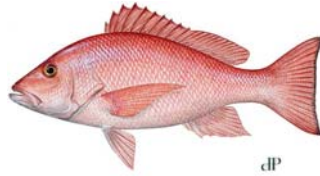


**Interim Rule for South Atlantic Red Snapper**  
*Frequently Asked Questions*  
May 2010



***What is the issue with the South Atlantic red snapper fishery?***

- A stock assessment was completed for red snapper through the Southeast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) stock assessment program in 2008. The assessment (SEDAR 15) found that the South Atlantic red snapper stock is overfished and currently undergoing overfishing. <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/>.

***What is being done to address overfishing in the South Atlantic red snapper fishery?***

- The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) received notification from NOAA Fisheries Service, in a letter dated July 8, 2008, that the South Atlantic red snapper stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing.
- Upon notification, the Council began developing an amendment to the Snapper-Grouper Fishery Management Plan to address long-term management measures to end overfishing of red snapper (Amendment 17A). Amendment 17A would not be implemented until late 2010 so immediate management measures are needed to reduce overfishing of red snapper.
- The Council requested that NOAA Fisheries Service use interim measures to reduce overfishing of red snapper while Amendment 17A can be developed.
- NOAA Fisheries Service published a proposed interim rule on July 6, 2009, with a 30-day comment period (74 FR 31906). The final rule was published in the *Federal Register* on December 4, 2009 (74 FR 63673), and became effective on January 4, 2010. The interim rule remains effective through June 2, 2010, but NOAA Fisheries Service is extending it for an additional 186 days through December 5, 2010.

***What is the extension to the interim rule to reduce overfishing of red snapper?***

- The extension to the interim rule will continue the current prohibition on recreational and commercial harvest of red snapper for an additional 186 days in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

***When will the extension to the interim rule be effective?***

- The extension is effective on June 3, 2010.

***How long would the extension to the interim rule be in effect?***

- The extension to the interim rule will continue the current prohibition of harvest of red snapper for an additional 186 days, through December 5, 2010.

***Who will be affected by the red snapper interim rule?***

- The extension to the interim rule will only apply to federal waters off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and the east coast of Florida (ranging from 3 to 200 miles offshore of each state), unless each state also chooses to implement compatible regulations for state waters. However, the provisions specified in the extension to the interim rule would also apply to a person on board a vessel for which a federal commercial or for-hire permit for the South Atlantic snapper-grouper fishery has been issued, regardless of where the fish are harvested or possessed (e.g. state or federal waters).

***Why does the fishery need to be closed? Can't the bag limit simply be reduced from 2 fish to 1 fish, or the size limit increased from 20 inches for both the recreational and commercial fisheries?***

- Changing the bag and size limits would not achieve the necessary reductions in total removals needed to address overfishing because of the discard mortality that would continue to occur.
- Amendment 17A will analyze a suite of management alternatives including time and area closures that would reduce the expected future discard mortality rate of red snapper.

***Given the current economic conditions, can the Council wait another year or so to put management measures in place?***

- The Council received notification on July 8, 2008, that overfishing is occurring in the red snapper fishery. The Magnuson-Stevens Act specifies that overfishing must be ended immediately while minimizing, to the extent practicable, negative economic and social impacts. The requirement to address overfishing in the Magnuson-Stevens Act does not allow for a delay.

***I'm seeing more red snapper than I have in the past 10 years. If the stock is in such bad shape, why are we catching more fish?***

- Many fishermen have testified during public hearings and scoping meetings that they are catching more red snapper in recent years, especially those fishing off the coast of Georgia and northeast Florida. A spike in 2008 recreational landings documents that fishermen are seeing more fish now than in previous years. The sharp increase in landings appears to be the result of good stock recruitment in recent years.
- Despite good recruitment, the age structure of the population remains truncated (there are not enough older fish). Red snapper live to at least 54 years of age, but the assessment indicates a small percentage of the population was estimated as being age 10 or older in recent years.

***We're also seeing more larger red snapper than we have in the past few years. Aren't these large fish a sign that the population is healthy?***

- For red snapper, larger fish don't always represent older fish. There is a great deal of variability in the size of red snapper at age. For example, the average size of a 10 year old red snapper is around 32 inches, but 10 year old fish range in size from 27 to 40 inches.

- Red Snapper are being caught before they become old enough to reach their peak reproductive levels. Although the minimum size limit allows some fish to spawn before they become vulnerable to harvest, these younger, mostly first-time spawners are less productive than the older and heavier fish. A 10-year old red snapper may have reached 90-95% of its maximum length but only 80% of its potential maximum weight.

***Where did the data used in the SEDAR stock assessment come from?***

- Data used for the assessment consist of records of commercial catches provided by dealer and fishermen reports since the 1940s, headboat fishery catch records from the Southeast Headboat Survey since 1972, and recreational catch records from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) since 1981. Also included are U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recreational fisheries surveys of the 1960s and 1970s. Data through 2006 were included in the assessment.
- Landings and effort information are provided by dealer and fishermen reports and surveys. Information on catch lengths and ages is provided by sampling programs that support the catch statistics programs. Information on biological characteristics, such as age, growth, and reproduction, is provided by various research studies.
- All of the data used in the assessment are described in the SEDAR 15 red snapper stock assessment report available on the SEDAR Web site at: <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/>. The SEDAR Web site also provides extensive supporting documentation that describes data collection programs and research findings.

***The fishery has already been closed for 6 months, isn't that enough?***

- The stock assessment indicates that the red snapper population is overfished and undergoing overfishing and requires management action to reduce fishing pressure. While the initial interim rule likely had positive effects on the red snapper population, the reduction it provides is not enough to end overfishing of the species. The extension of the interim rule is needed to address overfishing of red snapper while long-term management measures can be developed in Amendment 17A.

***When will the next red snapper stock assessment be completed?***

- A new benchmark stock assessment for red snapper will be completed in late 2010.

***Why is a new benchmark stock assessment being conducted for red snapper?***

- Fishermen report a spike in landed and discarded red snapper in 2007-2009.
- The SEDAR Steering Committee, which creates the assessment schedule, felt the increase in landed and discarded red snapper should be incorporated into a new benchmark assessment for the species.

***What happens if the new assessment shows different harvest reductions are needed than indicated by the current assessment?***

- NOAA Fisheries Service is committed to work with the Council to respond to any new assessment findings with any needed management adjustments, as quickly as possible.