



AMENDMENT 17A

to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region and Draft Environmental Impact Statement Summary

SUMMARY

Background

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) instructs the Regional Fishery Management Councils and NOAA Fisheries Service to prevent overfishing while achieving optimum yield (OY) from each fishery. When it is determined a stock is undergoing overfishing, measures must be implemented to end overfishing in one year. In cases where stocks are overfished, the Councils and NMFS must implement rebuilding plans.

The most recent assessment for the red snapper stock in the South Atlantic indicates that the stock is experiencing overfishing and is overfished (SEDAR 15, 2008). A benchmark assessment for red snapper is scheduled for 2010.

Purpose and need of the proposed action

The *purpose* of Amendment 17A to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP) is to implement long-term management measures expected to end overfishing of the red snapper stock in the South Atlantic immediately upon implementation and to rebuild the stock ultimately achieving optimum yield (OY) while minimizing to the extent practicable adverse social and economic effects. However, the provision in the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act, requiring the Councils to end overfishing in one year, overrides all other considerations.

The *need* of the action is to allow the stock to increase in biomass in order to maximize its reproductive potential so that the population may produce the OY. OY, the ultimate goal of any fishery management plan, is the portion of the fish stock that provides the greatest economic, social, and ecological benefit to the nation.

Description of All Alternatives in the Amendment

There are five categories of actions in Amendment 17A:

- (1) Maximum sustainable yield proxy for red snapper
- (2) Red snapper rebuilding plan
 - a. Rebuilding schedule
 - b. Rebuilding strategy and optimum yield
- (3) Red snapper management measures
- (4) Require the use of circle hooks
- (5) Establish a red snapper monitoring program

Description of Red Snapper Management Measure Preferred Alternatives

Alternative 4D (Preferred) Prohibit all commercial and recreational fishing for, harvest, and possession, of red snapper year-round in the South Atlantic EEZ. Prohibition of red snapper applies in the South Atlantic on board a vessel for which a valid Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper grouper has been issued, without regard to where such species were harvested, i.e., in state or Federal waters. Prohibit commercial and recreational fishing for, harvest, and possession, of species in the snapper grouper FMU year-round in an area that includes commercial logbook grids 2880, 2980, 3080, 3179, 3180, 3278, and 3279 between an approximate depth of 98 feet (16 fathoms; 30 m) to 300 feet (50 fathoms; 91 m), or 10,293 sq miles (26 659 km²), using the bathymetric boundary, of the South Atlantic EEZ (Figure 2-8; see Figure 1 below). Coordinates for the closure are shown in the amendment.

Alternative 5 (Preferred). Allow fishing for, harvest, and possession of snapper grouper species (with exception of red snapper) in the closed area if fish were harvested with black sea bass pots with endorsements.

Alternative 7 (Preferred). Allow fishing for, harvest, and possession of snapper grouper species (with the exception of red snapper) in the closed area if fish were harvested with spearfishing gear.

Alternative 8. Allow transit through areas closed to snapper grouper harvest.

Sub-alternative 8a (Preferred). The prohibition on possession does not apply to a person aboard a vessel that is in transit with snapper grouper species on board and with fishing gear appropriately stowed.

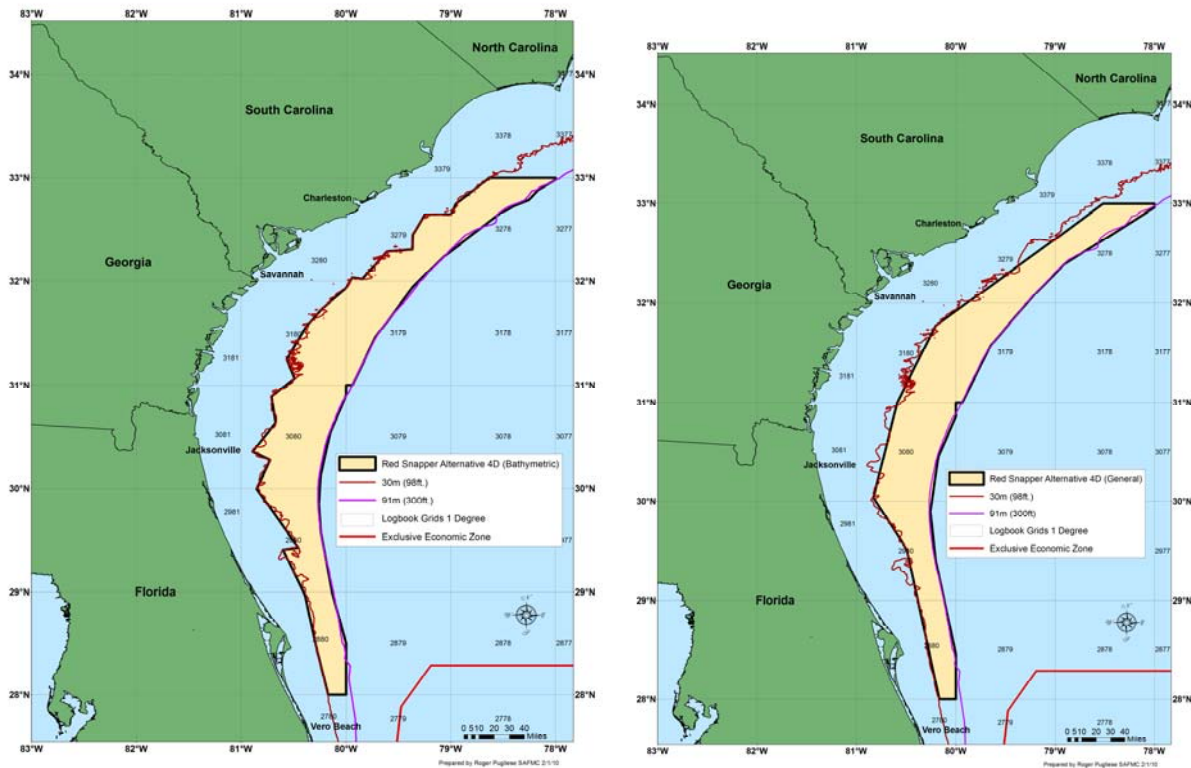


Figure 1. Map 1 of proposed closed area under Alternative 4D. Map 2 using generalized boundary for proposed closed area under Alternative 4D. The Council will decide at their March 2010 meeting which boundaries to use.

Timeline

The Council will discuss Amendment 17A at their March Meeting. The plan is for NMFS to file the Draft Environment Impact Statement (DEIS) before the March meeting. NMFS may extend the red snapper interim regulations (the regulations are to expire June 2, 2010) for an additional 186 days as per the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The plan is for the Amendment 17A regulations to be implemented January 2011 before the interim regulations would expire (if extended).

Upcoming Red Snapper Assessment

The SEDAR Steering Committee recommended that the planned update of South Atlantic red snapper be conducted as a benchmark, and that the process be expedited for presentation to the Council in December 2010. The benchmark process is the more appropriate approach for this assessment, as it will allow thorough consideration of numerous red snapper assessment issues raised by the South Atlantic Council in December 2009. Conducting a benchmark assessment will allow the workshop panels greater flexibility to incorporate new research and data sources and to reconsider key assessment assumptions

in light of current information. Moreover, the benchmark process includes an independent peer review, which will help ensure that the methods and results are valid and robust, and offers increased opportunity for public input.