

Private Recreational Tilefish Permit and Reporting Requirements

Outreach Efforts to Improve Angler Awareness and Compliance

Background

In August 2020, NOAA Fisheries implemented mandatory permitting and reporting requirements for private vessels fishing for blueline or golden tilefish north of the North Carolina/Virginia border. Under the new requirements, private recreational vessels (including for-hire operators using their vessels for non-charter, recreational trips) must obtain a federal vessel permit to target or retain golden or blueline tilefish. These vessel operators are also required to submit vessel trip reports electronically within 24 hours of returning to port for trips where tilefish were targeted or retained. These measures were recommended by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council in order to gather necessary recreational tilefish catch and effort data that are not currently captured through dockside interviews and/or angler phone surveys.

During the October 2021 meeting, the Council received a presentation from the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) on the status of private recreational tilefish permitting and reporting. The update included information related to the number of issued permits, landings by state, reporting systems, and lessons learned. Overall, GARFO staff acknowledged this initiative is the first of its kind for a Mid-Atlantic Council-managed species and indicated compliance and awareness of the requirements will be improved through additional outreach. For example, port agents continue to help private anglers set up Fish Online accounts, apply for permits, and understand the reporting requirements.

Council members and stakeholders have expressed concern that some vessel operators may not be aware of the new permitting and reporting requirements. While more than 800 permits have been issued, a relatively small number of recreational trips/landings have been reported by recreational anglers. In 2021, vessel operators reported only 34 trips for blueline tilefish and 24 trips for golden tilefish. To address these concerns, the Council has encouraged both Council and NOAA fisheries staff to conduct additional outreach to improve public awareness of the tilefish permitting and reporting requirements, encourage compliance, and educate anglers on the reporting systems available to submit electronic vessel trip reports.

Past efforts to inform the public about requirements

- GARFO – Created flyers, rack cards, posters, and tabletop displays for distribution at fishing shows and outreach events attended by port agents
- GARFO – Distributed rack cards to tackle shops along the coast
- GARFO – Distributed an Announcement through the [April 2020 NOAA Navigator](#) (goes out to those subscribed to receive NOAA Navigator updates)
- GARFO – Distributed a [Fisheries Bulletin](#) and several subsequent reminders to list subscribers
- MAFMC – Developed informational web page: [Recreational Tilefish Permitting and Electronic Reporting](#)
- MAFMC – Developed [FAQ document](#)
- MAFMC – Funded development of *eFin Logbook* app for recreational tilefish reporting

- [Mid-Atlantic Council Announces New Mobile App for Recreational Tilefish Reporting](#)
- MAFMC – Hosted a [training webinar](#) on April 28th
- MAFMC – Worked with Fish Rules (fishing app) to update Tilefish regulations
- MAFMC – Email announcements/reminders:
 - [Recreational Tilefish Anglers: Learn How to Obtain a Permit and Report Your Catch](#) (April 14, 2020)
 - [New Permitting and Reporting Requirements for Recreational Blueline and Golden Tilefish](#) (August 4, 2020)
 - [Mid-Atlantic Council Announces New Mobile App for Recreational Tilefish Reporting](#) (August 24, 2020)
 - [For-hire Vessels and Tilefish Anglers: Reporting Requirements Reminder](#) (April 15, 2021)
 - News Roundup reminders – [August 5, 2020](#), [April 22, 2021](#), [August 19, 2022](#)
- New Jersey added information to their annually published Marine Fisheries Digest
 - Also distributed other outreach materials through the NJDFW website, social media posts, listserv email, etc.

Recent stakeholder feedback

- Hard to find details about permit and reporting requirements
- Unclear if people are unaware of regulation or are choosing not to comply
- Disconnect between number of permits and number of individuals reporting tilefish trips/catch
- Anglers may be unaware of the requirement to report all trips *targeting* tilefish, even if no tilefish are caught

Next steps

- Council staff will solicit input from the Communication and Outreach AP and Tilefish AP on ways to improve angler awareness of, and compliance with, tilefish permitting and reporting requirements.
 - Input on both methods of communicating with the target audience as well as the content and clarity of communication products.
- October 2022 Council meeting
 - GARFO update on status of private recreational tilefish permitting and reporting
 - Provided summary and outcomes of AP meeting
 - Discuss Council communication and outreach efforts and identify any additional needs.

Outreach options to consider

- Further distribute GARFO created outreach materials (*see flyer/rack card attachment*)
 - Is there room to improve outreach material?
 - Ask states if they are willing to distribute to state license holders and their universe of bait/tackle shops
- Reach out to current permit holders to get their feedback (phone calls, email, online comment form)
- Ask states to add permit requirement or notification of federal rules to their license purchasing app/website

- Would they be willing to add a few tilefish questions to 2023 license questions?
- Create an informative YouTube video
 - Topics: Importance of requirement, benefits to reporting trips/catch, how to apply for permit and submit reports
 - Consider outsourcing video development
 - Use recreational tilefish fishermen as “ambassadors” to highlight in video
- Distribute content via social media and other useful online platforms
 - Work with interested stakeholders to distribute content (e.g., charter captains, private recreational fishermen, fishing clubs, state agencies)
- Distribute content or present information to fishing clubs/groups within the region
- Update Council webpage and embed/post any new outreach materials as they are created (e.g., video, fliers)
- **Feedback on list above? Additional thoughts/ideas?**

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