The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's

South Atlantic Update

Published for fishermen and others interested in marine resource conservation issues **Winter 2008**

Participants Favor New Public Scoping Meeting Format

February meetings draw crowds, interest in overlapping fisheries issues

It is a new approach for an age-old problem; how to get fishermen and other members of the public involved with fisheries issues at the *beginning* of the management process before decisions are made. The answer appears to be a public scoping meeting "road show" unlike anything the South Atlantic Council has attempted in the past. Beginning the first week of February, Council staff hit the road for a series of public scoping meetings to address four key issues: 1) a Comprehensive Allocation Amendment; 2) Limited Access Privilege (LAP) Programs; 3) Snapper Grouper Amendment 17; and 4) Allocation of the commercial king mackerel quota.

In fisheries management, overlapping issues often affect multiple fisheries. For example, seasonal closures for snapper grouper species may redirect effort to the king mackerel fishery. The Council has long recognized this and as a result, it is developing a Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) and an FEP Comprehensive Amendment to help address interrelational issues. Meanwhile, revisions in the Magnuson Stevens Reauthorization Act of 2006 have prompted new management actions, including those to address annual catch limits, accountability measures, and allocations. In reviewing these and other management needs during its December meeting, the Council agreed to try a new approach to better inform the public about upcoming issues and to allow for informal public input as part of the public scoping process.



Fishermen gather around Council staff biologist Rick DeVictor (left) as he explains various amendments under consideration for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan during the public scoping meeting in Port Canaveral, Florida. Council staff members were on hand to answer questions informally before meeting participants provided comments and recommendations to area Council representatives. An Overview of Issues for 2008 is inside this issue of the *South Atlantic Update*.

On the Road

For the first time, six members of the Council staff, including the deputy director, staff economist, fishery biologists, stock assessment coordinator, and public information officer, were available during a series of five scoping meetings from

(Continued page 8)

Public Comment Scheduled at March Council Meeting

Friday, March 7, 2008

8:15 AM

Snapper Grouper Amendment 15B

Modify sales provisions for snapper grouper, allocations for snowy grouper and red porgy, permit renewal and transfer, implementation of a plan to monitor and assess bycatch, reduce impacts on incidental take of sea turtles and smalltooth sawfish, and update reference points for golden tilefish.

See page 10 for more information on Amendment 15B

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Editor's Note

The South Atlantic Update is published by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Its purpose is to report developments in fisheries management that would be of interest to its readers. Please credit the Council when reprinting articles used in this newsletter. Anyone wishing to submit information or articles pertaining to fishing or fisheries management, or letters to the editor on a pertinent issue, is invited and encouraged to do so. Submissions may be mailed to Kim Iverson, Editor, South Atlantic Update, 4055 Faber Place Dr., Suite 201, N. Charleston, SC 29405, or may be sent via the internet; Email address: kim.iverson@safmc.net.

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From the Chairman

Build It and They Will Come



Council Chairman George Geiger

I am a bit of a skeptic by nature. So when Council staff approached me with the idea of holding a series of public scoping meetings to cover four topics at one time, and have the majority of staff members travel to each meeting in a sort of public "road show", I have to admit that I was a bit leery. I certainly understand the interconnectivity of the scoping issues before us and agree with the need to inform the public and receive comments on these issues. But I also knew that conducting such meetings would take a great deal of time and effort on the part of staff, and there was no guarantee that our fisherman - recreational and commercial - would participate.

However fishermen did participate; and they did in higher numbers than expected. From Coconut Grove, Florida to New Bern, North Carolina, we were all pleased with the number of people who attended the meetings, as well as the interest demonstrated in speaking with staff. I represented the Council at the meetings in Florida, taking public comment from participants at Coconut Grove and Cape Canaveral. And while I was pleased with the turnout and the opportunity to hear from constituents, I found myself sometimes frustrated that many fishermen who chose to comment didn't focus their comments on the scoping topics. The truth is we didn't receive many substantive comments on the specific issues of allocation, annual catch limits (and other items in Snapper Grouper Amendment 17), limited access privilege programs, and quota allocation for the commercial king mackerel fishery.

But I did hear about other issues – Amendment 15B sales provisions for bag limit snapper grouper, a general consensus against reductions in the total allowable catch for king mackerel (a decision that rests on the stock assessment currently underway), the need for better data, and general information about what fishermen are seeing on the water as far as their catches. Please don't misunderstand – these were all important comments as well, which is why I accepted and encouraged them. But it would have been even more helpful to have received directed and more specific comments from participants on the scoping topics as well. Understand, scoping is where you share your suggestions for potential solutions to immediate issues facing our fisheries. Those scoping comments, based on your experience, are crucial to the Council to help in the development of alternatives which will eventually translate into regulations.

