



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

News Release

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Council Chooses Preferred Management Measures for Dolphin and Wahoo Fisheries

Proposed measures would reduce recreational vessel limits for Dolphin and bag limits for Wahoo

During its meeting this week, members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council chose preferred management alternatives affecting Dolphin and Wahoo harvested in federal waters along the entire Atlantic coast. The proposed measures, as outlined in Amendment 10 to the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan, would reduce the current recreational vessel limit for Dolphin from 60 fish to 48 fish per vessel while maintaining the 10 fish per person/day bag limit and reduce the daily bag limit for Wahoo from 2 fish to 1 fish per person/day. Reductions in harvest are intended to help prevent seasonal closures that could be imposed should catch levels be exceeded.

Regional differences in the Dolphin and Wahoo fisheries became the focus of discussion as members of the Council reviewed concerns expressed during public hearings held in late January. Fishermen in South Florida and the Keys, including charter captains, have expressed concerns about catching fewer Dolphin and encountering smaller fish over the past few years and have requested the Council take action to reduce harvest. Further north, charter captains and other fishermen have raised objections to the proposed reductions, noting the importance of maintaining higher vessel limits for trips that require much farther runs offshore.

“We’ve heard from constituents and advisory panel members and believe their observations. Looking at the various management scenarios for both Dolphin and Wahoo, the Council compromised to reduce catches while addressing concerns of fishermen dependent on these valuable recreational fisheries,” explained Council Chair Mel Bell. “There are many variables affecting these migratory fisheries, including international harvest, environmental conditions, and other factors. We don’t have a clear sense of what the problem is and we’re being more preventative than curative at this point,” said Bell.

Amendment 10 also includes updates to annual catch limits, modifications to sector allocations, and changes to accountability measures designed to ensure the catch levels are not exceeded for both Dolphin and Wahoo. Proposed management measures would also allow properly permitted commercial fishing vessels with trap, pot or buoy gear onboard to retain up to 500 pounds (gutted weight) of Dolphin and remove the Operator Card requirement for for-hire and commercial fishermen in the Atlantic Dolphin Wahoo fishery. After considering recommendations from its advisory panels and public comment, the Council removed an action that would have allowed filleting Dolphin at sea on for-hire vessels in federal waters north of the NC/VA border. The Council is scheduled to approve Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 10 for review by the Secretary of Commerce during its June meeting.

(Continued)

Other Business:

Red Snapper

NOAA Fisheries provided an update on the recreational Red Snapper Season for 2021. Due to delays from COVID-19, some landings data from 2020 are not yet available. Those data are expected in May 2021. NOAA Fisheries intends to announce the 2021 season as soon as data are available and evaluated. If a season is allowed, the recreational season for Red Snapper begins on the second Friday in July. The number of fishing days is determined by NOAA Fisheries based on catch estimates from the previous season. The recreational season was open for four days in 2020 and five days in 2019.

A new stock assessment for Red Snapper will be reviewed by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) during its meeting in late April. The Council will receive an overview of the assessment and the SSC's recommendations during its June meeting. The Council discussed management options for considering the stock assessment results in setting the 2021 catch levels and requested that staff determine if an abbreviated framework can be used to adjust catch levels and if so, prepare such an amendment for Council review at their June 2021 meeting. The Council will also move forward with a plan amendment to modify annual catch limits, allocations, and other management measures necessary as a result of the stock assessment.

King Mackerel, Red Porgy, Snowy Grouper and Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Area

The Council continued work on management measures addressing Atlantic migratory group King Mackerel to address the recent stock assessment update that found the stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing. The measures, originally included in Framework Amendment 10 and now Amendment 34 to the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan, would modify annual catch limits and sector allocations, increase the recreational bag limit and possession limits off the coast of Florida, reduce the minimum size limits for both commercial and recreational sectors, and allow retention of "cut off" King and Spanish Mackerel by recreational fishermen as is allowed for the commercial sector. Public hearings on the amendment will be scheduled following the Council's June meeting.

Proposed management measures for Red Porgy to end overfishing and rebuild the stock continued to be reviewed in Amendment 50 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan, with public hearings scheduled this summer. The Council reviewed recent stock assessment results for Snowy Grouper and recommendations from its SSC and will begin developing an amendment to address management measures. The Council also approved Coral Amendment 10 for public hearings to be held prior to the Council's June meeting. The amendment addresses a Shrimp Fishery Access Area for rock shrimp along the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern off the east coast of Florida.

Additional information about this week's meeting, including a meeting [Story Map](#), committee reports, and briefing book materials is available from the Council's website at: <https://safmc.net/safmc-meetings/council-meetings/>. The next meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is currently scheduled for June 14-18, 2021 in Ponte Vedra, Florida.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils, conserves and manages fish stocks from three to 200 miles offshore of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida.