

# **Amendment 37 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 37)**

## *Frequently Asked Questions October 2016*

### **What is the purpose of Amendment 37?**

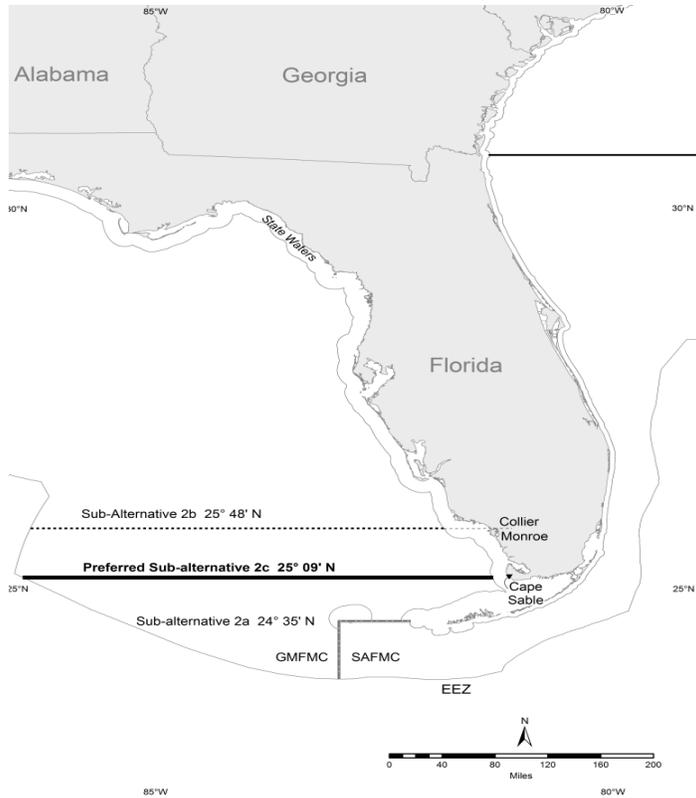
- Through Amendment 37, NOAA Fisheries is proposing to manage hogfish in the South Atlantic Region as two populations.
- The two populations would be 1) Georgia through North Carolina and 2) Florida Keys/East Florida.

### **Why the need for two populations?**

- Based on genetic information, a population assessment identified two populations of hogfish for the South Atlantic Region.
- The Florida Keys/East Florida population is *undergoing overfishing (rate of removal is too high) and is overfished (population abundance is too low)*, and therefore, is in need of a rebuilding plan. The overfishing and overfished status for the Georgia through North Carolina population is unknown.
- Managing with two populations will allow for separate regulations to be established for each area.

### **What would be the boundary between the Gulf of Mexico and the Florida Keys/East Florida hogfish populations?**

- Alternatives to specify boundaries of the Florida Keys/East Florida population of hogfish from the hogfish population in the Gulf of Mexico included the jurisdictional boundary between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils, Monroe/Collier County line, and a point just south of Cape Sable (Figure 1). Under the preferred alternative, the Florida Keys/East Florida population of hogfish would be managed from south of Cape Sable, around the Florida Keys, to the Florida/Georgia border. Therefore, hogfish in the entire Florida Keys would be managed exclusively by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.



**Figure 1.** Proposed boundary Sub-alternatives 2a (gray), 2b (dotted) and 2c (**Preferred**) (black) to separate the Florida Keys/East Florida population of hogfish from the Gulf of Mexico population. Source: Amanda Frick, NMFS SERO

**What are the proposed actions in Amendment 37 for the Florida Keys/East Florida population?**

- Establish a rebuilding plan that would set the allowable catch level so the stock can rebuild in 10 years with a 72.5% probability of success. The allowable catch level in 2017 would be 17,930 fish, and would increase annually through 2027 as the stock rebuilds (see Table 4.5.1 in Amendment 37 for all the values).
- Specify a total annual catch limit that would be equal to 95% of the allowable catch level, and commercial and recreational annual catch limits based on re-calculated sector allocations of 9.63% commercial and 90.37% recreational.
- The total annual catch limit for 2017 would be 17,034 fish, the commercial annual catch limit would be 3,510 lbs ww (1,345 fish), and the recreational ACL would equal 15,689 fish. The annual catch limits would increase annually through 2027 as the stock rebuilds (see Table 4.6.2 in Amendment 37 for all the values).
- Establish a recreational annual catch target equal to 85% of the recreational annual catch limit at 13,335 fish. Recreational annual catch targets would increase from 2017-2027 as the stock rebuilds (see Table 4.7.2 in Amendment 37 for all the values).
- Increase the commercial and recreational minimum size limit to 16 inches fork length.
- Establish a commercial trip limit of 25 pounds whole weight.
- Establish a recreational bag limit of one fish per person per day.
- Establish a six-month recreational fishing season from May-October.

**Would there be a change in the permit requirements to catch hogfish on the Gulf of Mexico side of the Florida Keys?**

- No. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council would continue to manage hogfish in Federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico, except in Federal waters south of this boundary. Therefore, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and not the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, would establish the management measures for the entire range of the Florida Keys/East Florida hogfish stock, including in Federal waters south of 25°09' N. lat. near Cape Sable in the Gulf of Mexico. Commercial and charter vessel/headboat vessels fishing for hogfish in Gulf of Mexico Federal waters, *i.e.*, north and west of the jurisdictional boundary between the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Councils, would still be required to have the appropriate Federal Gulf reef fish permits, and vessels fishing for hogfish in South Atlantic Federal waters, *i.e.*, south and east of the jurisdictional boundary, would still be required to have the appropriate Federal South Atlantic snapper-grouper permits. Those permit holders would still be required to follow the sale and reporting requirements associated with the respective permits.

**What are the proposed actions in Amendment 37 for the Georgia/North Carolina population?**

- Specify a total annual catch limit that would be equal to 95% of the allowable catch level, and commercial and recreational annual catch limits based on re-calculated sector allocations of 69.13% commercial and 30.87% recreational.
- The total annual catch limit would be 33,930 pounds whole weight, the commercial annual catch limit would be 23,456 pounds whole weight, and the recreational annual catch limit would be 988 fish.
- Establish a recreational annual catch target equal to 85% of the recreational annual catch limit at 840 fish.
- Increase the commercial and recreational minimum size limit to 17 inches fork length.
- Establish a commercial trip limit of 500 pounds whole weight.
- Establish a recreational bag limit of two fish per person per day.

**What accountability measures are proposed for the Florida Keys/East Florida and Georgia/North Carolina populations of hogfish?**

- If commercial landings reach or are projected to reach the commercial annual catch limit, the commercial sector would close for the remainder of the fishing year; all sale or purchase would be prohibited, and harvest or possession of hogfish in or from the exclusive economic zone would be limited to the recreational bag and possession limit. If the commercial annual catch limit is exceeded, the commercial annual catch limit in the following fishing year would be reduced by the amount of the commercial overage, only if hogfish is overfished and the total annual catch limit is exceeded.
- If recreational landings reach or are projected to reach the recreational annual catch limit, the recreational sector would close for the remainder of the fishing year, unless NOAA Fisheries determines that a closure is unnecessary. If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, then during the following fishing year, landings would be monitored for a persistence in increased landings. If necessary, the length of fishing season and the

recreational annual catch limit would be reduced in the following fishing year by the amount of the recreational overage, only if the species is overfished and the total annual catch limit is exceeded. The length of the recreational season and recreational annual catch limit would not be reduced if NOAA Fisheries determines a reduction is unnecessary.

**Who would be affected by Amendment 37?**

- Commercial and recreational fishers who fish for snapper-grouper species in federal waters (3-200 miles offshore) off Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

**When might Amendment 37 be effective?**

- Regulations could be effective by spring 2017.

**How can I comment on the Notice of Availability for Amendment 37?**

- NOAA Fisheries is accepting comments on the notice of availability for Amendment 37 from October 7, 2016, to December 6, 2016.
- Comments on the notice of availability for Amendment 37 can be submitted electronically via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to [www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2016-0068](http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2016-0068), click the “Comment Now!” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments. Written comments can be submitted to the address below.

**Where can I get more information on Amendment 37?**

- Contact NOAA Fisheries  
*By Mail:* Southeast Regional Office, c/o Nikhil Mehta  
263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505  
*By FAX:* (727) 824-5308  
*By Phone:* (727) 824-5305
- Amendment 37 may be found online at the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Web site at: [http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable\\_fisheries/s\\_atl/sg/2015/am37/index.html](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/s_atl/sg/2015/am37/index.html) or the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s Web site at <http://www.safmc.net>.