

Actions and Alternatives in Snapper Grouper Amendment 28

October 2012

Purpose for Action

Establish regulations to allow harvest of red snapper in the South Atlantic.

Need for Action

Increase the socio-economic benefits to fishermen and fishing communities that utilize the red snapper portion of the snapper grouper fishery. Regulations should minimize (1) safety at sea concerns, (2) probability of overages of the annual catch limit, and (3) discard mortality of red snapper. In addition, the fishing season should allow an opportunity to collect information on the life history of red snapper.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Outside of the 2012 fishing season summarize below, red snapper may not be harvested or possessed in or from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ). There is a 20-inch total length (TL) minimum size limit and red snapper are included in the 10 fish snapper combined bag limit. However, these provisions were currently not in effect while red snapper prohibition was in effect, and the 2012 temporary fishing season restricted the red snapper bag limit to 1 fish per person per day and eliminated the minimum size limit. The commercial and recreational allocations of red snapper are 28.07% and 71.93%, respectively.

The accountability measures (AM) for red snapper are as follows:

- (1) Track CPUE of red snapper via a fishery-independent monitoring program to track changes in biomass and take action to end overfishing if assessment indicates progress is not being made.
- (2) Track the biomass and CPUE through fishery-dependent sampling.
- (3) CPUE would be evaluated every three years and adjustments would be made by the framework action.
- (4) During the closed seasons, the recreational and commercial ACLs are zero (landings only).

2012 Fishing Season

In 2012, a temporary red snapper season was established. The commercial and recreational annual catch limits (ACL) for 2012 were 20,818 pounds gutted weight and 9,399 fish, respectively. The commercial red snapper season opened at 12:01 a.m., local time, on September 17, 2012, and closed at 12:01 a.m., local time, on September 24, 2012. During the open commercial season, the daily trip limit was 50 pounds gutted weight and there was no minimum size limit for red snapper. The recreational fishing season was open for two consecutive weekends made up of Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. The recreational red snapper season opened at 12:01 a.m., local time, on September 14, 2012, and closed at 12:01 a.m., local time, on September 17, 2012; the season then reopened at 12:01 a.m., local time, on September 21, 2012, and closed at 12:01 a.m., local time, on September 24, 2012. During the open recreational season, the bag limit was one fish per person per day and there was no minimum size limit for red snapper. The temporary commercial AM was the specification of the length of the opening and other management controls, the monitoring of landings, and the comparison of the landings to the ACL before potentially re-opening in 2012. The temporary recreational AM was the specification of the length of the opening and other management controls.

The total ACL (in numbers of fish) was based on the following formula:

$$ACL_{yr} = ABC_{yr} - (estCSR_{yr-2} + estCSR_{yr-1} + ABC_{yr})/3$$

where ACL_{yr} equal the annual catch limit in the current fishing year, ABC_{yr} equal the acceptable biological catch approved by the SSC for the current fishing year, and $estCSR$ equals the estimated dead discards plus closed season landings during the previous fishing years.

Alternative 2. Annually establish the red snapper total ACL (in numbers of fish) and sector ACLs based upon Council pre-approved formulas. Establish commercial and recreational AMs as in-season closures based on pre-season or in-season ACL projections. If the total ACL is exceeded in a given year, then harvest would not be allowed in the following fishing year.

Sub-alternative 2a. Annually establish the total ACL (in numbers of fish) based on the formula used to determine the ACL in 2012 as done through the temporary rule through emergency action.

$$\text{If total removals}_{yr-1} > ABC_{yr-1}, \text{ then } ACL_{yr} = 0$$

$$\text{If total removals}_{yr-1} < ABC_{yr-1}, \text{ then } ACL_{yr} = ABC_{yr} - (estCSR_{yr-2} + estCSR_{yr-1} + ABC_{yr})/3$$

where ACL_{yr} equal the annual catch limit in the current fishing year, ABC_{yr} equal the acceptable biological catch approved by the SSC for the current fishing year, and $estCSR$

equals the estimated dead discards plus closed season landings during the previous fishing years.

If the ACL in the prior fishing year is exceeded, then the ACL in the following year would be set equal to zero.

The ACL would be computed by first averaging estimated dead discards for the two prior fishing years with projected mortalities from the current year ABC. Average mortalities would then be subtracted from the current fishing year ABC to estimate the ACL. If the ACL is calculated as a negative number, then the ACL would be set equal to zero.

Sub-alternative 2b. Annually establish the total ACL (in numbers of fish) based on the following formulas:

$$\text{If total removals}_{yr-1} > ABC_{yr-1}, \text{ then } ACL_{yr} = 0$$

$$\text{If total removals}_{yr-1} < ACL_{yr-1}, \text{ then } ACL_{yr} = \left(\frac{ABC_{yr-1} - estCSR_{yr-1}}{ABC_{yr-1}} \right) \times ABC_{yr}$$

where ACL_{yr} equals the annual catch limit in the current fishing year, ACL_{yr-1} and ABC_{yr-1} equal the annual catch limit and acceptable biological catch for the prior fishing year, and $estCSR_{yr-1}$ equals the estimated dead discards plus closed season landings during the prior year.

If the ACL in the prior fishing year is exceeded, then the ACL in the following year would be set equal to zero.

The ACL would be computed by subtracting the previous year's estimated dead discards from the previous year's ABC, then dividing by the previous year's ABC. The resulting ratio would be multiplied by the current fishing year ABC to estimate the ACL.

Sub-alternative 2c. Annually establish the total ACL (in numbers of fish) based on the following formulas:

$$\text{If total removals}_{yr-1} > ABC_{yr-1}, \text{ then } ACL_{yr} = 0$$

$$\text{If total removals}_{yr-1} < ACL_{yr-1}, \text{ then } ACL_{yr} = \left(\frac{ABC_{yr-2} - estCSR_{yr-2}}{ABC_{yr-2}} + \frac{ABC_{yr-1} - estCSR_{yr-1}}{ABC_{yr-1}} \right) / 2 \times ABC_{yr}$$

where ACL_{yr} equals the annual catch limit in the current fishing year, ACL_{yr-n} and ABC_{yr-n} equal the annual catch limit and acceptable biological catch for the two prior fishing years, and $estCSR_{yr-n}$ equals the estimated dead discards plus closed season landings in the two prior fishing years.

If the ACL in the prior fishing year is exceeded, then the ACL in the following year would be set equal to zero.

The ACL would be computed in a similar manner as Sub-Alternative 2b, but would include two years of estimated removals rather than one.

Note: **Sector ACLs** will be calculated through the established allocations for red snapper (28.07% commercial; 71.93% recreational).

Alternative 3. Establish commercial fishing seasons. NMFS will announce the commercial ACL and the opening of the fishing season through the *Federal Register* and other methods deemed appropriate. The end of the commercial red snapper season will close when the sector ACL is met or projected to be met. Commercial landings will be monitored by the SEFSC's quota monitoring program. The commercial fishing season will not open if the projected season length is three days or less.

Sub-alternative 3a. The commercial season will begin at 12:01 A.M. on the second Monday in July.

Sub-alternative 3b. The commercial season will begin at 12:01 A.M. on the first Monday in August.

Sub-alternative 3c. The commercial season will begin at 12:01 A.M. on the second Monday in September.

Note: The operator of a vessel with red snapper in excess of the bag or possession limit aboard must have landed such red snapper prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, on the day following the closure, and all sale or purchase of red snapper must occur prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, on the day following the closure. The prohibition on sale or purchase does not apply to sale or purchase of red snapper that were harvested, landed ashore, and sold prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, on the day following the closure, and were held in cold storage by a dealer or processor.

Alternative 4. Establish recreational fishing seasons. SERO will complete an analysis each year estimating the length of the recreational red snapper fishing season. NMFS will announce the recreational ACL and the opening of the fishing season through the *Federal Register* and other methods deemed appropriate. The recreational season will consist of weekends only (Friday, Saturday, Sunday). The end of the recreational red snapper season will be pre-determined and announced before the start of the recreational season. The recreational fishing season will not open if the projected season length is three days or less.

Sub-alternative 4a. The recreational season will begin at 12:01 A.M. on the second Friday in July.

Sub-alternative 4b. The recreational season will begin at 12:01 A.M. on the first Friday in August.

Sub-alternative 4c. The recreational season will begin at 12:01 A.M. on the second Friday in September.

Alternative 5. Eliminate the red snapper commercial and recreational 20-inch TL minimum size limit.

Alternative 6. Establish a red snapper commercial trip limit.

Sub-alternative 6a. Establish a red snapper commercial trip limit of 25 lbs gutted weight per trip.

Sub-alternative 6b. Establish a red snapper commercial trip limit of 50 lbs gutted weight per trip.

Sub-alternative 6c. Establish a red snapper commercial trip limit of 75 lbs gutted weight per trip.

Sub-alternative 6d. Establish a red snapper commercial trip limit of 100 lbs gutted weight per trip.

Alternative 7. Establish a red snapper recreational bag limit of one fish per person per day.

Example

The ABC for 2012 was 86,000 fish. Estimated landings and dead discards that occurred in 2012 will be available around March 2013. If NMFS determines that the estimated landings and dead discards that occurred in 2012 is equal to or greater than 86,000 fish, no harvest will be allowed in 2013.

If NMFS determines that the estimated landings and dead discards that occurred in 2012 is less than 86,000 fish, harvest *may* be allowed in 2013. (Note: The commercial fishing season and the recreational fishing seasons will not open if their 2013 projected season length is three days or less.)

The 2013 ABC is from rebuilding projections contained in Table 9c of a document titled “SEDAR-24 South Atlantic Red Snapper: Management quantities and projections requested by the SSC and SERO”. The 2013 ABC equals 96,000 fish. NMFS will calculate the total ACL as per the formula implemented through this amendment and the sector-ACLs as per the Council’s allocation formula. NMFS will project the length of the commercial and recreational fishing seasons.

If harvest is allowed, NMFS will announce the pre-determined commercial and recreational fishing year start dates. The end of the commercial red snapper season will close when the sector ACL is met or projected to be met. The end of the recreational red snapper season will be projected and announced before the start of the recreational season.

The process will be repeated each year.