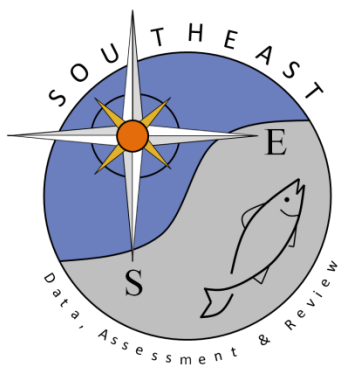


Commercial Fishing Targeting Changes

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Commercial Fishing Targeting Changes

The South Atlantic fishery has gone through changes in the last 5 years since the reauthorizing of the MSA in 2006. The new MSA put quotas and fishery rebuilding requirements on all fisheries in the USA. The South Atlantic was dramatically affected by the new requirements. Fisherman in the South Atlantic before the reauthorization, were barely restricted by regulations, mainly only size limits. So what changes in the fishing behavior have occurred?

Fisherman typically in the past would go fishing with the intention of filling the fish hole or box. They weren't too worried with what type of fish was filling the space just that it got filled. It was easy times when the only thing was making sure you were catching legal size fish. Granted the higher price fish were the target but whatever was caught along with them were put in the fish hole. After the regulations came in affect by the SAFMC things started to change in fisherman behavior. It now has become more of an avoidance fishery, meaning we avoid the closed species and target the open species.

The question might come how to avoid fish, well there are several ways. First of all, if fishermen want to avoid vermilion snapper and target grouper fishermen would fish bigger bait and hook size also not fish at night. Also fish spots or ledges that typically don't have vermilion would be a way to avoid them. If fishermen want to target triggerfish and vermilion but avoid grouper fisherman would fish smaller bait and smaller hooks also fish higher in the water column. Staying away from the high relief structure or wreck could help avoid grouper. If a fisherman wanted to target vermilion but avoid other species they could fish only at night when mainly only vermilion is actively feeding. These are good ways to make the best of your fishing time because it a waste of time to catch and release closed species.

I personally have made an effort to plan my fishing year effort in accordance to the regulation. The beginning of the year I will fish offshore in the winter because of the cold water. I will also fish only small hooks and baits to avoid catching grouper since the four month spawning closure for grouper. I also fishing offshore helped avoid black sea bass when they were closed because black sea bass are typically a shallow water fish. After the first season of vermilion is closed I will stop fishing since the valuable fish is closed and the profit gains are too low. When the grouper closure has ended in May I would switch to using larger baits and hooks while still fishing offshore. Once June comes around and black sea bass open I would switch to inshore. The reason for this is the water has warmed up inshore and black sea bass and grouper can be caught there. When July comes and vermilion second season is open I will still fish inshore since most all fish are open also fish more at night to target more vermilion since the value is higher and the summer heat is trying. Fishing inshore during this time also helps in avoiding the larger aggregations of triggerfish. Then after the second vermilion season has closed I would fish maybe one or two more trips before the gag closes. So in the end I'm likely to not fish April also not fish November and December, due to low value fish only being open. The profit gains become low and not enough to cover boat maintenance.

This is my perspective of commercial fishing since the reauthorization of MSA.

Sincerely Kenneth Fex (vice-chair of Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel)