

AMENDMENT 17A FACT SHEET THE BEGINNING

2008 Red Snapper Stock Assessment

The Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) stock assessment for red snapper in the South Atlantic was completed in 2008 and found the stock is both severely overfished and undergoing a severe level of overfishing. Most of the red snapper landings are from the recreational fishery: accounting for 72% of the total red snapper landings between 2000 and 2006. It's estimated that 40% of the fish released by recreational fisherman don't survive (it's 90% for the commercial industry). The 2008 stock assessment estimates that less than 1% of the stock is 10 years old or older (red snapper could live to be up to 54 years old) meaning there are not enough fish reaching their prime productive years.

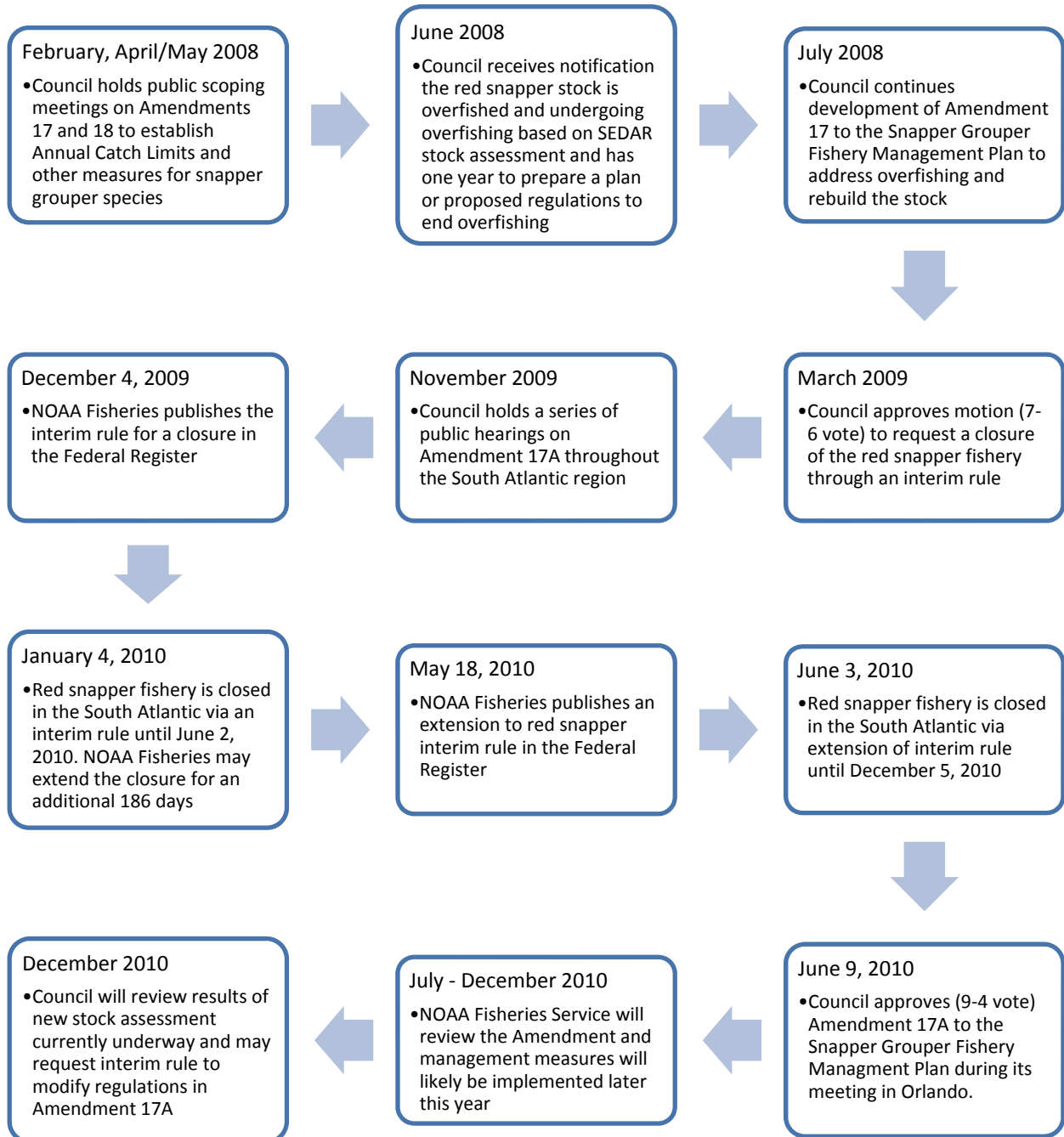
2006 Reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Conservation and Management Act

The Reauthorized Act as the foundation for federal fisheries management sets new guidelines to end overfishing and rebuild fish stocks. According to the new requirements, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council had one year to implement regulations to end overfishing. The Council has to develop regulations to reduce red snapper fishing mortality (both for fish that are landed and those released) by 83% from current levels. To end overfishing the Council requested NOAA Fisheries implement an interim rule to close the red snapper fishery throughout the South Atlantic in March 2009 and on January 4, 2010 the temporary closure was implemented for 180 days (with an extension of possible 186 days). Also the Council chose an Annual Catch Limit of zero for red snapper because of the inability to accurately monitor bycatch mortality. An area closure for all snapper grouper species is also included in the Amendment to further reduce the bycatch of red snapper.

Public Perception

Many fishermen have testified that they are catching more red snapper in recent years and larger fish. The 2008 stock assessment does show an increase in the abundance of red snapper since 1995 (estimated in 2007 to be twice that estimated for 1995). Because of this and the timing of the regulations (economic downturn), it's difficult to argue that a closure of the fishery is necessary. Council members have heard from local and state governments, state representatives, fishing related business owners, city chambers of commerce, and municipalities along the South Atlantic coast regarding red snapper. The Council sent a letter to Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke outlining their concerns with the need for improved data and the impacts of proposed management measures in the Amendment.

Timeline



NEWS RELEASE AFTER SAFMC MEETING

Amendment 17A to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan

- end overfishing of red snapper and rebuild the South Atlantic stock
- designed to meet the Congressional mandates of the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Conservation and Management Act
- must be approved by the Secretary of Commerce before regulations become effective

Management measures that may be implemented through Amendment 17A

1. A continuation of the closure of the red snapper fishery
2. A new area closure off of northeastern Florida and southern Georgia, where fishing for all snapper grouper species in water depths of 98 – 240 feet would be prohibited (with the exception of spearfishing and use of black sea bass pots)
3. A requirement for the use of non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for snapper grouper species north of 28 degrees N. latitude
4. The development of a fishery-independent monitoring program to help track the rebuilding and recovery of red snapper

In addition to the red snapper closure, the area closure is necessary to reduce harvest of red snapper by 76%, including the estimated number of fish that die even when released. The area closure targets areas where red snapper landings are highest.

Once the Amendment is handed over to NOAA Fisheries Service, SAFMC will not be involved but NOAA will hold public comment periods before regulations are implemented.

If regulations in Amendment 17A are implemented in December they could change because of a new stock assessment for red snapper that is currently underway. The results will be available to the Council during its December 6-10, 2010 meeting in New Bern, N.C. and they could request an interim rule to modify regulations in the Amendment.