

OPTIONS PAPER



Golden Tilefish Hook-and-Line Quota Issue



September 2014

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Background

The final rule for Amendment 18B to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (78 FR 23858, April 23, 2013) established a longline endorsement program for the commercial golden tilefish component of the snapper grouper fishery and modified the golden tilefish commercial trip limits. Currently, there are separate quotas and trip limits for the longline and hook-and-line sectors. An endorsement is required to fish with longline gear. Furthermore, one of the regulations regarding golden tilefish trip limits implemented by the final rule for Amendment 18B states, “Vessels with a golden tilefish longline endorsement are not eligible to fish for golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear under this 500-lb (227-kg) trip limit.” The golden tilefish endorsement, along with sector quotas and trip limits was put in place because the commercial annual catch limit/quota was being caught very rapidly with longline gear, and fishermen who had historically used hook-and-line gear to target golden tilefish were not able to participate in the golden tilefish portion of the snapper grouper fishery.

Some fishermen believe they can transfer their golden tilefish longline endorsement to another vessel and then fish for golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear, or that they can renew their Federal commercial snapper grouper vessel permit at one time but wait to renew their golden tilefish longline endorsement and then fish for golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear while their endorsement is not valid. Based on comments during the June 2012 Council meeting, neither scenario appeared to be the intent of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) at that time. For example, during the June 2012 Council meeting, one Council members stated, “Well, certainly that was the intent was not to have the longliners fish [on the hook-and-line trip limit]. If you had landings under the longline endorsement in any year, you would be precluded from participating in the hook-and-line 500-lb [227-kg] quota.” Another Council member stated, “I think the way it is going to go is if the vessel has got the endorsement on it, then he can’t fish [using hook-and-line gear]...” Therefore, the Council did not intend for fishermen who qualified and obtained a golden tilefish longline endorsement to also be able to fish for golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear during the same fishing year.

This Option Paper provides alternatives that would modify the current regulations on the ability of fishermen with a golden tilefish longline endorsement to fish on the commercial hook-and-line quota.

Action. Modify Eligibility to Fish on the 500-Pound Guttled Weight Commercial Golden Tilefish Hook-and-Line Quota

Alternative 1 (No Action). Vessels with golden tilefish longline endorsements *are not* eligible to fish for golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear under the 500-pound gutted weight golden tilefish hook-and-line trip limit.

Alternative 2. Vessels that have valid or renewable golden tilefish longline endorsements *are not* eligible to fish for golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear under the 500-pound gutted weight golden tilefish hook-and-line trip limit.

Alternative 3. Vessels that have valid or renewable golden tilefish longline endorsements *are not* eligible to fish for golden tilefish anytime during the golden tilefish fishing year using hook-and-line gear under the 500-pound gutted weight golden tilefish hook-and-line trip limit.

Alternative 4. Vessels with golden tilefish endorsements *are* eligible to fish for golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear under the 500-pound gutted weight golden tilefish hook-and-line trip limit.

Discussion

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, the regulations do not prohibit fishermen from transferring their golden tilefish longline endorsement to another vessel and then using hook-and-line gear to fish for golden tilefish. Further, under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** fishermen could choose to renew their Federal commercial snapper grouper vessel permit but wait to renew their golden tilefish longline endorsement, and then fish for golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear while their endorsement is not valid.

Under **Alternative 2**, vessels that have *valid or renewable* golden tilefish longline endorsements (“valid” means the endorsements are in a status where the vessels may fish for golden tilefish using longline gear; “renewable” means the endorsements are expired, but still able to be renewed, and the endorsements are in a status where the vessels may not fish for golden tilefish using longline gear) would not be eligible to fish for golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear under the 500-pound gutted weight golden tilefish hook-and-line trip limit. This would prevent fishermen from renewing only their snapper grouper permit and not their endorsement, so that they could fish on the hook-and-line quota when their golden tilefish longline endorsement is in renewable status (i.e., expired but still able to be renewed). However, under this scenario fishermen would be able to transfer their endorsement to another vessel to enable them to fish on the hook-and-line quota.

Under **Alternative 3**, if a vessel has a golden tilefish endorsement issued to the vessel, and that endorsement is in a valid or renewable status anytime during the fishing year, whether or not the vessel has golden tilefish landings that can be attributed to the endorsement, that vessel may not fish for golden tilefish using hook-and-line gear any time during that fishing year. Based on the minutes from the June 2012 Council meeting, **Alternative 3** was the intent of the Council at that time.

Alternative 4 would allow vessels with a longline endorsement to fish on the longline quota or the hook-and-line quota. Such a scenario would be similar to what is in place for black sea bass, where fishermen with a black sea bass pot endorsement can also use hook-and-line gear to target black sea bass. However, there are not separate quotas for the black sea bass pot and hook-and-line gear sectors. Furthermore, the black sea bass trip limit (1,000 pounds gutted weight) is much lower than the longline trip limit for golden tilefish (4,000 pounds gutted weight).

COMMITTEE ACTION:

OPTION 1. NO ACTION.

OPTION 2. CONSIDER OPTIONS AND PROVIDE GUIDANCE TO STAFF ON

WHETHER TO BEGIN DEVELOPMENT OF AN AMENDMENT TO ADDRESS THE

ISSUE.

OPTION 3. OTHERS???