

Final Rule Increases Annual Catch Limits for South Atlantic Blueline Tilefish

- NOAA Fisheries announces a final rule for Abbreviated Framework Amendment 3 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region, which increases the annual catch limits for South Atlantic blueline tilefish in response to the results of the latest population assessment.
- The annual catch limits are based on acceptable biological catch recommendations from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee.

Year	Total South Atlantic annual catch limit	Commercial annual catch limit	Recreational annual catch limit
Current	174,798	87,521	87,277
2020 until modified	233,968	117,148	116,820

New Requirements Effective for Fishermen Targeting Snapper Grouper Species

Descending Device Requirements

The new requirements are designed to help improve the chances that released fish survive by encouraging the use of descending devices when needed and modifying current hook requirements. Beginning July 15th, a descending device must be on board and readily available for use (attached to a minimum of 60-feet of line with at least 16 ounces of weight) when targeting snapper grouper species. The descending device can help reduce the effects of barotrauma, a condition that occurs when a fish is rapidly reeled up from depth. Signs include protrusion of the stomach from the fish's mouth, bulging eyes, prolapse, and bubbling scales. A descending device can quickly be used to send the fish back to depth, improving its chances of survival.

Hook Modifications

Changes to hook requirements are also being implemented. Fishermen targeting snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits north of 28 degrees N. latitude (approximately 25 miles south of Cape Canaveral, Florida) must use non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks. The new

regulations also require that all hooks must be non-stainless steel when targeting snapper grouper species in federal waters in the South Atlantic.

Recreational, Commercial and For-Hire Fishermen
 Note that the new requirements apply to recreational fishermen as well as federally-permitted for-hire (charter) and commercial snapper grouper vessels fishing in federal waters (greater than 3 nautical miles) off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and the east coast of Florida.

Learn More

Additional details on the new requirements as well as information on proper handling techniques, how to identify barotrauma, and how-to videos demonstrating the effectiveness of descending devices are available from the Council's new Best Fishing Practices webpage at: <https://safmc.net/best-fishing-practices/>.