



MAGNUSON - STEVENS ACT/NEPA SCOPING DOCUMENT

AMENDMENT 17 TO THE SNAPPER GROUPER FMP

JANUARY 2008

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Scoping meetings are less formal than public hearings and occur prior to the Council taking any position on a management issue. When the Council is considering the need for management, scoping meetings provide an opportunity for members of the public to make suggestions BEFORE the Council has made any decisions.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is soliciting public input on possible options under consideration by the Council. The Council is considering (a) responding to assessments for red snapper, greater amberjack, and mutton snapper; (b) specifying annual catch limits for species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit currently undergoing overfishing; (c) specifying accountability measures as appropriate; (d) removing species from the fishery management unit as appropriate; (e) extending the management unit through the Mid-Atlantic Council's area (through NY); and (f) other miscellaneous items.

NEED FOR ACTION

Recent Assessments

Stock assessments in the South Atlantic are conducted through the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) program. The assessments provide an evaluation of stock health under the current management regime and other potential future harvest conditions. More specifically, the assessments provide an estimation of the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and a determination of the stock status (whether overfishing is occurring and whether the stock is overfished). Following the assessment, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviews the information and advises the Council on whether the stock assessment was performed utilizing the best available data and whether the outcome of the assessment is suitable for management purposes.

Red snapper, greater amberjack, and mutton snapper stocks in the South Atlantic are currently being assessed. The Council and the Council's SSC will review the assessment results at the June 2008 Council Meeting. Early indications are that the Council will need to implement management measures to reduce fishing mortality of red snapper in order to end overfishing and rebuild the stock. **Amendment 17 will contain actions to reduce fishing mortality and establish rebuilding plans as appropriate, in addition to establishing MSY and Optimum Yield (OY) for red snapper, greater amberjack, and mutton snapper.**

Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures

Revisions to the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 2006 require that by 2010, FMPs for fisheries determined by the Secretary to be subject to overfishing must establish a mechanism for specifying annual catch limits (ACLs) at a level that prevents overfishing and does not exceed the recommendations of the respective Council's SSC or other established peer review processes. These FMPs also are required to establish within this time frame measures to ensure accountability. Accountability measures are management controls that ensure that the ACLs are not exceeded; examples include corrective measures if overages occur and implementation of an in-season monitoring program (Table 1). By 2011, FMPs for all other fisheries, except fisheries for species with annual life cycles, must meet these requirements. **Amendment 17 will specify ACLs and including accountability measures for species undergoing overfishing and for the three recently assessed species:**

- (a) Red snapper
- (b) Greater amberjack
- (c) Mutton snapper
- (d) Snowy grouper (overfishing should end in 2009)
- (e) Golden tilefish (overfishing should end in 2007)
- (f) Black sea bass (overfishing should end in 2009)
- (g) Red grouper (undergoing overfishing)
- (h) Black grouper (undergoing overfishing)
- (i) Speckled hind (undergoing overfishing)
- (j) Warsaw grouper (undergoing overfishing).

Table 1. Miscellaneous issues under consideration by the Council.

	Species	Proposed Actions
Changes to management regulations	Snowy Grouper	Six month seasonal closure for snowy grouper over winter months.
		Reduce bycatch of deepwater species (restrict the number of hooks in the deepwater recreational fishery).
		Establish regional quotas for snowy grouper.
		Lottery permit system
		One snowy per vessel (recreational).
	Golden Tilefish	Change golden tilefish fishing year/remove 300 lb trip limit
		Prohibit longline gear when reach 300 lb trip limit
		Reduce bycatch of deepwater species (restrict the number of hooks in the deepwater recreational fishery)
	Black Sea Bass	Adjust requirements related to fishing with black sea bass pots
	Speckled Hind	Reduce bycatch of deepwater species (restrict the number of hooks in the deepwater recreational fishery)
Warsaw Grouper	Reduce bycatch of deepwater species (restrict the number of hooks in the deepwater recreational fishery)	
Changes to data collection/monitoring process	Would Apply to All Species in Snapper Grouper FMU	Include current overage alternatives developed by the Council.
		Commercial sector – track landings using logbooks, dealer reports & trip tickets; close fishery when quota projected to be met; incorporate PQBM.
		Recreational sector – track landings using MRFSS & Headboat; change regulations and/or close fishery when allocation projected to be met; incorporate PQBM.
		Improve recreational catch data – for-hire logbooks; private recreational logbooks.
		Improve biological sampling – specify numbers of sample by species to be collected and analyzed with deadlines based on SEDAR assessment schedule. Improve bycatch data – fully implement ACCSP.
		Improve fishery independent surveys.