There was one general consensus at the meetings. Participants liked the informal format and appreciated having Council staff available to discuss issues and help answer questions. I have to agree. I personally appreciate the dedication of Council staff in preparing materials for the meetings and for making the demanding road trip to bring information to constituents. There was a great deal of discussion and information exchange at the staff tables. I hope that this type of dialogue can and will continue. Now that you have had the opportunity to interface with Council staff, I hope that you will contact them more freely via email or phone concerning any questions about upcoming issues. I also encourage you to contact Council members in your area as well to discuss issues. We're available and appreciate your comments – especially those that can help guide us in the management decision process.

Learn more about Council members at www.safmc.net

In the News:

Sea Grant Offers Fact Sheets on LAP Programs

"Top Ten Questions (And Answers) About Limited Access Privilege Programs" is just one of a series of fact sheets now available to help fishermen better understand how LAP Programs work and what is being considered for the South Atlantic commercial snapper grouper fishery.

The fact sheets have been developed by Sea Grant in cooperation with the Council's LAP Program Exploratory Workgroup. The Workgroup was formed earlier this year by the Council to explore options for a LAP Program and develop a working document for the Council to use in considering such a program.

Fact sheets include definitions, resources and information on possible benefits and drawbacks of a LAP Program. Copies are available on the Council's web site at www.safmc.net. Additional information about the LAP Program and Workgroup is also available on the web site.

New Toll Free Number and Other Aids to Access Federal Permit Info

Searching for information about a federal fisheries permit? The Southeast Regional Office of the National Marine Fisheries Service now has a **toll free number: 877/376-4877**

Applicants can now check on the **status of their applications for dealer and vessel permits** on the SERO web site. This information, including tables listing current holders of dealer and vessel permits can be accessed from the Constituency Services (Permits) Branch at: sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/permits/permits

Landings and Catch History Data

Landings data for many vessels commercially fishing in the southeast EEZ that have submitted logbook data may be available and requested from the NMFS Office. **A form requesting catch history** can be downloaded at the web address above.



Spanish Mackerel Trip Limits Change to Reflect Fishing Year

On February 11, 2008 the National Marine Fisheries Service published the Final Rule to change the beginning date for trip limits for Atlantic Spanish mackerel off the east coast of Florida. NMFS will begin the 3,500 lb. trip limit on March 1st each year to correspond to the beginning of the fishing year. This trip limit will be effective until November 30. From December 1 until the end of the fishing year, trip limits are adjusted according to the quota landed. This action becomes effective March 12, 2008; for all subsequent years the trip limit will begin March 1.

The fishery for the Atlantic group Spanish Mackerel is divided into northern and southern zones. The southern zone extends south along the east coast of Florida from the Georgia/Florida border to the Miami-Dade /Monroe County Line. For more information on the mackerel fishery visit: sero.nmfs.noaa.gov.

Limited Access Privilege Program Exploratory Workgroup to Make Recommendations

Workgroup will meet for the first time in conjunction with the Council to present Working Document

For the past year, members of the Limited Access Privilege (LAP) Program Exploratory Workgroup have been diligently putting together a "Working Document" for consideration by the South Atlantic Council regarding a possible LAP Program for the commercial snapper grouper fishery. During the Council's March 2008 meeting, the Workgroup will present the Working Document to the LAP Program Committee and discuss their rationale for its contents - as well as their concerns.

The Working Document summarizes the results of the Workgroup meetings. The document serves as an outline of what the LAP Workgroup would like to see a limited access privilege program look like, *if* a LAP Program is implemented for the snapper grouper fishery. The document is intended to assist the Council in deciding: 1) If a limited access privilege program is appropriate for the snapper grouper fishery; and 2) how a LAP Program might be structured.

Putting together the Working Document has not been an easy task. Workgroup members have worked through 8 multi-day meetings in the past 12 months. They've received background information on several LAP Programs implemented in other areas, including first hand information from fishermen involved in the red snapper Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) Program in the Gulf of Mexico. At each meeting, Workgroup members have hammered into shape the Working Document, outlining the possible benefits and drawbacks of an LAP Program, a goal and proposed objectives, prerequisites, design characteristics, and management options. The Working Document also includes recommendations for options other than LAP Programs for the snapper grouper fishery.

Voting members of the Workgroup include commercial fishermen representing different gear types and various fishing areas throughout the southeast, along with fish house operators, an industry organization representative, and a representative from an environmental organization. Opinions regarding the use of LAP Programs for the commercial snapper grouper fishery are as varied as the representatives on the Workgroup. There was no unanimous decision to support or oppose LAP Programs. Non-voting members include representatives from Sea Grant, NOAA Office for Law Enforcement, and the National Marine Fisheries Service.



As commercial snapper grouper fishermen face reductions in annual quotas for species such as these golden tilefish, the Council will determine if a Limited Access Privilege Program will help their fishery.

A copy of the LAP Program Working Document is available in the March 2008 meeting briefing book materials available at www.safmc.net.



Current Issues:

An Overview for 2008

Keeping track of fisheries issues can be a daunting task. At any given time, there are several amendments under various stages of development. The Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act of 2006 (approved in early 2007) prompted the development of several new amendments to fishery management plans (FMPs). This overview is designed to provide a "snap shot" of recently approved amendments to various FMPs and items currently under consideration by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. These items range from amendments and management regulations approved by the Council that are awaiting review and approval by the Secretary of Commerce - to the issues considered for public scoping in February 2008. Public scoping occurs at the beginning of the management process, providing the public an opportunity to comment on issues before the Council has decided to take any specific action.

Snapper Grouper

Snapper Grouper Amendment 14

Marine Protected Areas

Amendment 14 to the Snapper Grouper FMP will establish a series of 8 deepwater marine protected areas in the South Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone. The amendment was approved by the Council during its June 2007 meeting and submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NFMS) for approval by the Secretary of Commerce on July 18, 2007. According to an update provided by NOAA Fisheries at the December 2007 Council meeting, the document is still under review to resolve jurisdictional issues.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 15A

Rebuilding Plans for snowy grouper, black sea bass and red porgy

Amendment 15A to the Snapper Grouper FMP was approved by the Council during its December 2007 meeting and has been submitted to NMFS for approval by the Secretary of Commerce. The amendment was developed by the Council to: 1) update management reference points for snowy grouper, black sea bass, and red porgy; 2) modify rebuilding schedules for snowy grouper and black sea bass; 3) define rebuilding strategies for snowy grouper, black sea bass, and red porgy; and 4) redefine the minimum stock size threshold for the snowy grouper stock.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 15B

Modifications to sales provisions, allocations of snowy grouper and red porgy, bycatch monitoring, etc.

Amendment 15B is currently under development by the Council. A total of 10 public hearings were held in November/December 2007 and the public comment period was open until January 11, 2008. The Council is scheduled to approve Amendment 15B during its March 3-7, 2008 meeting in Jekyll Island, GA. The Amendment includes actions to:

- Modify sales provisions for bag-limit snapper grouper species;
- Reduce the effects of incidental hooking on sea turtles and smalltooth sawfish;
- Change the commercial permit renewal period and transferability requirements;
- Implement a plan to monitor and address bycatch;
- Establish management reference points, such as Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) and Optimum Yield (OY) for golden tilefish;
- Establish allocations between recreational and commercial fishermen for snowy grouper and red porgy.

Upcoming Schedule

- Council approves the final amendment document and submits to the Secretary of Commerce for review and approval - March 2008.

Current Issues

Snapper Grouper Amendment 16

Measures to end overfishing for gag grouper and vermilion snapper

During its June 2007 meeting, the Council received updated stock assessment information indicating that overfishing is occurring for gag and vermilion snapper. To end this overfishing within one year, as specified in the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act, the Council began developing Amendment 16 to end overfishing by reducing harvest of these two species. The amendment will also address allocations of gag and vermilion snapper and specify management parameters such as Optimum Yield (OY) for gag. A series of 6 public scoping meetings were held in September 2007.

Upcoming Schedule

- Approve for public hearings March 3-7, 2008 Council meeting
- Public hearings in May 2008
- Review all comments and approve actions at the June 9-13, 2008 Council meeting
- Council approves the final amendment and submits to the Secretary of Commerce - September 2008
- Regulations effective January 1, 2009

Snapper Grouper Amendment 17

Annual Catch Limits, bycatch reductions, seasonal closures, overage alternatives, etc.

This amendment was included in the February 2008 scoping process. The Scoping Document contains several options to address a variety of management issues including:

- Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) for species undergoing over fishing (including snowy grouper, golden tilefish, black sea bass, and red porgy)
- Reducing bycatch of deepwater species,
- Overage alternatives,
- A regional quota for snowy grouper,
- A 6-month seasonal closure for snowy grouper in the winter months,
- Extending the entire snapper grouper management unit northward through the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's area of jurisdiction, and
- Golden tilefish allocations.



Upcoming Schedule (Amendment 17)

- Public Scoping - February 2008
- Council reviews scoping comments and options - March & June 2008
- Approve for public hearings - September 2008
- Public hearings - October/November 2008
- Council reviews all comments and approves actions – December 2008
- Council approves the final amendment and submits to the Secretary of Commerce for review and approval - March 2009

Snapper Grouper Amendment 18

Limited Access Privilege (LAP) Program for the Commercial Snapper Grouper Fishery

The Council is exploring the use of a LAP Program for the commercial snapper grouper fishery. In January 2007, a LAP Program Exploratory Workgroup was formed to develop a Working Document to outline how such a plan may work. Members of the Workgroup consist of fishermen, fish house operators, industry leaders, environmental organizations, and non-voging members representing Sea Grant, and NOAA. The Workgroup has met regularly to formulate the Working Document and will present its recommendations to the Council during its March 2008 meeting. This amendment was included in the February 2008 scoping process.

Upcoming Schedule (tentative)

- Public Scoping - February 2008
- Final LAP Program Work Group recommendations presented to Committee and Council – March 3-7, 2008 Council meeting
- Council reviews scoping comments, LAP Program Work Group recommendations, and options – March, June & September 2008 Council meetings
- Approve for public hearings (IF Council determines to move forward) - December 1-5, 2008 Council meeting
- Public hearings – February 2009
- Review all comments and approve actions – March 2009
- Review complete document and approve for formal review by the Secretary of Commerce - June 2009
- Regulations effective January 2010

Current Issues

Coastal Migratory Pelagics (Mackerel)

Management of both king and Spanish mackerel stocks is currently shared by the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils through the joint Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagics. The following issues are currently being addressed for mackerel.

Mackerel Framework

Atlantic Spanish mackerel trip limit date change

The single action adjusts the beginning date for the 3,500 pound commercial trip limit to begin March 1, in conjunction with the fishing year.

Upcoming Schedule

- Council submitted for review and approval by the Secretary of Commerce – October 10, 2007
- Final Rule published on February 8, 2008 and becomes effective March 12, 2008. For all subsquent years, the trip limit will begin March 1.



Mackerel Amendment 18

Boundary/Mixing, Permits, & Separate FMP between Gulf and South Atlantic Councils

After reviewing comments received during public hearings held in March 2007 for the original actions in Amendment 18, the Council decided to defer further action on the amendment until after receiving the results of the 2008 stock assessment update for South Atlantic king mackerel.

The SEDAR (Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review) stock assessment program will complete the assessment by the end of 2008. Meanwhile, the Council solicited public input regarding ways to fairly allocate the South Atlantic commercial king mackerel quota during public scoping in February.

Upcoming Schedule (Amendment 18)

- Scope Commercial Quota Issue – February 2008
- Review scoping comments and options – June, September & December 2008
- Approve for Public Hearings – March 2009 (SAFMC) and then by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
- Public Hearings – 2009

Allocations

Comprehensive Allocation Amendment

Allocations between commercial and recreational sectors and possibly within each sector



The Council is considering the development of a Comprehensive Allocation Amendment to address the allocation of fishery resources between recreational and commercial user groups. Allocations within the recreational (e.g., for-hire and private) and commercial (e.g., hook-and-line, black sea bass pots, and longlines) sectors are also under consideration.

The reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the Councils establish Annual Catch Limits (pounds or numbers of fish) for each species and Accountability Measures that ensure the catch limit is not exceeded in any year by any sector. To do this the Council must allocate the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) from the stock assessment process between recreational and commercial sectors. This is being done for the species undergoing overfishing in Snapper Grouper Amendment 17 (see Snapper Grouper Amendment 17 for more details).

Options currently being considered for allocations include:

- Use of landings data from NMFS or the Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program data bases
- Catch data from stock assessments (including bycatch mortality)
- Council's judgment based on fairness and equity
- Detailed economic and social analyses

Current Issues

Upcoming Schedule (Allocations)

- Public Scoping February 2008
- Council will review scoping comments and options paper at the March 3-7, 2008 Council meeting
- Public hearings – November 2008
- Council will review public hearing comments and approve amendment at the December 1-5, 2008 Council meeting
- Council will give final approval (if necessary) and submit to the Secretary of Commerce – March 2009

Ecosystem-based Management

Fishery Ecosystem Plan and Comprehensive Amendment

The Council is in the process of developing a Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) that will act as a "source document" for implementation of subsequent Comprehensive Amendments. These amendments will provide a method to address issues across existing species- specific fishery management plans and allow for an ecosystem-based approach to management. The FEP is being built upon the Council's existing Habitat Plan and involves a number of writing teams utilizing a large number of technical experts.

The first FEP Comprehensive Amendment includes actions to:

- Update existing Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) information to address the EFH Final Rule,
- Designate new deepwater coral HAPCs to protect deepwater coral communities.

Upcoming Schedule

- Finalize Fishery Ecosystem Plan (source document)
  - Public Hearing version - January through March 2008
  - Final version – June through September 2008
- FEP Comprehensive Amendment
  - Review/Revise Draft – January through March 2008
  - Approve for Public Hearings - March 2008
  - Public Hearings – May 2008
  - Review all comments and approve all actions June 2008

Upcoming Schedule (continued)

- Review complete document and approve for submission to the Secretary of Commerce - September 2008
- Submit to the Secretary of Commerce for review and approval – October 2008
- Regulations effective January 2009

Shrimp FMP

Shrimp Amendment 7

Evaluate removing landings requirements for the South Atlantic rock shrimp fishery

Currently, rock shrimp fishermen must have landed specified quantities of rock shrimp before the end of 2007 in order to keep their South Atlantic Rock Shrimp Endorsement active. With input from the Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel and comments received from public scoping meetings held in November 2007 and January 2008, the Council will determine how to move forward to address this issue.

Upcoming Schedule

- Council will review scoping comments and options paper– March 2008
- Approve document for public hearings – June 2008
- Public Hearings – August 2008
- Review Public Hearing input & approve actions – September 2008
- Council approval and submission to the Secretary of Commerce – December 2008

(Continued next page)



(Continued from page 7)

Current Issues

Spiny Lobster FMP

Spiny Lobster Import Amendment

Addressing consistency in size requirements for imported spiny lobster

Spiny Lobster are managed jointly by the South Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils. With the Caribbean Council taking the lead, the councils are proposing an amendment to address the importation of spiny lobster products that do not meet U.S. conservation standards.

Upcoming Schedule

- Scoping – February 2008 (separate from the series of scoping meetings)
- Review scoping and draft document – March 2008
- Approve for public hearings – June 2008
- Public hearings – July 2008
- SAFMC reviews comments and approves document for formal review – September 2008
- Final document sent to Secretary of Commerce – October 2008
- Final rule effective – end of February 2009



Public Scoping Meetings ***(Continued from page 1)***

Coconut Grove, Florida to New Bern, North Carolina. Staff members distributed information and answered questions in informal surroundings during a period of five hours beginning in the afternoon and extending into the early evening. Local Council members were on hand to receive comments from participants. These comments were recorded and distributed to all Council members for consideration.

Participants at the first meeting in Coconut Grove, Florida included representatives from both recreational and commercial sectors interested in allocation issues, LAP Programs, and other scoping topics. Several members of the Islamorada Charter Captain's Association attended and asked to express their opinions on the separate issue of sales provisions for fish caught under the bag limit in the snapper grouper fishery. The Council is considering eliminating a current provision that allows for the sale of these fish by fishermen with proper commercial state permits through Amendment 15B (see page 10). "We realize the formal comment period for this issue has ended," said Captain Ray Rosher, a charter captain from the Miami area. "But for many of us, this is the best opportunity we've had to let the Council know how harmful the elimination of this sales provision will be to our charter fleets and we appreciate the chance to speak."



Deputy Director Gregg Waugh disCusses allocation and king mackerel quota issues during the scoping meeting in Cape Canaveral, Florida. Over 100 fishermen attended the meeting and were given the opportunity to talk informally with staff and Council members about their concerns and questions.

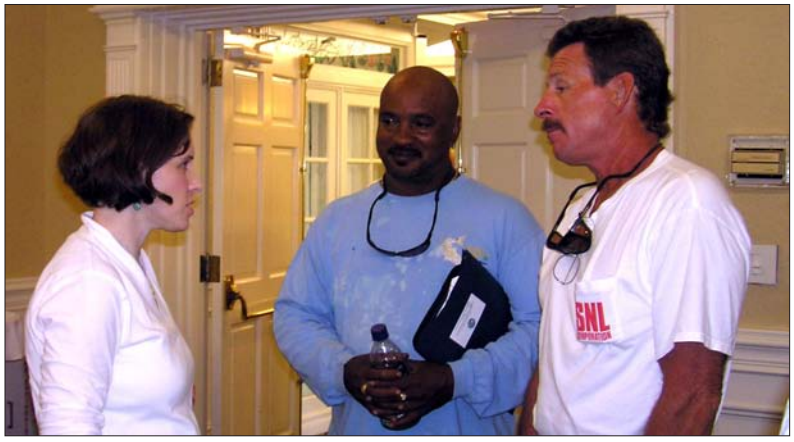
In Cape Canaveral, the focus was on the king mackerel fishery as over 100 participants filled the room to capacity. With the Gulf king mackerel quota nearing its closure, commercial mackerel fishermen took the day off from fishing and expressed concerns about possible reductions in the Total Allowable Catch for Atlantic group king mackerel. Fishermen had lots of questions for SEDAR stock assessment coordinator John Carmichael regarding the stock assessment process, generally expressing opinions that the king mackerel fishery is healthy and reductions are not needed. "While we may not always agree with the message, I think this is one of the best meetings the Council has had," said Jim Busse, owner of Seafood Atlantic in Port Canaveral. "The informal structure allowed me to talk with Gregg Waugh [Deputy Director] about alternatives for the king mackerel fishery that

Public Scoping Meetings *(Continued)*

may keep the fishery viable throughout the year, even if reductions in the TAC are coming."

Although they didn't number in the hundreds, Council Vice-Chairman Duane Harris was pleased with the turnout of participants at the meeting in Brunswick, Georgia. Charter and head boat operators from as far away as St. Augustine attended the meeting, learning more about issues and providing comments. Members from Georgia's Coastal Conservation Association spoke on behalf of their membership, supporting measures in the Comprehensive Allocation Amendment. "From my perspective, the meeting went very well," said Vice-Chairman Harris. "I am very pleased with this process and think it will serve the public and Council very well in the future."

Council staff economist Kate Quigley was busy at each meeting location answering questions and concerns about a proposed Limited Access Privilege Program for the commercial snapper grouper fishery. Fishermen holding federal permits spoke informally with Kate to learn more about how such a program may work and how it could affect their fishing practices. Kate used the opportunity to talk about the LAP Program Exploratory Workgroup and how the Workgroup's recommendations, along with comments received during the scoping process, will help to guide the Council in its decision on whether to pursue such a program. Fact sheets developed by Sea Grant were also distributed to provide background information on LAP Programs.



Kate Quigley, the Council's staff economist discusses Limited Access Privilege Programs with fishermen during a break at the Cape Canaveral, Florida scoping meeting. The meeting format allowed for informal discussions between staff and participants.

Fishermen were also interested in Amendment 17 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan that has implications for both recreational and commercial fishermen. The amendment addresses possible reductions for red snapper, greater amberjack, and mutton snapper as stock assessment results become available later this year. Staff fishery biologist Rick DeVictor helped to explain requirements outlined in the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act to specify annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) for fisheries subject to overfishing by 2010. Amendment 17 will specify these measures for several species, including red snapper, greater amberjack, mutton snapper, snowy grouper, golden tilefish, black sea bass, and others.

Over 250 informational packets were distributed at the meetings along with copies of the scoping documents and fact sheets. These materials are available at www.safmc.net. While the public comment period for this round of scoping ended on February 22, 2008, additional public hearings and comment periods will follow for those items the Council chooses to move forward with following its March 3-7, 2008 meeting in Jekyll Island, Georgia.



Fishermen listen intently as staff coral biologist Myra Brouwer discusses proposed deepwater coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern off the southeastern coast during the public scoping meeting in Brunswick, Georgia.

"I think the process went well. We received a lot of good, informed comments from fishermen. Several mentioned they appreciated having direct access to staff and Council members. We all were able to interact in a one on one or small group basis. While participants may not agree with everything the Council does, at least they know we were listening to them because we were able to engage in conversation with them. I believe the interchange helped both sides to understand, even when there might not have been agreement. Personally, I see that as a step forward."

