



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 130403320-4891-02; RTID 0648-XF560]

Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic; 2026-2027 Recreational Fishing

Season for Black Sea Bass

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; recreational fishing season.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the recreational fishing season for black sea bass in South Atlantic Federal waters will extend throughout its 2026-2027 fishing year.

Announcing the length of the recreational fishing season for black sea bass is one of the accountability measures (AMs) for the recreational sector. This announcement allows recreational fishers to maximize their opportunity to harvest the recreational annual catch limit (ACL) for black sea bass while NMFS manages harvest to protect the black sea bass resource.

DATES: This temporary rule is effective from [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER], through March 31, 2027.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nikhil Mehta, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, telephone: 727-824-5305, email: nikhil.mehta@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The snapper-grouper fishery in the South Atlantic includes black sea bass south of 35°15.19' N latitude, which is due east of Cape Hatteras Light, North Carolina, and is managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP). NMFS prepared the

FMP in collaboration with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council), and NMFS implements the FMP through regulations at 50 CFR part 622 under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). Black sea bass occurring in Federal waters north of 35°15.19' N latitude are managed under a different fishery management plan and are regulated by 50 CFR part 648.

The recreational fishing year for black sea bass is April 1 through March 31. One of the recreational AMs for black sea bass requires that, before the start of each recreational fishing year, NMFS will project the length of the recreational fishing season based on when NMFS projects recreational landings of black sea bass will reach the sector ACL, and announce the season end date in the **Federal Register** [50 CFR 622.193(e)(2)]. The purpose of this AM is to allow recreational fishermen to maximize their opportunities to harvest the recreational ACL through a more predictable recreational season while NMFS manages harvest within the recreational ACL to protect the stock from experiencing adverse biological consequences. The metric conversion for the imperial measurements used in this document is 1 pound (lb) equals approximately 0.45 kilograms.

The recreational ACL for black sea bass during the 2026-2027 fishing year is 310,602 lb in gutted weight or 366,510 lb in round weight [50 CFR 622.193(e)(2)]. NMFS estimates that recreational landings of black sea bass during the 2026-2027 fishing year will be less than the 2026-2027 recreational ACL. To make this determination, NMFS compared recreational landings of black sea bass in the last 3 fishing years for which data are available (2022-2023 through 2024-2025) to the recreational ACL for the 2026-2027 fishing year. Recreational landings in each of these past 3 fishing years have been less than the 2026-2027 recreational ACL, and NMFS expects similar landings for the 2026-2027 fishing season. Therefore, because NMFS projects that the recreational

landings of black sea bass will be less than the 2026-2027 recreational ACL, NMFS does not expect to close the recreational harvest of black sea bass during the fishing year. Accordingly, the season end date for the recreational harvest of black sea bass in South Atlantic Federal waters is March 31, 2027.

The Council recently approved potential new management measures for black sea bass through Regulatory Amendment 37 under the FMP. If approved and implemented by NMFS, those changes could further restrict allowable recreational harvest by establishing a recreational annual catch target that is lower than the current recreational ACL and revising AMs for black sea bass to close recreational harvest if landings reach the annual catch target. It is currently unknown whether the timing for Regulatory Amendment 37 could affect the 2026-2027 fishing year for black sea bass. However, if NMFS does implement Regulatory Amendment 37, NMFS would inform fishermen and the public about how that action would affect the length of the recreational season for black sea bass at the time of implementation.

Classification

NMFS issues this action pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This action is required by 50 CFR 622.193(e)(2), issued pursuant to section 304(b), and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), there is good cause to waive prior notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action, as notice and comment is unnecessary. Such procedures are unnecessary because the rule establishing the recreational AM has already been subject to notice and comment, and all that remains is for NMFS to notify the public of the recreational season length.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: March 18, 2026.

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