Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701

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NOAA Fisheries Service Requests Public Comments on Proposed Regulations for South Atlantic Black Sea Bass

(Comment Period Ends April 23, 2012)

NOAA Fisheries Service requests public comments on proposed regulations for Amendment 18A to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 18A). The proposed rule for Amendment 18A published in the *Federal Register* on March 23, 2012 [77 FR 16991]. The primary purpose of Amendment 18A is to implement management measures that would optimize fishing opportunities for black sea bass, and improve data reporting in the for-hire sector of the snapper-grouper fishery.

The proposed rule for Amendment 18A includes:

Commercial Sector Measures

- An endorsement program for the commercial black sea bass pot segment of the snapper-grouper fishery, where only endorsement holders who meet certain landings criteria and also have a valid Unlimited South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper Permit would be allowed to use pot gear to harvest black sea bass.
- An appeals process for the black sea bass pot endorsement program.
- Modifications to commercial and recreational accountability measures.
- A limit of 35 black sea bass pot tags issued to each endorsement holder each permit year.
- A requirement to bring black sea bass pots back to shore at the end of each trip.
- A 1,000 pounds gutted weight (1,180 pounds whole weight) commercial trip limit for the black sea bass commercial sector.
- An increase to the commercial minimum size limit for black sea bass from 10 inches total length (TL) to 11 inches TL.

Recreational Sector Measures

- An increase to the recreational minimum size limit for black sea bass from 12 inches TL to 13 inches TL.
- A requirement for selected for-hire vessels to report landings information electronically on a weekly or daily basis.

***Please Note:** If the black sea bass pot endorsement program is approved for implementation, a 30-day freeze on transfers of Unlimited South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper Permits with black sea bass landings using black sea bass pot gear between 1999 and 2010 will begin on the publication date of the final rule, which will be announced with another fishery bulletin.

Request for Comments

Comments on the proposed rule for Amendment 18A must be received no later than April 23, 2012, to be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service. See the Addresses section for information on where and how to submit comments.

Addresses

Electronic or hardcopies of Amendment 18A and the proposed rule may be obtained from:

- The NOAA Fisheries Service Web site http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/SASnapperGrouperHomepage.htm.
- The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Web site at http://www.safmc.net.

To request a CD of the draft environmental impact statement contact:

NOAA Fisheries Service
Southeast Regional Office
Sustainable Fisheries Division
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701
Phone: (727) 824-5305

You may submit comments by the following methods:

- Electronic Submission: The Federal e-Rulemaking Portal at http://www.regulations.gov (select "Submit Comment", then type in NOAA-NMFS-2011-0282 in the "Keyword or ID" box). All comments received are part

of the public record and will generally be posted to http://www.regulations.gov without change.

- Mail: NOAA Fisheries Service
  Southeast Regional Office
  Sustainable Fisheries Division
  c/o Kate Michie
  263 13th Avenue South
  St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

NOAA Fisheries Service will accept anonymous comments. Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

Comments received through means not specified in this bulletin may not be considered.

More Information

For more information on Amendment 18A please click on this link to the Amendment 18A Frequently Asked Questions found at http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/SASnapperGrouperHomepage.htm or view the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Web page at: www.safmc.net.

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