Dr. Brian Cheuvront, Council representative from the NC Division of Marine Fisheries

Fishermen's Comments Center Around Sales Provisions for Bag Limit Fish

Council to review all comments on Snapper Grouper Amendment 15 B at March meeting and is scheduled to make a decision on final approval

The Council is scheduled to make a decision on final approval of Amendment 15B to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan during its March meeting. If approved, the amendment would eliminate a long standing provision allowing the sale of bag limit snapper grouper species by fishermen in the South Atlantic region who hold the proper state commercial permits.

A series of 10 public hearings were held in November and December of last year to solicit comments on this and other actions in Amendment 15B, the final occurring at the Council's December meeting in Atlantic Beach, North Carolina. The public comment period was open until January 11, 2008. Although the amendment contains several actions, the majority of comments received pertained to the measure that would require a federal commercial Snapper Grouper Permit in order to sell harvested snapper grouper species. Currently, fishermen with the proper state commercial licenses may sell the recreational bag limit of snapper grouper species caught in federal waters in the South Atlantic Council's area of jurisdiction.

"Our primary income isn't from snapper grouper sales, but with rising operation costs and declining business, being able to sell our leftover fish is one of the small things that allows us to operate a successful business."
Captain Nick Stanczyk,
Bud and Mary's Marina
Islamorada, Florida

The Council believes that removing the economic incentive to target fish by those without the federal permit may avoid an early closure to the commercial fishery and possibly aid in the recovery of stocks currently undergoing overfishing and/or in an overfished state. All landings that are sold count against the commercial quota, regardless of whether the fisherman has a federal permit. Sale of bag limit caught fish by anglers becomes more significant as regulations have become more restrictive over the years and additional restrictions are anticipated for some species, including vermilion snapper and gag grouper. The Council also believes that the measure should improve accuracy of data by eliminating the possible "double counting" of fish that are reported through recreational surveys and commercial dealers.

The Law Enforcement Advisory Panel has stated its support in the past for requiring a federal permit to sell any species under the Council's jurisdiction, saying the measure would aid law enforcement by reducing the universe of people that could legally sell fish. In addition, in the Gulf of Mexico and in state waters off the east coast of Florida, a commercial federal permit is required to sell fish. Compatible regulations will improve sales provisions in both areas.

Some individual and agency comments agree with the Council's preferred alternative to eliminate the sales provision. The Environmental Protection Agency concurred that fish caught from charters should not be sold or purchased as they may be registered as commercial landings. The NC Division of Marine Fisheries commented, saying they believe that eliminating the sale of the recreational bag limit could effectively extend a shortened season for snapper grouper species and insure the fishermen who have shouldered much of the regulatory burden will be able to share in the rewards of rebuilt stocks. Some individual comments submitted concurred. "Fish sold here by the charter fleet have really hurt my markets (restaurants mainly)," stated Robert Harrison, a commercial fisherman in Hatteras, North Carolina. "These boats have already been paid for for the day and can afford to greatly underprice me."



Fishermen who sell their bag-limit snapper grouper catches will face changes to the current regulations if Snapper Grouper Amendment 15B is approved. The amendment will require a federal permit to sell any snapper grouper species.

However, the majority of those who commented on the issue were against the Council taking action to require the federal permit in order to sell catch because of economic hardships. Some fishermen, despite not having a Federal Snapper Grouper permit, have state commercial licenses and believe they should be able to sell their harvest up to the recreational bag limits. They consider themselves commercial fishermen, as most of their income is derived from fishing activities. Some hold other federal permits (King and Spanish Mackerel, Dolphin/Wahoo) and augment their income with the sale of bag limit species.

Charter operators, particularly in the Florida Keys, also anticipate economic hardships with the federal permit requirement. They reported that the ability of charter/headboat vessels to sell their recreational catch is a historic practice and crews are financially dependent on the practice as are local restaurants. "The additional income that is derived from the sale of fish that our customers leave is crucial to the existence of our already difficult business," wrote Captain Rob Dixon of Islamorada, Florida, citing rising fuel costs and a weakening economy.

The Council will receive updated economic data regarding the impacts of eliminating the sales provision and review all comments received during the public comment period. The Council is scheduled to give final approval for Amendment 15B during the March meeting and will hold one final comment period before making its decision.

Final Public Comment on Amendment 15B
Friday, March 7, 2008
8:15 am
Jekyll Island, GA

Understanding Data Collection and the Stock Assessment Process

Many questions received during the public scoping meetings revolved around the need to reduce harvest of some species based on stock assessments. Fishermen questioned the stock assessment process and wanted to know more about data collection. Many expressed doubt in assessments that show declines in species, while they report increases in the numbers of fish and observe what they consider to be healthy stocks.

