

Regulatory Amendment 16 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

OPTIONS PAPER



March 2013



Background

Regulatory Amendment 16 to the Fishery Management Plan of the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Regulatory Amendment 16) is being developed to lengthen the season and address concerns about derby conditions in the longline fishery for golden tilefish. Amendment 18B was developed to establish an endorsement program for the commercial fishery, specifically for the longline sector. The amendment also proposed allocating the commercial Annual Catch Limit (ACL) between gear sectors (longline and hook-and-line), and establishing a trip limit for those fishermen who did not qualify for a longline endorsement. The proposed rule for Amendment 18B was published in December 2012. Amendment 18B does not propose to change the 4,000-pound trip limit for longline vessels, however. Longline fishermen approached the Council with concerns about derby fishing conditions continuing. The fishermen suggested ways to slow down fishing and extending the season for longliners. This regulatory amendment proposes an action to address those concerns.

Possible Actions in Regulatory Amendment 16

1. Extend the fishing season for longline vessels in the golden tilefish portion of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic.

Proposed Timeline for 2013

1. The IPT will develop an Options Paper and present it to the South Atlantic Council at the March 2013 meeting. Actions and alternatives will be based on Council guidance and input from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel.
2. The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) will review the draft amendment in April 2013 and provide their input for the South Atlantic Council's consideration.
3. The South Atlantic Council will review the draft amendment at the South Atlantic Council meeting in June 2013, provide further guidance, and approve for public hearings.
4. Public hearings will be held in August 2013.
5. The Council will review public input and approve the amendment for formal review at their September 2013 meeting.

Golden Tilefish

Management Background

Amendment 9 (1999) -- Vessels with longline gear aboard may only possess snowy, warsaw, yellowedge, and misty grouper, and golden, blueline and sand tilefish. Within the 5-fish aggregate grouper bag limit (which currently includes tilefish and excludes goliath grouper and Nassau grouper), no more than 2 fish may be gag or black grouper (individually or in combination).

Amendment 13C (2006) – established a commercial quota = 295,000 lbs gw; a commercial trip limit of 4,000 lbs gw until 75% of quota is taken on or before September 1, then reduce to 300 lbs; established a recreational bag limit of 1 golden tilefish per person per day and included golden tilefish within the 5 grouper aggregate bag limit.

Amendment 15B (2009) – established management reference points for golden tilefish.

Amendment 17B (2011) -- Defined allocations for golden tilefish based on the following formula for each sector: (50% * average of long catch range (lbs) 1986-2008) + (50% * average of recent catch trend (lbs) 2006-2008). The allocation was set at 97% commercial and 3% recreational. Established Total ACL = 326,554 lbs whole weight or 291,566 lbs gutted weight. Established Accountability Measures for the commercial and recreational sectors. Specified a recreational ACL in numbers of fish = 1,578 fish.

Regulatory Amendment 12 (2012) – Revised the ABC and ACL based on the SEDAR 25 (2011) stock assessment. Set the total ACL for 2012-2015 at 625,000 pounds whole weight (558,036 pounds gutted weight): commercial ACL = 606,250 pounds ww (541,295 gw); recreational ACL = 3,019 fish. The amendment also revised the recreational accountability measure.

Amendment 18B (2013) – Proposes establishment of an endorsement program for the longline sectors; allocating the commercial ACL between gear groups (75% longline/25% hook-and-line); removing the 300-pound step-down for the longline sector; and establishing a trip limit of 500 pounds for fishermen who did not qualify for a longline endorsement.

Current status/issues:

- The SEDAR 25 (2011) assessment of the golden tilefish stock indicated that the U.S. southeast stock of tilefish is currently not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The stock assessment results show that the biomass of golden tilefish has increased substantially since the last assessment and is now above B_{MSY}
- Regulations proposed in Amendment 18B are pending approval by the Secretary of Commerce. It is anticipated that regulations will become effective in 2013.
- Fishermen who qualified for a longline endorsement have requested that the Council consider options to minimize derby conditions at the beginning of the fishing year and stretch out the season.
- The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel recommended the following at their November 2012 meeting:
MOTION: ESTABLISH FISHING ON A 2 WEEKS ON/2 WEEKS OFF SCHEDULE FOR THE GOLDEN TILEFISH LONGLINE FISHERY OR CONSIDER OTHER ALTERNATIVES (I.E., EVERY OTHER WEEK IS PREFERRED) THAT SLOW DOWN THE HARVEST AND PREVENT WASTE
APPROVED

Draft Purpose and Need

The purpose of Regulatory Amendment 16 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery is to: 1) ameliorate existing derby conditions in the commercial longline sector of the golden tilefish portion of the snapper grouper fishery; 2) lengthen the commercial longline fishing season; and 3) prevent market flooding.

The need for the amendment is to increase safety at sea while promoting biological benefits by distributing fishing effort over a longer period of time, and to promote socio-economic benefits.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Review, modify, and approve the Purpose and Need

MOTION:

Possible Actions to Consider

Action 1. Extend the fishing season for longline vessels in the golden tilefish portion of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Longline vessels are limited to 4,000 pounds per trip with no step-down trip limit.

Alternative 2. Require longline vessels to fish for two weeks beginning on January 1 and stop fishing for the following two weeks. Continue fishing in this manner until the golden tilefish longline ACL is met or is projected to be met.

Alternative 3. Require longline vessels to fish every other week beginning on January 1 and until the golden tilefish longline ACL is met or is projected to be met.

Others????

COMMITTEE ACTION: Review and add/remove alternatives as appropriate.

MOTION: