Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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NOAA Fisheries Service is Eliminating the 240-Foot (40-Fathom) Snapper-Grouper Prohibition in the South Atlantic

NOAA Fisheries Service is eliminating the 240-foot (40-fathom) snapper-grouper prohibition in South Atlantic federal waters. The 240-foot (40-fathom) prohibition, implemented on January 31, 2011, prohibited the possession of six deepwater snapper-grouper species (snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, queen snapper, and silk snapper) in or from the South Atlantic federal waters in depths greater than 240 feet (40 fathoms). **The final rule publishes in the *Federal Register* on May 10, 2012 and the removal of the prohibition is effective on that date.**

The purpose of the 240-foot (40-fathom) prohibition approved in Amendment 17B to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region is to reduce bycatch of speckled hind and warsaw grouper. However, there is evidence, from both public comments and new analysis of data, that the prohibition is not effective at its stated purpose and comes at a higher economic cost to fishermen than originally anticipated. A new analysis of landings data following the implementation of the prohibition indicates that different management measures are likely more effective. Therefore, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is currently developing an amendment to further protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper. That amendment considers additional measures to reduce bycatch of speckled hind and warsaw grouper, including the expansion of existing, and establishment of new, closed areas.

The decision to eliminate the 240-foot (40-fathom) prohibition through Regulatory Amendment 11 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region **does not affect** the prohibition on harvest and possession of speckled hind and warsaw grouper in the South Atlantic. It remains unlawful to harvest or possess speckled hind and warsaw grouper.

More information, including Frequently Asked Questions for Regulatory Amendment 11 can be found online at:
http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/SASnapperGrouperHomepage.htm