harvest is closed in that zone. King mackerel and Spanish mackerel are the only two species with this restriction on federally permitted vessels. Initially this framework amendment included an action that would apply in the Gulf only. After June 2016, it is a joint framework amendment with actions applying to the Gulf, South Atlantic, and Mid-Atlantic regions. The proposed rule for the amendment was published on March 1, 2017, and the comment period closed on March 31, 2017. The amendment would remove the restriction on fishing for and retaining the recreational bag limit of king and Spanish mackerel in the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and Mid-Atlantic on a vessel with a federal commercial permit for king or Spanish mackerel when the vessel is on a recreational trip and commercial harvest of king or Spanish mackerel in that zone or region is closed.

Spiny Lobster

Spiny Lobster Regulatory Amendment 4 (ACL and recreational traps)

The Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs recommended that the spiny lobster OFL and ABC be calculated based on landings data from 1991 through the most recent data (2015/16). This amendment would include actions to update the OFL, ABC/ACL, and ACT based on the SSCs' recommendation. The amendment will also include an action to prohibit traps for recreational harvest of spiny lobster in the South Atlantic EEZ. In December 2016, the South Atlantic Council provided recommendations for the recreational trap action, which will be incorporated into the Gulf Council's option paper presented at their January/February 2017 meeting. The South Atlantic Council reviewed the draft amendment in March 2017. A webinar public hearing will be held in May 2017. Approval for formal review is scheduled in June 2017 for both councils.

Generics

South Atlantic For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment

The SAFMC began development of joint plan amendment with the Gulf Council to modify reporting requirements for charter vessels in 2015. However, in September 2015 the Council revised the amendment to apply to charter vessels in South Atlantic fisheries only. At the March 2016 meeting, the Council revised the expected timeline for the amendment, to allow time to develop core data elements. The Council reviewed the revised amendment in June 2016, developed a list of core variables and scheduled final approval for December 2016 to allow consideration of preliminary feedback from the SAFMC-ACCSP electronic reporting pilot study. In December 2016, the Council approved the amendment for formal review. Because new reporting requirements would also apply to species managed under the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan, which is a joint plan with Gulf Council, approval by the Gulf Council took place at their January/February 2017 meeting and the amendment was transmitted for formal review on March 4, 2017. The National Marine Fisheries

Service is expected to begin developing the infrastructure for the new reporting system in 2017. The Council expects that electronic reporting by South Atlantic charter vessels will commence in 2018 on a voluntary basis. Actions in the amendment include:

- Require that federally permitted charter vessels and headboats submit fishing records weekly via electronic reporting (NMFS approved hardware and software). Weekly = Tuesday following each fishing week.
- Report all fish harvested and discarded on all trips regardless of where the fish were caught.
- Require federally permitted charter vessels to report location fished electronically by manually entering latitude and longitude in degrees and minutes or by clicking on an electronic chart.