

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 33 (Red Snapper Seasons)

Public Comments Summary

Summary of attendance and number of comments:

- 46 comments were received online (as of 8/23/19)
- Public hearings were held over 4 days, August 12-15, 2019 with 9 listening stations (2 in NC, 2 in SC, 1 in GA, and 4 in FL)
- Total of 17 comments were provided during webinar/listening stations
- 30 members of the public (non-Council or other agency staff) attended webinars

Summary of comments directly relevant to proposed actions in Regulatory Amendment 33:

Action 1 – Removing minimum number of days: 11 comments in support of Alternative 2

Action 2 – Start date for recreational season:

- 3 in support of no change
- 5 comments in support of Alternative 2 (May opening) (one commenter stated discard mortality is higher in summer months, including September)
- 1 comment in support of Sub-alternative 2a (first week in May, Saturday)
- 4 comments in support of Alternative 4 (September opening)
- 1 comment in support of Alternative 5 (May 1 with re-opening in September)
- 1 comment suggests August opening

Action 3 – Days of the week for recreational season:

- 1 comment in support of no change
- 1 comment in support of Alternative 3 (Fridays)
- 1 comment in support of Alternative 4 (Saturdays)
- 2 comments in support of Alternative 6, Sub-alternative 6a (every other weekend, Fri-Sat)
- 1 comment in support of Alternative 8 (maximum flexibility)

Action 4 – Start date for commercial season:

- 3 comments in support of no change
- 1 comment in support of Alternative 4 (May opening with no harvest in July-August)
- 12 comments requesting opening for commercial season in the beginning of August or leave as is. August start would provide white fish to market when other species are no longer available.
- 1 comment in support of opening in September- December, and that if quota is not met it be re-opened in May of the following year to fill the previous year's quota.

Other Comments:

- Consider moon/tides in future openings (2 comments)
- Consider a tag or permit program (5 comments)
- Suggest the following changes:
 - Regular seasonal openings;
 - size/slot/total fish limits, such as those implemented for snook;
 - circle hooks only;
 - mandatory release tools and training required; and
 - no commercial harvest, including no allowance for chart captain/crew.
- Request for extended season for fall 2019 for North Carolina due to unfavorable fishing weather in July. Suggest that NOAA and the Council work together to implement a management approach that is equitable to both sectors, takes into consideration recent abundance surveys, and is more flexible than previous approaches. Ample notice time in 2019 was appreciated.
- Suggest year-round season with a call-in landing line like what is in place for tuna and other pelagics.
- Suggest expediting stock assessment or conducting update for red snapper to quicken changes in management (3 comments).
- Consider a set season and slot limit. Overabundance of red snapper may having negative effects on reef ecosystems.
- Current (recreational) seasons in the South Atlantic are not working well because of derby conditions. Either extend like the Gulf or get rid of recreational season altogether until a longer season can take place.
- Red snapper are overabundant off Georgia and causing other species to be displaced. Turn over management of all resident species to the states where we can adjust our limits to suit our needs.
- Consider: 1) The possibility of erroneous catch data due to their aggressive nature during spawning season) and 2) Effect on the overall population due to harvest during spawning.
- A NOAA abundance index from a long-term fishery independent survey shows many times more fish than at any time since 1990. There can be no reason not to substantially increase the red snapper ACL.
- Red snapper quotas between recreational and commercial fishermen should be the ratio of the dollar amount that each adds to Florida's economy.
- Support a plan which will allow for more days/opportunities to go fishing rather than limited (specific) dates due to unsafe conditions created by derby and highgrading. Consider 4 week- long seasons based on boater registration ID whereby the vessel can only harvest red snapper in one of four weeks per season (similar to management of alligator harvest).
- Change bag limit to 1 snapper per day per person. Slot limit of 16" to 22". A season from October to June.
- Additionally, charter/for-hire should have their own sector and quota separate from the private recreational.

- Consider tournament schedule for red snapper openings (Greater Jacksonville Kingfish Tournament of happened on the same weekend).
- Consider a 30-day recreational season with a one fish per boat limit.
- From the marketplace point of view, it seems like would make more sense to have red snapper available in January. Seems like that would maybe bring a higher price and might be a better option.
- Disallow harvest during red snapper spawning season, consider a split season instead.
- Weekend openings are not ideal for charter businesses; weekdays would be better.
- Structure the recreational season in a way that allows for maximum participation, for instance, a Saturday or Sunday or Friday to distribute the available quota so that there are more available weeks for folks to get out on the water. Also need the most time to prepare for a season so ample notice to anglers is also a request.
- The current approach to manage red snapper is not working for fishermen or the management agencies whose resources are stretched thin.
- Let the recreational sector open some time ahead of the commercial sector to minimize interaction between the two.
- Would like to see a separate charter (inspected vessels) and private recreational seasons and request that the inspected vessel season is before the private recreational season. There is a significant safety issue under current conditions.
- Consider setting a fishing age requirement. Reports of very young children (10 -12 months old) on private recreational boats to get an additional bag limit. Thinks this is a huge safety concern.
- Consider moving up the red snapper stock assessment to an earlier time. This species is critical to businesses and should be re-evaluated sooner. Needs to also include good science rather than best available science.
- Need better coverage for collecting fish samples. Since the last NOAA port sampler left, the position has not been refilled that he knows of and there is currently only 1 FWC sampler that covers from Volusia county through Ft. Pierce.
- Proposal was submitted for punch management approach using a punch card approach. Other commenters supported this proposal.
- Red snapper are now targeted by the commercial sector; they are no longer an incidental catch.