



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

News Release

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Increases to Black Sea Bass Annual Catch Limits Under Consideration *Council plans special meeting via webinar May 13, 2013 to address increase; public comment open*

Fishermen eagerly waiting for the black sea bass season to open in offshore waters on June 1, 2013 have an opportunity to comment on management measures that may increase the length of this year's fishing season. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is currently accepting public comment on measures to increase the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) for both commercial and recreational fishermen. A recent stock assessment shows that the black sea bass stock in the South Atlantic is no longer undergoing overfishing, is not overfished, and the stock is rebuilt. The proposed increases are based on recommendations from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee.

The changes would be implemented through Regulatory Amendment 19 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The amendment includes two alternatives for increasing the current ACL of 847,000 pounds (all weights are in whole weight). Alternative 2 would allow the ACL to increase to 2,133,000 pounds in 2013. This value is equal to the Acceptable Biological Catch as recommended by the SSC. Under Alternative 2, the ACL would be reduced to 1,992,000 pounds in 2014 and to 1,814,000 pounds in 2015.

Alternative 3 would allow for an increase in the ACL to 1,756,450 pounds in 2013. Because the alternative provides for a buffer between the ABC and ACL that accounts for management uncertainty and the assessment suggests that this level of harvest can be maintained indefinitely, the ACL would remain at that level until modified. The current allocation for black sea bass is 43% commercial and 57% recreational.

The amendment also proposes a seasonal closure (November 1 through April 30) of the commercial black sea bass pot fishery to address possible gear interactions with large whale migration and right whale calving season. The Council will consider public comment before making any decisions.

In order to help expedite the proposed increase to the black sea bass catch limits for the 2013 fishing season, the Council will hold a **special one-day meeting via webinar** on **Monday, May 13, 2013**. The meeting is scheduled from 1:00 PM until 5:00 PM. In addition to black sea bass management, the Council will address proposed measures affecting Gulf of Mexico For-Hire Federal Permit holders due to joint management plan requirements. Public comment will be taken during the meeting. Additional details about the webinar, including instructions for registering and providing comment, are available from the Council's website at www.safmc.net. A copy of Regulatory Amendment 19 is also available from the Council's website. Public comment should be emailed to SGRegAm19Comments@safmc.net or mailed to Robert Mahood, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, North Charleston, SC 29405. **Comments are due to the Council office by May 10, 2013.**

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils, conserves and manages fish stocks from three to 200 miles offshore of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida.