

The Service believes the United States should accept this recommendation of the CITES Nomenclature and Animals Committees and proposes a corresponding change in its interpretation of the listing of *Ovis vignei* in 50 CFR Part 23. This interpretation would become effective 90 days after the conclusion of COP10, if the Parties adopt the report of the Nomenclature Committee. Public comment on this recommended position is solicited. Under the new interpretation, all urial specimens would be considered to be on Appendix I, and imports would be subject to the normal permitting requirements applicable to species included in Appendix I.

Inclusion of Sturgeons in Appendix II

Sturgeons (order Acipenseriformes) are a primitive group of approximately 25 species of fish, whose biological attributes make them vulnerable to intensive fishing pressure or other causes of elevated adult mortality. Many species of sturgeons, the primary source of commercial caviar, have experienced severe population declines worldwide because of both habitat destruction and overharvest for international trade. Some are at serious risk of extinction. Two species in the United States (the shortnosed sturgeon, *Acipenser brevirostrum*, and pallid sturgeon, *Scaphirhynchus albus*) are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, while a third species (the Gulf sturgeon, *Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*) is listed as threatened. CITES presently includes two species in Appendix I and one in Appendix II. The closely related American paddlefish, *Polyodon spathula*, has also been included in Appendix II since 1992.

Recently attention has been focussed on conservation problems in the Caspian Sea, which is the source of more than 90 of the world caviar trade and which produces the highest quality caviar. Since the mid-1970's very marked declines in the populations of all six of the Caspian Sea's sturgeon species have been noted, especially populations of the most heavily exploited species: Beluga (*Huso huso*), Russian (*Acipenser gueldenstaedti*), and stellate (*A. stellatus*) sturgeons. Five of the six species are considered endangered by the "1996 IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals." The problem has become exacerbated in recent years due to deteriorating fishery management and enforcement capabilities in the region, resulting in harvests that far exceed recommended quotas.

The Scientific Authority of Germany has prepared a detailed draft proposal to

include all species of sturgeons not presently included in the appendices in Appendix II. This draft proposal was discussed in November in Moscow at a meeting involving the Russian Federation and several former Soviet Republics, including several that participate in the Caspian Sea sturgeon fishery: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. The meeting, hosted by the Russian Federation State Committee for Environmental Protection and the German Scientific and Management Authorities yielded an overwhelming acknowledgment of the severity of the threat to sturgeon populations in the Caspian Sea. The existence of a substantial illegal trade in caviar (estimated to constitute up to 80 percent of the trade) that has resulted in a decrease in both the quality and price of caviar in international markets also was recognized.

The probable outcome of this meeting will be a joint proposal from Germany and the Russian Federation to list all species of sturgeons, except those already included in Appendix I, in Appendix II. Such a listing will enable: (1) The implementation of management controls necessary to stabilize sturgeon populations in the Caspian Sea and elsewhere in the world; and (2) better regulation of the trade by importing countries, especially through an improved capability for distinguishing legal from illegal caviar. The Service believes that the United States, as a range state for some of the most endangered sturgeon populations and as a major importer of caviar products (between 50 and 60 metric tons per year from 1992 through 1995), should consider co-sponsoring this proposal if Germany and Russia decide to advance it. The Service solicits public comment on this potential action.

Future Actions

The Service will consider all comments received in writing during the comment period in deciding whether the actions considered above are appropriate. Proposals to amend the appendices must be submitted to the CITES Secretariat by January 10, 1997, for consideration at COP10 in Harare, Zimbabwe, June 1997. In February 1997, the Service will publish a Federal Register notice announcing decisions on this and other proposals being considered for amending the appendices under consideration.

The primary authors of this notice are Dr. Marshall A. Howe, Office of Scientific Authority and Dr. Rosemarie Gnam, Office of Management Authority, under the authority of the Endangered

Species Act of 1973, 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*

Dated: December 18, 1996.

Marshall P. Jones, Jr.,
Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

[FR Doc. 96-32533 Filed 12-19-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[I.D. 120696E]

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council; Public Hearings

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

ACTION: Public hearings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) will convene 10 public hearings on Draft Amendment 8 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP) and its associated analyses of regulatory and environmental impacts, including a draft supplemental environmental impact statement (DSEIS).

DATES: Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on January 22, 1997. The hearings will be held from January 6 to January 17, 1997. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific dates and times.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to Bob Mahood, Executive Director, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, One Southpark Circle, Suite 306, Charleston, SC 29407-4699. Copies of the draft amendment and SEIS are available from Susan Buchanan at 803-571-4366. The draft amendment and DSEIS will also be available to the public at the hearings.

The hearings will be held in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for locations of the hearings and special accommodations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Susan Buchanan, Public Information Officer, 803-571-4366; Fax: 803-769-4520; E-mail: safmc@safmc.nmfs.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Council will hold public hearings on Draft Amendment 8 to the FMP and associated analyses of regulatory and

environmental impacts, including a DSEIS.

Amendment 8 included the following management measures:

1. Limit permit holders to those who can demonstrate landings of at least 1,000 lb (454 kg) of snapper-grouper species in 2 of the 3 years - 1993, 1994, and 1995, and have held a valid snapper-grouper permit for those years.

2. Control fishing effort by establishing trip limits for identified sub-unit groups of species within the FMP's management unit.

3. Redefine the FMP's definitions of overfishing and optimum yield for all species in the snapper-grouper management unit.

4. Increase the red porgy minimum size limit from 12 inches (30.5 cm) total length (TL) to 14 inches (36 cm) TL for recreational and commercial fishermen and establish a recreational fishery bag limit of two red porgy.

5. Increase the black sea bass minimum size limit from 8 inches (20.3 cm) TL to 10 inches (25.4 cm) TL for both recreational and commercial fishermen.

6. Designate a black sea bass Special Management Zone.

7. Establish a recreational fishery bag limit of 10 black sea bass.

8. Require escape vents and escape panels with degradable fasteners in black sea bass pots.

9. Establish measures for greater amberjack that would extend the April closure throughout the South Atlantic EEZ and prohibit sale during April, reduce the recreational fishery bag limit to one fish per person per day, implement a commercial quota to reduce landings by 21 percent based on average landings from 1986-1995, implement a 500-1,000 lb (227-454 kg) trip limit, change the start of the fishing year from January 1 to July 1, and prohibit coring.

10. Establish, effective January 1, 1998, an annual commercial quota for vermilion snapper of 600,000 lb (272,155 kg), a recreational fishery bag limit of five fish and a recreational fishery minimum size limit of 12 inches (30.5 cm). 11. Increase the gag minimum size limit from 20 inches (50.8 cm) TL to 24 inches (61 cm) TL for the commercial and recreational fisheries, and prohibit all harvest January through March.

12. Require logbook reporting by the 10th of the month following the month of fishing activity.

13. Establish a zone in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ) through which vessels carrying fish traps could transit if they have valid

Gulf reef fish permits and fish trap endorsements.

14. Restrict vessels with bottom longline gear on board to possessing only snowy grouper, warsaw grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

15. Allow use of one bait net per boat, up to 50 ft (1,524 cm) long by 10 ft (305 cm) high with a stretched mesh size of 1.5 inches (3.75 cm) or smaller; also, allow possession and use of cast nets for catching bait.

16. Allow species within the snapper grouper fishery management unit (whether whole or fillets) caught in Bahamian waters in accordance with Bahamian law, to be possessed on board a vessel in the EEZ and landed in the United States provided the vessel is in transit from the Bahamas and valid Bahamian fishing and cruising permits are on board.

17. Establish an aggregate snapper-grouper recreational fishery bag limit of 20-25 fish inclusive of all species in the snapper-grouper fishery management unit.

18. The Council is considering a number of options under this action to reduce fishing mortality including establishing a closure of the South Atlantic EEZ for species in the snapper-grouper fishery management unit, or implementing a trip limit for all temperate, mid-shelf snapper-grouper species, or establishing an aggregate temperate mid-shelf species quota.

The hearings will begin at 7 p.m. and will end when business is completed. The dates and locations are scheduled as follows:

1. Monday, January 6, 1997—Pooler (Savannah area) Ramada Inn, 301 Governor Treutlen Drive, Pooler, GA 31322; telephone: 912-748-6464

2. Tuesday, January 7, 1997—Comfort Inn Oceanfront, 1515 N. 1st Street, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32250; telephone: 904-241-2311

3. Wednesday, January 8, 1997—Holiday Inn, 1300 N. Atlantic Avenue, Cocoa Beach, FL 32931; telephone: 407-783-2271

4. Thursday, January 9, 1997—Sheraton Hotel, 630 Clearwater Park Road, West Palm Beach, FL 33401; telephone: 561-833-1234

5. Friday, January 10, 1997—Banana Bay Resort, 4590 Overseas Highway, Marathon, FL 33401; 305-743-3500

6. Monday, January 13, 1997—Town & Country Inn, 2008 Savannah Highway, Charleston, SC 29407; telephone: 803-571-1000

7. Tuesday, January 14, 1997—Holiday Inn, 1601 Virginia Dare Trail,

Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948; telephone: 919-441-6333

8. Wednesday, January 15, 1997—Sheraton Atlantic Beach Resort, Salter Path Road, Atlantic Beach, NC 28512; telephone: 919-240-1155

9. Thursday, January 16, 1997—Holiday Inn, 4903 Market Street, Wilmington, NC 28405; telephone: 910-799-1440

10. Friday, January 17, 1997—Myrtle Beach Martinique Resort & Hotel, 7100 N. Ocean Blvd., Myrtle Beach, SC 29572; telephone: 1-803-449-4441

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to the Council office (see ADDRESSES) by December 30, 1996.

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

Dated: December 16, 1996.

Gary C. Matlock,

*Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 96-32282 Filed 12-19-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

50 CFR Part 678

[Docket No. 961211348-6349-02; I.D. 092396B]

RIN 0648-AH77

Atlantic Shark Fisheries; Quotas, Bag Limits, Prohibitions, and Requirements.

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

ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes changes to the regulations governing the Atlantic shark fisheries that would: Reduce commercial quotas and recreational bag limits; establish a quota for small coastal sharks; prohibit directed commercial fishing for, and landing or sale of, five species of sharks; establish a recreational tag-and-release only fishery for white sharks; prohibit filleting of sharks at sea; and restate the requirement for species-specific identification by all owners or operators, dealers, and tournament operators of all sharks landed under the framework provisions of the Fishery Management Plan for Sharks of the Atlantic Ocean (FMP). This rule would reduce effective fishing mortality, facilitate enforcement, and improve management.