Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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NOAA Fisheries Service Announces Approval and Effective Dates for South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper Trip Limits and Bag Limit

NOAA Fisheries Service will publish a final rule on June 15, 2011, implementing management measures to prevent the progressive shortening of fishing seasons for black sea bass, gag, and vermilion snapper, and to increase the trip limit for greater amberjack.

Harvest restrictions implemented through recent amendments to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP) have resulted in some reduced quotas and effort shifts causing derby-fisheries for black sea bass and vermilion snapper to develop. The potential also exists for a derby commercial fishery to develop for gag. Additionally, the quota for greater amberjack has never been met under the current trip limit of 1,000 pounds (lbs) gutted weight. (gw). To address these issues, Regulatory Amendment 9 to the FMP (Regulatory Amendment 9) was developed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and NOAA Fisheries Service.

The Final Rule for Regulatory Amendment 9 will:

- Reduce the recreational bag limit for black sea bass from 15 fish per person to 5 fish per person;
- Establish a commercial trip limit of 1,000 lbs gw for gag;
- Establish a commercial trip limit of 1,500 lbs gw for vermilion snapper; and
- Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack from 1,000 lbs gw to 1,200 lbs gw.

Changes from the Proposed Rule

The proposed rule contained an action to split the commercial quota for black sea bass into two six-month seasons (June-November and December-May) in order to extend fishing opportunities during the fishing year. However, during the proposed rule comment period, NOAA Fisheries Service received new information from the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) indicating that saving a portion of the commercial black sea bass quota for the December-May season would result in the presence of numerous vertical black sea bass pot buoy lines within the endangered northern right whale migration route during the time of year when the whales are transiting off the Southeast coast. Though no marine mammal interactions with black sea bass pot gear have been documented, allowing an increased risk of right whale entanglement is inconsistent with the goals of the ALWTRT and recent scientific information suggests they are more vulnerable to entanglement in Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic fisheries than previously thought. Therefore, NOAA Fisheries Service determined it was not appropriate to approve the split season quota at this time.

Effective Dates

- The black sea bass recreational bag limit reduction will be effective June 22, 2011.
- The commercial trip limits for gag and vermilion snapper and the commercial trip limit increase for greater amberjack will be effective July 15, 2011.
- The split season quotas for the black sea bass commercial sector will not be implemented at this time.

Addresses

Electronic copies of final rule may be obtained from the e-Rulemaking Portal at http://www.regulations.gov, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Web site at http://www.safmc.net, or:

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More Information

For more information on Regulatory Amendment 9 please refer to the Regulatory Amendment 9 Frequently Asked Questions or the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Web page at: www.safmc.net.