



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Golden Crab AP Meeting Report **May 2, 2014**

The Golden Crab AP met on Friday, May 2, 2014 at the Fairfield Inn and Suites, Dania Beach, Florida from 1:00 pm until 3:00 pm.

Present were the following AP members: Howard Rau, Glenn Ulrich, David Nielsen, Robert Palma, Brad Whipple, Theresa Coppa, Nuno Almeida, and Randy Manchester. One AP member, Chip Bethell, was not present.

Also present were: Brian Chevront (SAFMC Staff), Tony Coppa (Golden Crab Fisherman), David Cupka (SAFMC Council Member), Bill Kelly (FL Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association), and Gary Seperino (Golden Crab Crewmember).

Generic AM/Dolphin Allocation Amendment

The AP reviewed the action from the Generic Accountability Measure (AM)/Dolphin Allocation Amendment (Golden Crab Amendment 9) related to the criteria that would invoke the AM for the golden crab fishery should the fishery exceed its Annual Catch Limit. As the golden crab fishery is only a commercial fishery, alternatives/sub-alternatives related to recreational sector AMs were not relevant to the discussion. The AP recommended the Council select either sub-alternative 2a or 2c (which are functionally equivalent for this commercial-sector only fishery) as a preferred sub-alternative. The reasoning for their motion was that unless the stock of golden crab is determined to be overfished, there is no biological imperative for paybacks of overages.

Approved Motion: The Golden Crab AP supports the Council choosing either sub-alternative 2a or 2c for Action 1 of Golden Crab Amendment 9 as preferred sub-alternatives.

Other Business

The AP discussed six items under "Other Business".

1. AP Term Limits:

There was a discussion of term limits put in place for AP members by the SAFMC. In 2014, one AP member will have served three successive, three-year terms. According to the AP guidelines, he will be rotating off the AP. However, he was encouraged to reapply because of the provision for allowing AP members to continue to serve as long as there are no others chosen by the Council who are qualified and willing to serve.

2. Golden Crab Stock Assessment:

The AP discussed the potential for a future stock assessment for golden crab. After a discussion of the lack of recent data regarding many factors such as distribution and life history, the AP decided that rather than ask for a stock assessment to be put on the SEDAR calendar, they realized that additional data are necessary to adequately describe the stock, particularly fishery independent data collection over the entire range of the stock.

The AP noted that it is thought that golden crab spawn in the Gulf of Mexico and they are wondering if the BP Oil spill in 2010 affected the golden crab spawn of that year. Fishermen noted that crabs spawned that year would be entering the fishery by now and they are noticing fewer crabs from that year class in current catches.

The AP made a recommendation that a fishery independent data collection program for golden crab be established, preferably through cooperative research projects. Several of the AP members volunteered to help with such an effort.

Approved Motion: The AP recommends that NMFS establish an independent data collection program for golden crab, preferable as cooperative research projects.

3. Change in the Beginning of the Golden Crab Fishing Year:

The AP discussed requesting that the Council consider changing the start of the fishing year for the golden crab fishery from January 1 to either September 1 or October 1 each year. Fishing for golden crab really starts in the late summer/early fall each year. And if in the future the fishery is possibly facing in-season closures due to reaching the ACL, they would like to increase the probability that the more lucrative fall/winter fishery would be open, as opposed to other times of the year. The AP would like for the Council to consider such an action in a future golden crab amendment.

4. Allowable Fishing Areas in the Southern Zone:

The AP discussed allowable fishing areas in the Golden Crab Southern Zone and the Small Vessel Sub-Zone. Of primary concern was where properly permitted vessels could fish in the Southern Zone and Sub-Zone. According to 50 CFR 622.17 (b) (3), vessels 65' or less in length with a Southern Zone Permit are permitted to fish only in the Sub-Zone. Vessels greater than 65' in length with a Southern Zone Permit are allowed to fish in the Southern Zone, but not in the Small Vessel Sub-Zone.

50 CFR 622.17 (b) (3) is excerpted here:

“Small-vessel sub-zone. *Within the southern zone, a small-vessel sub-zone is established bounded on the north by 24°15' N. lat., on the south by 24°07' N. lat., on the east by 81°22' W. long., and on the west by 81°56' W. long. No vessel with a documented length overall greater than 65 ft (19.8 m) may fish for golden crab in this sub-zone, and a vessel with a documented length overall of 65 ft (19.8 m) or less that is permitted for the southern zone may fish for golden crab only in this sub-zone.*”

5. Potential Landings of Golden Crab by Northern Red Crab Vessels:

AP members expressed concern that red crab vessels permitted by the NMFS NERO may be illegally taking golden crabs along with red crabs south of Virginia, particularly in the Golden Crab Northern Zone off North Carolina. AP members are concerned because the red crab fleet appears to be moving further south in search of red crabs. However, taking of golden crabs south of the Virginia/North Carolina state line without a SERO Golden Crab Permit is prohibited. The AP's concern stems from the fact that the Red Crab Permit extends from New England south to Cape Hatteras while the Northern Zone Golden Crab permit extends from Florida up to the Virginia/North Carolina state line. The AP would like for law enforcement agencies, the Council, and NMFS to look into this matter.

6. Re-examination of Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Areas (AGCFA):

The AP would like for the Council to reconsider the AGCFAs as some of the areas that are currently closed to golden crab fishing have had the bottom mapped. The AP would like for the Council to consider opening areas shown not to have sensitive bottom habitat as a result of recent mapping efforts. The AP would like for the Council to consider this for all golden crab zones.

To this end, the AP has asked to have the opportunity to meet again this fall (October or November 2014) with the express purpose of examining maps showing the permit zones, areas closed to golden crab fishing, currently allowed fishing areas, known coral habitat, and mapped areas that are known not to contain sensitive bottom habitat.

AP member, Glenn Ulrich did golden crab distribution research in the 1980's. He will try to find records indicating the latitude/longitude positions of where his research found presence/absence of golden crabs north of Florida. Glenn said he would make the data available by July 1, if possible. The AP would like this data to be put into GIS maps along with the above data and made available as part of the golden crab mapping project.

The AP would like to use the information to make recommendations for possible areas to reopen or to extend allowable fishing areas based on their efforts at a fall 2014 Golden Crab AP meeting.