



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

News Release

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Council Requests Emergency Rule to Allow Red Snapper Harvest this Year *Limited harvest proposed through recreational three-day weekends and commercial mini-season*

During its meeting last week in Orlando, members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council requested an emergency rule be used to provide recreational and commercial fishermen the opportunity to harvest a limited number of red snapper later this year, perhaps by early fall. The Council determined that a total of 13,067 fish could be harvested this year after reviewing the latest estimates of total removals of red snapper (dead discards) that have occurred during 2010 and 2011 under the current moratorium. The red snapper fishery has been closed in South Atlantic federal waters since January 4, 2010 to end overfishing and rebuild the stock as required by Congress through the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The estimates, provided to the Council by NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center, showed that removals of red snapper through discarding are below the total removals allowed under the current rebuilding plan for the stock, thus allowing for a limited harvest.

Upon approval by the Secretary of Commerce, the emergency rule would allow for recreational fishermen to harvest a total of 9,399 fish during three-day weekend openings, with the dates of the openings to be determined by NOAA Fisheries Service. During the opening, the bag limit would be 1 fish per person/day and there would be no size limit. The commercial fishery would be allowed a total of 3,668 fish or 20,818 pounds (gutted weight). The commercial fishery would open in seven-day "mini-season" increments subject to the quota, with a limit of 50 pounds per trip and no size limits. The current allocation for the red snapper fishery is 72% recreational and 28% commercial.

"The Secretary will try to make a decision on the request within 60 days," said Roy Crabtree, southeast regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service. "Depending on publication of the final rule, fishing for red snapper could likely occur sometime in September." Dr. Crabtree pointed out that fishermen will be given ample notice to prepare for the opening. NOAA Fisheries Service could modify the opening dates of the fishery dependent upon weather conditions.

"The Council is pleased to have updated data that allows for a limited harvest of red snapper as the stock continues to rebuild," said Council Chairman David Cupka. "While the opening for both the recreational and commercial fisheries may be brief, this will provide an opportunity to collect fishery-dependent data from the fish that are harvested," said Cupka. "Fishermen at this week's meeting have stated their willingness to participate in data collection efforts."

Council members emphasized the need for NOAA Fisheries Service to closely monitor landings if the red snapper fishery opens and encouraged the use of onboard observers for both headboat and commercial vessels, additional dockside intercepts, and other measures. Both state and federal agencies would be involved in data collection efforts during the openings.

The emergency rule to allow harvest would be a temporary measure. The Council will begin development of an amendment to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan to control the annual harvest of red snapper through a tag program. The plan would be administered by NOAA Fisheries Service and tags would be distributed to both commercial and recreational fishermen using a lottery system. Public hearings will be held on the amendment as it is developed. The Council will consider options for the tag program during its September meeting in Charleston.

The Annual Catch Limit for red snapper of 13,067 fish in 2012 will be modified each year, using harvest data and fishery-independent data collected through ongoing offshore sampling programs. A benchmark stock assessment for red snapper is scheduled for 2014.

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Other Measures:

Golden Tilefish

The Council also approved measures to implement an endorsement program for the commercial golden tilefish fishery. Amendment 18B to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan would cap the number of participants in the commercial fishery, establish allocations between fishermen using longlines and those using hook-and-line to harvest golden tilefish and other measures. The amendment must be approved by the Secretary of Commerce before implementation.

Marine Protected Areas

After reviewing public comment, recommendations from its Scientific and Statistical Committee, Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel, and reports from earlier workshops, the Council will continue to develop management alternatives to use MPAs as added protection for speckled hind and warsaw grouper. The Council will hold two additional public workshops in North Carolina and Florida in conjunction with a series of public hearings scheduled for August 6-16, 2012. The hearings will be held from Key Largo, Florida to New Bern, North Carolina and address: permits and data collection for for-hire and commercial vessels; management measures for the commercial shrimp fishery to expedite the closure of federal waters in conjunction with state closures due to adverse weather; alternatives for joint federal dealer permits between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico; and other issues. Details regarding the public hearings are available from the Council's website. MPA workshop details will be posted as they become available.

The next meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is scheduled for September 10-14, 2012 in North Charleston, SC. Details for the meeting and meeting materials will be posted on the Council's website at www.safmc.net as they become available.

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.