The next issue of the Update will focus on data collection and the stock assessment process. We'll interview SEDAR Stock Assessment Coordinator, John Carmichael and learn some of the most frequently asked questions he received while on the road in February. There will be updates on recreational data collection, the latest SEDAR schedule, and more.

SAFMC Meeting Dates and Locations 2008 Schedule

March 3-7, 2008
Jekyll Island Club Hotel
371 Riverview Drive
Jekyll Island, GA 31527
Phone: 1-800-535-9547

June 8-13, 2008
Renaissance Orlando Hotel Airport
5445 Forbes Place
Orlando, Florida 32812
Phone: 1-800-228-9290

September 15-19, 2008
Charleston Marriott Hotel
170 Lockwood Boulevard
Charleston, SC 29403
Phone: 1-800-968-3569

Nov 30-Dec 5, 2008
Hilton Wilmington Riverside
301 N. Water Street
Wilmington, NC 28401
Phone: 1-888-324-8170

Acronyms

ABC - Allowable Biological Catch

ACCSP - Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program

AP - Advisory Panel

ASMFC - Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

BRD - Bycatch Reduction Device

CPUE - Catch Per Unit Effort

EEZ - Exclusive Economic Zone

EFH - Essential Fish Habitat

EFH/HAPC - Essential Fish Habitat/ Habitat Area of Particular Concern

FMP - Fishery Management Plan

HMS - Highly Migratory Species

ITQ - Individual Transferable Quota

LAP - Limited Access Privilege

MSY - Maximum Sustainable Yield

MRFSS - Marine Recreational Fishing Statistics Survey

NMFS - National Marine Fisheries Service

OY - Optimum Yield

SEDAR - Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (stock assessment process)

SSC - Scientific & Statistical Committee

SFA - Sustainable Fisheries Act

TAC - Total Allowable Catch

VMS - Vessel Monitoring System

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting



March 3-7, 2008

Jekyll Island Club
371 Riverview Drive
Jekyll Island, GA
Phone: 800/535-9547 or 912/635-2600

For a detailed agenda contact the Council office toll free at 1-866 SAFMC-10 or 843/571-4366. The agenda is also available on the Council's web site www.safmc.net

MEETING AGENDA

Monday	**1:00 - 6:00**	**Joint LAP Program Workgroup and Committee Meeting**
	6:30 - 7:30	**Redstone Consulting Group Presentation on Limited Access Privilege Programs**
Tuesday	**8:00 - 12:00**	**LAP Program Committee Meeting**
	1:30 - 2:30	**Exec/Finance Committee Meeting**
	2:30 - 6:30	**Snapper Grouper Committee Meeting**
-Concurrent Session -		
	1:00 - 6:00	**Law Enforcement AP Meeting**
Wednesday	**8:00 - 12:00**	**Snapper Grouper Committee Meeting *(continued)***
	1:30 - 5:30	**Jt. Habitat/Ecosystem Committee Meeting**
Thursday	**8:00 - 10:00**	**Spiny Lobster Committee Meeting**
	10:00 - 12:00	**Shrimp Committee Meeting**
	1:30 - 3:30	**Allocation Committee Meeting**
	3:30 - 4:30	**SOPPs Committee Meeting**
	4:30 - 5:30	**SSC Selection Committee Meeting *(Closed)***
	5:30 - 6:30	**Pesonnel Committee Meeting *(Closed)***
Friday	**8:00 - 12:30**	**Council Session**

www.safmc.net

Mark your calendar...

2008

March 24-27	***Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Tech Meeting Week*** Baltimore, MD www.asmfc.org
April 7-11	***Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Meeting*** Baton Rouge, LA www.gulfcouncil.org
April 8-10	***Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting*** Annapolis, MD www.mafmc.org
June 8-13	***South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting*** Orlando, FL www.safmc.net
July 7-11	***International Coral Reef Symposium*** Ft. Lauderdale, FL www.nova.edu/ncri/icrs/index.html

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting
March 3-7, 2008
Jekyll Island, GA

NOTE: **Public Comment Scheduled for Snapper Grouper Amendment 15B**
Modification to the sales provision for bag-limit snapper grouper, allocations, bycatch and more
Overview of 2008 Issues
See inside for details

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic And Atmospheric Administration

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