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 Actions Affecting South Atlantic Black Sea Bass

(Comment Period Ends April 2, 2012)

NOAA Fisheries Service requests public comments on Amendment 18A to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 18A). The primary purpose of Amendment 18A is to reduce effort in the black sea bass component of the snapper-grouper fishery to address the continued shortening of fishing seasons caused by derby fishing conditions, and to improve data reporting in the for-hire sector of the snapper-grouper fishery.

Actions in Amendment 18A include:

- Updates to the acceptable biological catch and annual catch limits for black sea bass based on a new stock assessment.
- 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 and endorsement transferability requirements.
- Modifications to commercial and recreational accountability measures; actions taken if the catch limits are exceeded.
- 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 pound gutted weight (1,180 pound whole weight) commercial trip limit for the black sea bass commercial sector.
- An increase to the commercial minimum size limit from 10 inches total length (TL) to 11 inches TL, and an increase to the recreational size limit from 12 inches TL to 13 inches TL and;
- 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, 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 Amendment 18A must be received no later than April 2, 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 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 final 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

All personal identifying information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. 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 see the Amendment 18A Frequently Asked Questions or view the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Web page at: www.safmc.net.

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