What would Amendment 29 do?

If approved, Amendment 29 would:

- Update the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s (Council) acceptable biological catch control rule to incorporate a new methodology for determining the acceptable biological catch of unassessed species.
- Adjust the acceptable biological catch value for 14 unassessed snapper-grouper species.
- Revise the annual catch limits for three species complexes and four snapper-grouper species.
- Establish a minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia for both the commercial and recreational sectors.
- Revise the commercial and recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish off the east coast of Florida.
- Establish a commercial split season for gray triggerfish.
- Establish commercial trip limits for gray triggerfish.

Why is it necessary to modify the acceptable biological catch control rule?

The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee recommended a revised approach to modify the acceptable biological catch control rule for unassessed species. This approach represents the best available scientific information. Amendment 29 applies the new approach to revise the acceptable biological catch values for the following unassessed snapper-grouper species: bar jack, margate, red hind, cubera snapper, yellowedge grouper, silk snapper, Atlantic spadefish, gray snapper, lane snapper, rock hind, tomtate, white grunt, scamp, and gray triggerfish.

Would the annual catch limits change?

Yes, commercial and recreational catch limits for the snappers complex, shallow water grouper complex, bar jack, Atlantic spadefish, and gray triggerfish would increase. The commercial and recreational catch limits for the grunts complex and scamp would decrease.

How would the minimum size limits for gray triggerfish change?

If implemented, Amendment 29 would establish a 12-inch fork length minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia for both the commercial and recreational sectors.
Amendment 29 would also increase the commercial and recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish off the east coast of Florida from 12 inches total length to 14 inches fork length, which is consistent with the minimum size limit in place off the west coast of Florida.

**What is the commercial split season being proposed in Amendment 29? How does it work and why is it needed?**

Amendment 29 includes an action to establish a split season for commercial gray triggerfish. The split season would allocate 50 percent of the commercial gray triggerfish catch limit to January 1 through June 30, and 50 percent to July 1 through December 31. As a result, the commercial catch limit would be divided into two equal seasonal quotas of 156,162 pounds whole weight. If the quota was reached for a given season, the harvest of gray triggerfish in the commercial sector would close. In addition, any unused portion of the quota from the first season would be added to the quota in the second season. Any unused portion of the quota specified in the second season, including any addition of quota from the first season, would become void and would not be added to any subsequent quota.

Weather conditions can be poor off North Carolina and South Carolina during the early part of the year making fishing for gray triggerfish difficult. Two commercial fishing seasons are expected to provide opportunities to fish for gray triggerfish throughout the South Atlantic and throughout the calendar year.

**What are the commercial trip limits being proposed in Amendment 29? Why are they needed?**

Amendment 29 would also establish a commercial trip limit of 1,000 pounds whole weight for gray triggerfish, to extend the commercial fishing season, and reduce derby conditions.

**When does the comment period end?**

The Notice of Availability for Amendment 29 published in the *Federal Register* on November 23, 2014 (79 FR 69819), and the comment period ends on January 23, 2015. The proposed rule published in the *Federal Register* on December 8, 2014 (79 FR 72567) and the comment period ends on January 7, 2015. All comments specifically directed toward the amendment or the rule will be addressed in the final rule.

**How do I submit a comment?**

- You may submit comments by either of the following methods. Comments received through other means may not be considered.
  - Enter the following docket number into the “Search” box: NOAA-NMFS-2014-0132
  - Select the appropriate title, and click “Submit a Comment.” This will display the comment Web Form.
  - Attachments to electronic comments (up to 10 MB) will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.
Where can I find more information about the amendment?

- Contact NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office
  - By Mail:
    Southeast Regional Office, c/o Karla Gore
    263 13th Avenue South
    St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
  - By FAX: (727) 824-5308
  - By Phone: (727) 824-5305