Ocean Conservancy®

South Atlantic Red Snapper Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) FAQs

Q: Aren't there a lot of red snapper right now?
A: There are a lot of young red snapper, and we need to keep fishing pressure low enough to let them grow older and become the reproductive backbone of a healthy fishery. If these young fish are killed (either by targeted or incidental catch), it will prevent the stock from rebuilding.

Q: Is the federal data for red snapper reliable?
A: The National Academy of Sciences has repeatedly affirmed that the recreational data collection system known as the Marine Recreational Information Program is using statistically robust and scientifically appropriate methodologies. That said, the surveys were never designed to provide information for in-season management, and survey administrators have been making efforts to improve timeliness, precision, and transparency. There are opportunities to continue to improve recreational fishing data but upending our entire system to replace it with unproven approaches that don't meet federal standards and won't address existing data gaps will not solve the problem.

Q: The Gulf states have been managing red snapper for many years, shouldn't the South Atlantic states have the same opportunity?
A: There are many concerning signs that state management of red snapper is driving it into decline in the Gulf — the average size is declining and fishermen are having to travel further to catch a keeper. Recent Gulf Council meetings have included a lot of public testimony from fishermen complaining that red snapper is in decline. Additionally, the stocks have massively different populations (the Gulf population is estimated to be over 10 times the size of the South Atlantic population) making comparisons between them unsuitable.

Q: How much overfishing could occur under the EFPs?
A: The EFP proposals failed to include estimates of the number of fish they anticipate catching or how many people will be allowed to catch them, even though such estimates are required as part of the EFP application/approval process. Ocean Conservancy has used available data to estimate the amount of fish that could be caught. The annual catch limit, or ACL, for the recreational sector is 22,797 fish. A recent two-day red snapper fishing season in Florida alone resulted in 24,885 landed fish, which exceeds that limit. A simple expansion using this Florida landings rate and ignoring the contribution from other states who will have even longer fishing seasons, suggests that as many as 485,000 fish could be landed in a 39-day season. This is over 20 times the annual catch limit – a clear violation of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Q: If the season is longer, won't that mean there are fewer discards of red snapper because fishermen can keep the red snapper they catch during a longer open season that they otherwise will have to throw back if the season is shorter?
A: Yes, but not enough to offset the drastically longer seasons. We should expect a reduction in discards from an extended season as anglers will not be required to throw back all red snapper

caught during the additional 38-58 days of the year the season is open. However, there will still be red snapper that are discarded due to being under the size limit, not being the target species, someone practicing catch-and-release, or if they have caught their bag limit. Even with the most responsible release practices, between 15-31 percent of the red snapper thrown back are estimated to die. However, extending the season by 20-30 times will drastically increase the number of kept fish, increasing the total mortality on the stock as kept fish have a 100% mortality. Fewer discards won't even come close to offsetting the mortality of a longer season.

Q: What are EFPs? What are they used for?

A: Exempted fishing permits (EFPs, also sometimes referred to as "experimental" fishing permits) are an authorization to engage in limited fishing activities that are exempt from the usual fishing rules. The EFP itself is an agreement between the participants and NOAA Fisheries; in exchange for an exemption from existing regulations, the participants provide something of value to improve the fishery or further scientific study. EFPs can be useful tools that allow the applicants, such as specific entities, scientists, and fishermen, to target or take species that are managed under a fishery management plan when this fishing would otherwise be prohibited (e.g., if the timing, gear used, location, or species targeted are not allowed under the plan). EFPs are often used to advance scientific research or test new fishing methods and therefore generally provide information to address a data gap or test a new approach that could inform future management practices. EFPs are granted on a case-by-case and regional basis through a public application process. Typical applicants include Federal or state agencies, universities and academic researchers, marine fish commissions, nonprofit organizations, and individuals. The proposed South Atlantic red snapper EFPs go far beyond the intended scope and purpose of EFPs in the law and in regulation.