

# *South Atlantic Fishery Management Council*



## *SA Liaison Report*

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January 2016

### **During the December 2015 meeting, the Council Approved New Federal Fishery Management Measures, Adopted Vision Blueprint for Snapper Grouper Management and Approved Measures for Dolphin, Blueline Tilefish, Yellowtail Snapper & Black Sea Bass**

#### **New Commercial Trip Limit for Dolphin**

The Council approved Regulatory Amendment 1 to the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan to implement:

1. A new commercial trip limit for dolphin (fish) of 4,000 pounds once 75% of the commercial annual catch limit has been harvested.

Background: Dolphin are managed from New England to the Florida Keys under the fishery management plan. The commercial fishery closed this past June when NOAA Fisheries projected that the annual catch limit of 1,157,001 pounds (whole weight) would be met, impacting the commercial fishery along the entire Atlantic coast. Commercial landings of dolphin spiked to their highest numbers in 2014 and again in 2015. Council members discussed the need to have precautionary measures in place that would help extend the fishing season should the spike in landings continue. It is estimated that if landings during the 2016 commercial dolphin season are similar to those last year, the trip limit would be implemented in August.

#### **Blueline Tilefish, Yellowtail Snapper and Black Sea Bass**

The Council approved Regulatory Amendment 25 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan to:

##### **Blueline Tilefish**

1. Specify a new annual catch limits for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic of 174,798 pounds (whole weight).
2. Allow the recreational bag limit to increase from 1 fish per *vessel*/per day from May through August to a 3 fish per *person*/day May through August within the 3-fish aggregate grouper bag limit. Recreational harvest is prohibited the remainder of the year.
3. Increase the commercial trip limit from 100 pounds (gutted weight) to 300 pounds.

Background: The Council approved a conservative increase to the annual catch limit after receiving the results of recent research on the genetic population structure of blueline tilefish that do not indicate the existence of distinct population segments. Genetic Studies to determine the range of the stock along the Atlantic coast continue and a new stock assessment for blueline tilefish is scheduled for 2017.

##### **Yellowtail Snapper**

1. Modify the current fishing year for yellowtail snapper, changing it from a calendar year to an August – July fishing year for both the commercial and recreational fishery.

Background: Yellowtail snapper are primarily harvested in South Florida and the Florida Keys. The commercial fishery was closed on October 31, 2015 after NOAA Fisheries projected the fishery would

meet its annual catch limit of 1,596,510 pounds (whole weight). The change was requested by fishermen to allow harvest to continue during the peak tourist season and have any closures that may occur due to meeting the annual catch limit coincide with the spring/summer spawning season.

### **Black Sea Bass**

1. Increase the current recreational bag limit from 5 fish per person/day to 7 fish per person/day.

Background: Once considered overfished, the stock was deemed rebuilt based on the 2013 stock assessment and the annual catch limit more than doubled. While the increase in the bag limit may prove good news to some fishermen, new analyses show that landings of black sea bass are currently limited by the 13” size limit. On average, less than 1% of anglers are reaching their bag limit and discarding over 12 times more black sea bass than they are landing, with over 95% of those fish estimated to be below the minimum size limit. The Council discussed the findings and the need to consider reducing the current minimum size limit in a future amendment as recommended by its Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel. The changes could not be made through Regulatory Amendment 25 due to timing limitations.

### **Black Sea Bass Pot Fishery**

Commercial black sea bass pot fishermen may also see changes in regulations beginning in November 2016 that would allow the traditional winter fishery to operate once again. The use of black sea bass pots is currently prohibited from November 1 through April 30 to help protect against interactions with right whales and other species protected under the Endangered Species Act. Working closely with NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources Division, the Council has developed specific time and area restrictions through Regulatory Amendment 16 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan that would allow federally permitted fishermen to use the pots year round while minimizing any interactions with migrating whales. New regulations would also require identifying marks for lines used on the pots. There have been no documented interactions between the relatively few pots used by the black sea bass commercial fishery in the South Atlantic and right whales. The Council’s intent is to have the new sea bass pot regulations in place prior to November 1, 2016.

### **Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery**

Since December 2012 the Council has been working diligently to develop a long-term “vision” for managing the snapper grouper fishery into the future. The process has included holding workshops during each of the Council’s quarterly meetings, soliciting input from its advisory panels, conducting a series of 26 informal port meetings with stakeholders in the spring of 2014, and soliciting additional public comment through a series of webinars/comment stations in the summer of 2015. The result is a strategic plan called the *Vision Blueprint* that includes four strategic focus areas: Science, Management, Communication, and Governance with specific strategies and actions for each area. In October of this year, the Council met to further refine and prioritize actions within the Vision Blueprint and determine approaches for applying the Blueprint for management purposes.

During its December meeting, the Council adopted the Vision Blueprint and ranked various ideas, drawn from the management action items in the Blueprint, to include in future amendments. Topics for amendment development include a Fishery Seasonality and Retention Amendment, Sub-regional Management Amendment, Sector-based Amendment (separate for commercial and recreational sectors), a Recreational Stamp/License Amendment, and a Traditional Multi-Day Bandit Boat Amendment. The Council will continue to refine items for amendments developed under the Blueprint and collect public input through the regular Council amendment process of scoping and public hearings and possibly stakeholder surveys.

## Items Approved for Public Hearings in January/February 2016

The Council will hold a series of public hearings at the beginning of 2016 to solicit public input on a number of management measures being proposed:

1. **The Charterboat/Headboat Reporting Amendment** – mandatory weekly electronic reporting for all federally permitted charter (six-pack) vessels; report all fish harvested/discarded on all trips regardless of where harvested (current headboat requirements); charter vessels and headboats report by Tuesday following a week ending on Sunday; meet headboat and SC minimum data elements; and report catch location by latitude/longitude in degrees and minutes or by clicking on a headboat chart (10 miles by 10 miles). Compliance, no fishing reports, and catastrophic measures would be the same as currently in place for headboats. Council intends to approve for formal review in June and have the regulations effective 1/1/17 if all aspects of the system are ready.
2. The management of **hogfish** in the South Atlantic will change under measures proposed in **Snapper Grouper Amendment 37**, including the creation of two separately managed stocks and proposed alternatives to end overfishing for the Florida Keys/East Florida stock that includes modifications to bag limits, size limits, recreational fishing seasons, and implementation of commercial trip limits.
3. **Amendment 26 to the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Fishery Management Plan** – changes to catch levels and management measures for king mackerel. The SAFMC used the same document the GMFMC is using.
4. The Council is also soliciting public scoping on preliminary measures that may be considered for **mutton snapper** following a recent stock assessment. While the assessment determined the mutton snapper stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing, the public and the Council's Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel have expressed concerns about harvest of mutton snapper during the spawning season. Similar issues were identified during a series of public workshops recently conducted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Additional information about the public hearings is posted on the Council's website at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net).

Thanks and I would be glad to answer any questions.