



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

News Release

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Managers Focus on Data Collection Needs to Better Track Annual Catch Limits *Joint Seafood Dealer Amendment approved; Emergency Rule requested for yellowtail snapper*

Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council heard from fishermen from North Carolina to the Florida Keys about the impacts of recent fishery closures during the Council meeting last week in Charleston, South Carolina. Commercial fishermen from the Florida Keys shared concerns about the yellowtail snapper fishery, recreational anglers spoke about shortened seasons for black sea bass, and commercial golden tilefish fishermen were frustrated at the delay in reopening their fishery after an updated assessment shows the ACL may be increased. Everyone was in agreement, both managers and fishermen, that improvements must be made in data collection and tracking of annual catch limits for species managed by the Council. Annual catch limits, or ACLs, are the numbers or pounds of fish that can be harvested each fishing year and are required under the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act in order to prevent overfishing. In some cases, the ACLs have led to shortened fishing seasons for both commercial and recreational fishermen, leading to questions regarding data collection practices and the current methods used to track ACLs. NOAA Fisheries Service is the agency responsible for tracking ACLs and subsequent fishery closures once the ACLs have been met. The Council approved an amendment to improve data collection from seafood dealers and continues to work on specific management measures to better track ACLs.

Generic Seafood Dealer Amendment (Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic)

The Council approved the Generic Dealer Amendment during last week's meeting. Developed jointly with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the amendment will improve data collection efforts by increasing the number of species that require purchase through a federally licensed dealer, improving the timeliness in dealer reporting, and modifying requirements for maintaining federal dealer permits. The amendment would also create a universal dealer permit for both the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions. The amendment will be submitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

Data Collection Improvements for Commercial and For-Hire (Charter) Fishermen

Council members continued to develop management alternatives to improve the collection of data from both commercial and for-hire fishermen through the Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 3. The amendment currently includes measures that increase the frequency of reporting by charter and headboat fishermen and provides for the use of electronic logbooks. The for-hire sector contributes to recreational landings that count towards the recreational ACL. Improved data reporting could reduce the chance that ACLs are exceeded and accountability measures are triggered. The amendment also includes measures to improve commercial logbook reporting, use of vessel monitoring systems, and improvements in bycatch reporting. The Council will address the amendment again during its December meeting in North Carolina.

Yellowtail Snapper Emergency Rule Request

An anticipated closure of the commercial yellowtail snapper fishery was delayed after reported landings were updated shortly before the beginning of last week's Council meeting. An updated stock assessment, recently completed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, shows the stock is healthy and not undergoing overfishing or overfished. The Council approved an Emergency Rule request to increase the ACL for yellowtail snapper, a staple for the Florida Keys. Because the stock is managed jointly with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the new stock assessment will be reviewed by the Scientific and Statistical Committees from both Councils on October 10, 2012 and managers are hopeful that an increase in the ACL will be allowed this year.

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Gag Grouper and Shallow Water Grouper Closure Anticipated

With landings currently at 77.8% of the commercial ACL for gag grouper (352,940 pounds gutted weight), the commercial fishery could close before the end of the fishing year, triggering a closure of associated shallow water grouper (gag, black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney). When the gag grouper quota is met all shallow water grouper are closed to help prevent bycatch mortality of gag. There is also a January through April spawning season closure in place for these species. There are currently separate ACLs in place for gag, red grouper, black grouper, and scamp. All of the remaining shallow water grouper species have their own group commercial and recreational ACLs. The Council is developing a regulatory amendment to address modifying the gag trigger that closes all shallow water grouper.

Other Business

Shrimp Amendment 9

The Council approved Amendment 9 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan for submission to the Secretary of Commerce. The amendment includes measures to improve the timeliness and ability to close federal waters to shrimp harvest concurrently with state waters at the state's request when there is concern about the impacts of cold weather and other environmental factors that could impact overwintering shrimp stocks.

Reappointment of Chair and Vice-Chair

The Council unanimously re-elected Council Chairman David Cupka and Council Vice-Chairman Ben Hartig, during its meeting last week. Chairman Cupka, an At-large representative from Charleston, SC was elected to an unprecedented third term as chairman. Vice-Chairman Hartig is a commercial fisherman from Hobe Sound, FL.

The next meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is scheduled for December 3-7, 2012 in Wilmington, NC. Details for the meeting and meeting materials will be posted on the Council's website at www.safmc.net as they become available.

<p>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.</p>
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