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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **Federal Fishery Management Measures Approved for Blueline Tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic**

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council has approved measures to establish management of blueline tilefish in Federal waters off the Mid-Atlantic and New England coasts. The Blueline Tilefish Amendment includes a suite of measures that will incorporate blueline tilefish as a managed species in the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan.

Blueline tilefish are managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council from Florida to North Carolina, and there are currently no regular federal regulations north of the North Carolina/Virginia border. Last year, after catch of blueline tilefish off the Mid-Atlantic increased markedly, the Council requested that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) implement emergency measures to constrain landings of blueline tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic. These measures, which include a commercial trip limit of 275 pounds (gutted) and a recreational bag limit of 7 fish per person, are set to expire on June 3, 2016.

If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the amendment would establish a separate blueline tilefish management unit in Federal waters north of the North Carolina/Virginia border extending up to the boundary with Canada. The management objectives for blueline tilefish would be the same as for golden tilefish, with the addition that “management will reflect blueline tilefish’s susceptibility of overfishing and the need for an analytical stock assessment.”

Based on the recommendation of its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the Council adopted an Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) of 87,031 pounds for 2017. The Council voted to allocate 73% of total allowable landings to the recreational fishery and 27% to the commercial sector. This allocation was based on the median of annual commercial-recreational catch ratios from 2009-2013.

For the commercial fishery, the Council adopted a trip limit of 300 pounds gutted weight (head and fins must be attached). In addition, the amendment would require a joint golden/blueline tilefish open access commercial permit to retain blueline tilefish, subject to the applicable trip limit. Standard reporting of catch would be required for commercial vessels and dealers landing blueline tilefish.

For the recreational fishery, the Council recommended an open season from May 1 to October 31, when blueline tilefish are available to most anglers throughout the Mid-Atlantic. Recreational bag limits would be set at 7 fish per person for inspected for-hire vessels, 5 fish per person for uninspected for-hire vessels, and 3 fish per person for private vessels. In addition, the Council recommended mandatory permitting and reporting of golden and blueline tilefish for both for-hire and private recreational fishing in order to develop better information on recreational tilefish landings in the Mid-Atlantic.

“One of the challenges with developing this amendment has been the lack of data about the abundance and historical landings of blueline tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic,” said Council Chairman Rick Robins. “As we transition from emergency management to regular management of the fishery, it will be important for us to seek continual improvement in information on the status, productivity, and catch of blueline tilefish off the Mid-Atlantic. The Council will be working to encourage progress on the research needs identified by our SSC

and will also be highly engaged in developing new information through the upcoming SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review Assessment (SEDAR) for blueline tilefish.”

The public will have an opportunity to comment on the measures recommended by the Council during the comment period associated with the NMFS proposed rule. Publication of the proposed rule is expected this summer.