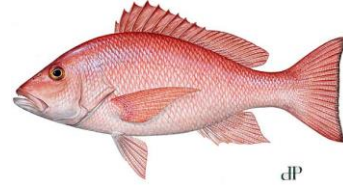




South Atlantic Fishery Bulletin

Bringing Fishing News to You



FB17-061

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CONTACT: Sustainable Fisheries, 727-824-5305

NOAA Announces 2017 Limited Opening of Recreational and Commercial Red Snapper Fishery in South Atlantic Federal Waters

KEY MESSAGE:

- Red snapper recreational and commercial seasons will open in South Atlantic federal waters for limited harvest in 2017 through emergency action.
- The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council requested the opening after recent scientific information indicated a large increase in the size of the red snapper population since 2010.
- NOAA Fisheries determined the limited harvest in 2017 is neither expected to result in overfishing, nor prevent continued rebuilding of the population.

WHEN RULE WILL TAKE EFFECT:

- The **recreational sector** will open for harvest on weekends only (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) on the following days:
 - November 3, 4, and 5, 2017 – The recreational season opens at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 3, 2017, and closes at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 6, 2017.
 - November 10, 11, and 12, 2017 – The recreational season opens again at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 10, 2017, and closes at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 13, 2017.
- The **commercial sector** will open for harvest upon implementation of the emergency rule at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 2, 2017, and will close at 11:59 p.m., local time, on December 31, 2017, unless the commercial annual catch limit is met or projected to be met before this date.
 - NOAA Fisheries will announce if the commercial sector needs to close before 11:59 p.m., local time, on December 31, 2017.

THE REGULATIONS DURING THE LIMITED SEASONS ARE:

- For the **recreational sector**, the bag limit is one red snapper per person per day. This applies to private and charterboat/headboat vessels (the captain and crew on for-hire vessels may retain the recreational bag limit).
- For the **commercial sector**, the trip limit is 75 pounds gutted weight.
- There are no minimum size limits for the recreational and commercial sectors.
- The recreational and commercial catch limits are 29,656 fish and 124,815 pounds whole weight, respectively.

This bulletin serves as a Small Entity Compliance Guide, complying with section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

When are the 2017 South Atlantic recreational and commercial red snapper seasons?

- The **recreational sector** will open for harvest on weekends only (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) on the following days:
 - November 3, 4, and 5, 2017 – The recreational season opens at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 3, 2017, and closes at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 6, 2017.
 - November 10, 11, and 12, 2017 – The recreational season opens again at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 10, 2017, and closes at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 13, 2017.
- The **commercial sector** will open for harvest upon implementation of the emergency rule at 12:01 a.m., local time, on November 2, 2017, and will close at 11:59 p.m., local time, on December 31, 2017, unless the commercial annual catch limit is met or projected to be met before this date.
 - NOAA Fisheries will announce if the commercial sector needs to close before December 31, 2017.

What are the regulations for red snapper during these seasons?

- Recreational annual catch limit of 29,656 fish.
- The recreational bag limit is one red snapper per person per day.
- Commercial annual catch limit of 124,815 pounds whole weight.
- The commercial trip limit is 75 pounds gutted weight.
- There is no minimum size limit for both the recreational and commercial sectors.

What is the history of red snapper harvest and prohibitions in the South Atlantic Region?

- Harvest of red snapper from South Atlantic federal waters was prohibited in 2010 when the population was determined to be severely overfished and undergoing overfishing (Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review [SEDAR] 15).
- Amendment 28 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region established a process that allowed harvest if total removals (landings plus dead discards) were below the acceptable biological catch in the previous year.
- Limited harvest of red snapper was allowed in 2012, 2013, and 2014.
- The estimated total removals of red snapper exceeded the acceptable biological catch in 2014, 2015, and 2016, resulting in no allowable harvest since 2014.

What is the current status of the red snapper population in the South Atlantic Region?

- The latest population assessment (SEDAR 41) was completed in 2016 and revised in 2017. It indicated the South Atlantic red snapper population is overfished and undergoing overfishing; however, the population is rebuilding.

- The red snapper overfishing determination in the assessment came from 2012-2014 when only a small amount of harvest was allowed to occur. However, discards during this time period were high due to fishermen targeting species that co-occur with red snapper, which likely contributed to the overfishing determination.
- SEDAR 41 stated that recreational discards were one of the most important and uncertain sources of information used in the stock assessment during the harvest prohibition from 2010-2014.
- The harvest prohibition in 2015 and 2016 has contributed towards addressing overfishing of red snapper supported by an increase in population biomass of red snapper since 2010.

Why is limited harvest of red snapper being allowed in 2017?

- Recently available fisheries independent studies by the Southeast Reef Fish Survey program (http://safmc.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Jun%202017/10%20Snapper%20Group/A03_SG_2016SERFSReport_May2017.pdf) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (http://safmc.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Sept%202017/Late%20Materials/TAB01/Tab01_A1_FWRI_SA_Red_Snapper_OverviewREVISEDSept17.pdf) have shown relative abundance of red snapper has increased since 2014, and was highest in 2017.
- The scientific studies also show a greater number of large red snapper and a broader range of ages in recent years suggesting rebuilding of the red snapper population despite the limited harvest allowed in 2012, 2013, and 2014.
- The total annual catch limit implemented by this temporary rule equals the landings of red snapper during the limited harvest in 2014.
- The harvest prohibitions of red snapper since 2010 have resulted in adverse socio-economic effects to fishermen and fishing communities such as loss of additional revenue and recreational opportunities, as well as indirect benefits to businesses that provide supplies for fishing trips.
- Collection of fishery dependent data is limited during harvest prohibitions. Federal and state personnel will collect information, including catch data and biological samples during the open season in 2017, which will inform future population assessments for red snapper.

How will the limited harvest in 2017 affect the overfishing and overfished status of red snapper?

- NOAA Fisheries has determined that the limited harvest in 2017 is not expected to result in overfishing and will not prevent the continued rebuilding of the red snapper population.

What are some Best Fishing Practices while fishing for red snapper?

- The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council identified the following best practices to reduce release mortality and further protect the population as it rebuilds:

- Avoid areas likely to have red snapper if you already have met your recreational bag limit. If you are approaching your commercial vessel limit, move to a different area.
- When red snapper are out of season, avoid areas where they are common.
- Use single hook rigs since the recreational bag limit for red snapper during the limited fishing season is one per person per day. This will potentially reduce the number of red snapper that are caught on one drop.
- Use a dehooking device to remove the hook. Keep fish in the water if you plan to release them or return them as quickly as possible.
- Use descending devices when releasing fish with signs of barotrauma.

Where can I find more information on the environmental assessment and temporary final rule through emergency action?

- Contact NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office
By Mail: Nikhil Mehta
NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office
Sustainable Fisheries Division
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
By FAX: (727) 824-5308
By Phone: (727) 824-5305
- The environmental assessment and temporary final rule through emergency action may be found online at the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Web site at: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/s_atl/sg/2017/red_snapper_er_2017/index.html
- Additional information on management of red snapper in the South Atlantic may be found at: <http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/red-snapper/>

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- **Gulf of Mexico Commercial Fisheries Related Alerts**
 - Text GULFCOMMFISH to 888777
- **South Atlantic Recreational Fisheries Related Alerts**
 - Text SATLRECFISH to 888777
- **South Atlantic Commercial Fisheries Related Alerts**
 - Text SATLCOMMFISH to 888777
- **Caribbean Fisheries Related Alerts**
 - Text CARIBFISH to 888777

Other contacts:

Media: Kim Amendola, 727-551-5707

Allison Garrett, 727-551-5750