Fishery Management Unit

The Council is considering action to remove some species from the fishery management unit (FMU), particularly those that have a low occurrence in federal waters. The FMU defined by each regional fishery management council FMP identifies the specific fishery (or that portion thereof) that is relevant to the FMP's management objectives. Decisions about the composition of FMUs are an integral part of the plan development process, as FMUs define the specific species that are to be the target of conservation and management. The South Atlantic Council's Snapper Grouper FMU is currently composed of 73 species as listed in Appendix B. The purpose of this action is to ensure that fishery managers focus their attention and resources on species that are in need of conservation and management and to allow transfer management to agencies that are more appropriate.

Extension of Snapper Grouper Regulations

The Council is concerned about a northward expansion of a fishery for snapper and grouper species, resulting in large catches of tilefish and groupers. For example, the Council's Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel presented information documenting increasing catches of blueline tilefish and snowy grouper off the coast of Virginia. In addition, Virginia reported state records of recreationally-caught blueline tilefish and snowy grouper. (The Virginia Marine Resources Commission has since established commercial and recreational limits on the harvest and landing of tilefish and grouper off the coast of Virginia.) **In response, the Council is considering extending the range of the snapper grouper fishery management plan north through the Mid-Atlantic Council's area of authority; black sea bass, scup, and golden tilefish will continue with the current boundaries.**

**SNAPPER GROUPER AMENDMENT 17
PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING SITES AND DATES**

Scoping meetings will be held from 2:00 P.M – 5:00 P.M. and from 6:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M. at the following locations. Written comments must be received by 5 P.M on February 22, 2008. The Council accepts comments sent by mail, fax, or E-mail (SGAm17Scoping@safmc.net).

<p><u>Monday, February 4, 2008</u> The Mutiny Hotel 2951 South Bayshore Drive Coconut Grove, Florida 33133 Phone: 305-441-2100</p>	<p><u>Tuesday, February 5, 2008</u> Radisson Resort at the Port 8701 Astronaut Boulevard Cape Canaveral, Florida 32920 Phone: 321-784-0000</p>
<p><u>Wednesday, February 6, 2008</u> Quality Inn – Stellar Conference Center 125 Venure Drive Brunswick, Georgia 31525 Phone: 912-265-4600</p>	<p><u>Thursday, February 7, 2008</u> Sheraton New Bern 100 Middle Street New Bern, North Carolina 28560 Phone: 252-638-3585</p>
<p><u>Wednesday, February 20, 2008</u> Hilton Garden Inn 5265 International Blvd. North Charleston, South Carolina 29418 Phone: 843-308-9331</p>	

Council staff and local Council representatives will be on hand to answer questions concerning Amendment 17 and other topics covered during this series of scoping meetings. Members of the public will have the opportunity to provide comments on the record at any time during the hours posted above.

Other topics being covered during these scoping meetings include 1) Allocations for all fisheries; 2) a possible Limited Access Privilege (LAP) Program for the commercial snapper grouper fishery; and 3) allocation of the commercial king mackerel quota. Copies of the scoping documents for these topics can be accessed at www.safmc or by contacting the Council office.

What Next?

Comments must be provided to the Council by 5 P.M. on February 22, 2008. All comments will be considered by the Council in drafting Amendment 17 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. There will be a number of opportunities to provide public input if the Council moves forward to develop an amendment. A simplified schematic of the Council process is presented in Appendix C.

Timing for Snapper Grouper Amendment 17:

- Scoping through February 22, 2008.
- Council reviews scoping comments and Options Paper & provides direction to Staff/Team – March 3-7, 2008 meeting in Jekyll Island, GA.
- Scientific & Statistical Committee reviews Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement – June 8-10, 2008 meeting in Orlando, FL.
- Council reviews Options Paper & provides direction to Staff/Team – June 9-13, 2008 meeting in Orlando, FL.
- Council approves Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement for public hearings – September 15-19, 2008 meeting in Orlando, FL.
- Public hearings – October 2008.
- Review informal & public hearing comments and DEIS comments and approve all actions – December 1-5, 2008 meeting in Wilmington, NC.
- Review complete document and approve for formal review by the Secretary of Commerce – March 2-6, 2009 meeting in Savannah, GA.

**Appendix A. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council 2007-2008 Membership.
The names of the Council Members who serve on the Snapper Grouper Committee
appear in bold.**

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Appendix B: Species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit.

Almaco jack, *Seriola rivoliana*
Atlantic spadefish, *Chaetodipterus faber*
Banded rudderfish, *Seriola zonata*
Bank sea bass, *Centropristis ocyurus*
Bar jack, *Caranx ruber*
Black grouper, *Mycteroperca bonaci*
Black margate, *Anisotremus surinamensis*
Black sea bass, *Centropristis striata*
Black snapper, *Apsilus dentatus*
Blackfin snapper, *Lutjanus buccanella*
Blue runner, *Caranx crysos*
Blueline tilefish, *Caulolatilus microps*
Bluestriped grunt, *Haemulon sciurus*
Coney, *Cephalopholis fulva*
Cottonwick, *Haemulon melanurum*
Crevalle jack, *Caranx hippos*
Cubera snapper, *Lutjanus cyanopterus*
Dog snapper, *Lutjanus jocu*
French grunt, *Haemulon flavolineatum*
Gag, *Mycteroperca microlepis*
Golden tilefish, *Lopholatilus chamaeleonticeps*
Goliath grouper, *Epinephelus itajara*
Grass porgy, *Calamus arctifrons*
Gray (mangrove) snapper, *Lutjanus griseus*
Gray triggerfish, *Balistes capriscus*
Graysby, *Cephalopholis cruentata*
Greater amberjack, *Seriola dumerili*
Hogfish, *Lachnolaimus maximus*
Jolthead porgy, *Calamus bajonado*
Knobbed porgy, *Calamus nodosus*
Lane snapper, *Lutjanus synagris*
Lesser amberjack, *Seriola fasciata*
Longspine porgy, *Stenotomus caprinus*
Mahogany snapper, *Lutjanus mahogoni*
Margate, *Haemulon album*
Misty grouper, *Epinephelus mystacinus*
Mutton snapper, *Lutjanus analis*

Nassau grouper, *Epinephelus striatus*
Ocean triggerfish, *Canthidermis sufflamen*

Porkfish, *Anisotremus virginicus*
Puddingwife, *Halichoeres radiatus*
Queen snapper, *Etelis oculatus*
Queen triggerfish, *Balistes vetula*
Red grouper, *Epinephelus morio*
Red hind, *Epinephelus guttatus*
Red porgy, *Pagrus pagrus*
Red snapper, *Lutjanus campechanus*
Rock hind, *Epinephelus adscensionis*
Rock Sea Bass, *Centropristis philadelphica*
Sailors choice, *Haemulon parra*
Sand tilefish, *Malacanthus plumieri*
Saucereye porgy, *Calamus calamus*
Scamp, *Mycteroperca phenax*
Schoolmaster, *Lutjanus apodus*
Scup, *Stenotomus chrysops*
Sheepshead, *Archosargus probatocephalus*
Silk snapper, *Lutjanus vivanus*
Smallmouth grunt, *Haemulon chrysargyreum*
Snowy grouper, *Epinephelus niveatus*
Spanish grunt, *Haemulon macrostomum*
Speckled hind, *Epinephelus drummondhayi*
Tiger grouper, *Mycteroperca tigris*
Tomtate, *Haemulon aurolineatum*
Yellow jack, *Caranx bartholomaei*
Yellowedge grouper, *Epinephelus flavolimbatus*
Yellowfin grouper, *Mycteroperca venenosa*
Yellowmouth grouper, *Mycteroperca interstitialis*
Yellowtail snapper, *Ocyurus chrysurus*
Vermilion snapper, *Rhomboplites aurorubens*
Warsaw grouper, *Epinephelus nigritus*
White grunt, *Haemulon plumieri*
Whitebone porgy, *Calamus leucosteus*
Wreckfish, *Polyprion americanus*

Appendix C. A Simplified Schematic of the Council Process.

