Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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NOAA Fisheries Service Announces Closure Date for the South Atlantic Recreational Black Sea Bass Fishery

NOAA Fisheries Service has determined that the 2011-2012 recreational annual catch limit of 341,747 pounds for black sea bass has been reached. As a result, the recreational sector for black sea bass in federal waters of the South Atlantic from 35°15.19' N. latitude, (the latitude of Cape Hatteras Light, NC) to Key West, FL, will **close, effective 12:01 a.m. (local time) October 17, 2011**, through 12:01 a.m. June 1, 2012.

For vessels with a valid federal charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic Snapper-grouper, the closure applies to state and federal waters. The operator of a vessel that has a federal for-hire permit for snapper-grouper must land any black sea bass harvested from either state or federal waters prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, October 17, 2011.

Background:
Amendment 17B to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region implemented annual catch limits and accountability measures for nine species in the snapper-grouper complex. Accountability measures are actions intended to prevent the annual catch limit from being exceeded. If the recreational annual catch limit is projected to be met, the recreational sector would be closed. If the recreational annual catch limit is exceeded, the annual catch limit for the following fishing year will be reduced by the amount of the overage. A determination on a reduction of the annual catch limit will be made before the following fishing year begins.

Black sea bass are overfished (population is too low), and experiencing overfishing (rate of removal is too high). The commercial quota is 309,000 pounds. The recreational annual catch limit was adjusted to 341,747 pounds from 409,000 pounds to account for the recreational overage during the 2010-2011 fishing year. Harvest levels must be kept below these levels to prevent fish from being removed too quickly, and to rebuild the black sea bass population.

Commercial Sector:
Commercial harvest of black sea bass closed on July 15, 2011, because NOAA Fisheries Service projected landings would reach the quota by that time. It remains closed until June 1, 2012.