



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

SA Liaison Report

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During the March 2016 meeting, the Council Approved Measures to Protect Spawning Areas, System Management Plans, Options/Approach for Cobia, CMP Amendment 26 (King Mackerel), Options for Mutton & Hog Snapper, and Discussed Citizen Science

Designated Spawning Special Management Zones designed to protect habitat and snapper grouper species

The Council approved Amendment 36 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan to implement five Spawning SMZs:

1. A 5.1 square mile area off the coast of North Carolina known as the South Cape Lookout site;
2. A 3.03 square mile area off the coast of Georgetown, South Carolina within an area called "Devil's Hole" or "Georgetown Hole"
3. Two experimental artificial reef areas established by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources known as "Area 51" and "Area 53", each approximately 3 square miles in size off the coast of South Carolina; and
4. A 3.6 square mile area off the east coast of the Florida Keys referred to as the "Warsaw Hole" (50 Fathom Hole) for the number of warsaw grouper associated with the area.

Background:

Fishing for species in the snapper grouper fishery management complex and anchoring would be prohibited within the proposed Spawning SMZs; anchoring is allowed in the experimental artificial reef areas. Fishermen would be allowed to troll for pelagic species such as dolphin, tuna, and billfish in the areas but cannot possess snapper grouper species while in the Spawning SMZs. Restricting bottom fishing is designed to help protect habitat and fish that gather there to spawn, resulting in the production of more eggs and larvae that could help recruitment of juvenile fish. The areas would also help reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality for snapper grouper species, including speckled hind and warsaw grouper, two species that have been candidates for listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. A transit provision is also included in the amendment.

In addition to designating the Spawning SMZs, the amendment includes a sunset provision that would require the areas be reauthorized after a period of 10 years, based on their effectiveness. A System Management Plan for the Spawning SMZs was approved in conjunction with Amendment 36, outlining research/monitoring, law enforcement, and outreach needs. The amendment would also move the existing Charleston Deep Artificial Reef Marine Protected Area to match the boundary of the currently permitted site.

System Management Plan for Deepwater MPAs

Eight Deepwater MPAs were established through Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 in January 2009. The Council approved a System Management Plan (SMP) that serves as the framework for resource protection, research and monitoring, outreach, administration, and evaluation of the MPAs. The SMP includes action items to assist in achieving the goals and objectives of the SMP and potential metrics for evaluating the management effectiveness of the MPAs. Eventually, the SMP will be expanded to encompass all the Council's managed areas, with sections for MPAs, Spawning SMZs, SMZs, and Coral HAPCs.

Recreational Cobia Closure in 2016:

The Council directed staff to begin work on a framework amendment that includes options to implement vessel limits, reduce the current 2 fish per person/day bag limit, increase the minimum size limit, combinations of the previous measures, and changes to the fishing year. The Council also requested the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission consider developing a complimentary plan for state waters to allow more management flexibility.

Background:

NOAA Fisheries announced during the Council meeting that the recreational fishery for cobia would close on June 20, 2016 in federal waters (greater than 3 miles offshore) from Georgia to New York. The length of the fishing season and the closure date is determined by NOAA Fisheries and not by the Council based on the Accountability Measure (AM) in CMP Amendment 18. The recreational annual catch limit for Atlantic migratory group cobia was exceeded in 2015 by 149% triggering AMs to help ensure that it is not exceeded in 2016 and resulting in the June closure. In an effort to prevent a closure of the cobia fishery in the future and ensure that fish are available throughout the management area, the Council is working on a framework amendment to be implemented prior to the 2017 cobia fishing year. The cobia fishery occurs primarily in the spring/summer months as the fish migrate northward. Fishermen and others affected by the recreational closure have expressed strong concerns about the negative economic impacts, especially to those in North Carolina and Virginia, where the majority of landings occur from both state and federal waters.

CMP Amendment 26

The Council approved Amendment 26 to the Joint Coastal Migratory Pelagic Fishery Management Plan to implement measures for **king mackerel**. The Gulf of Mexico Council will review the joint amendment during its April meeting.

Oculina Team Report

The Oculina Team Report was also approved as part of the evaluation plan for the **Oculina Experimental Closed Area** off the east coast of Florida.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 37 (Hogfish) and 41 (Mutton Snapper)

The Council continued to modify proposed management measures for **hogfish** and **mutton snapper** stocks in the South Atlantic after reviewing public comment received during public hearings held earlier this year. A recent assessment for hogfish identified a Florida Keys/East Florida stock and a Georgia/North Carolina stock. Snapper Grouper Amendment 37 contains measures to end overfishing for the FL Keys/East Florida stock including increasing size limits, decreasing bag limits, limiting the season for the recreational fishery, and establishing commercial trip limits. The Council is coordinating with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission to address measures for mutton snapper, including options to reduce harvest during spawning season aggregations.

Amendment 43 (Red Snapper)

A synopsis of red snapper data was provided to inform Council discussions on potential red snapper management measures for inclusion in Amendment 43. The data included commercial and recreational landings, seasonality of harvest, size distribution of red snapper catch, and distribution of bag/trip sizes. Council staff gave an overview of the information compiled and presented possible management approaches. The Committee/Council will review the results of the red snapper stock assessment (SEDAR 41) at their June meeting in Cocoa Beach, FL.

Citizen Science

The Council expressed interest in a Citizen Science program to address the many outstanding data needs and take advantage of repeated offers by constituents to contribute to data collection efforts. An organizing committee of Council members, staff, and interested parties was assembled to address the challenge of starting such a program. As a first major step, to judge interest and obtain broad feedback on a possible citizen science program, a workshop was held January 19-22 in Charleston, SC. Following the workshop, and relying heavily upon the discussion and recommendations provided, the Organizing Committee developed a program blueprint for Council to consider. The Data Committee was presented with the blueprint and asked to provide guidance on how to proceed. The Council approved measures to move forward with its **Citizen Science Initiative** following recommendations from the regional Citizen Science Program Design Workshop held January 19-21, 2016 in Charleston. Learn more at: <http://www.safmc.net/citizen-science-initiative>.

Other Council Actions

1. Send a letter to Eileen Sobeck, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, indicating the need for funding to the SERO/SEFSC to implement headboat, charter vessel, and commercial electronic reporting and requesting clarification on how much of the \$7 million funds for electronic monitoring/reporting will be available for work in the South Atlantic Council's area.
2. Send a letter to Alan Risenhoover, Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, commenting on the catch share program review guidance.

Committee Reports & Next Meeting

Committee reports for the March 2016 meeting are now available at www.safmc.net. The next meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is scheduled for June 13-17, 2016 in Cocoa Beach, FL.

Thanks and I would be glad to answer any questions.