

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025

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HOUSE BILL 442
Committee Substitute Favorable 4/29/25
Committee Substitute #2 Favorable 5/6/25

Short Title: Restore Flounder/Red Snapper Season.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

March 20, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO RESTORE RECREATIONAL FISHING FOR FLOUNDER AND RED
SNAPPER IN NORTH CAROLINA THROUGH THE CREATION OF A FOUR-YEAR
PILOT PROGRAM.

Whereas, in 2024, the Division of Marine Fisheries of the Department of Environmental Quality issued proclamations limiting the recreational harvest of flounder to four days in joint fishing waters and the recreational harvest of red snapper to one day; and

Whereas, the recreational fishing industry contributes significantly to the economy of coastal North Carolina; and

Whereas, North Carolina's restrictions on recreational fishing of flounder and red snapper are more stringent than any other Southeastern state from Virginia to Texas; and

Whereas, there is considerable overlap in the fish population between southeastern counties of the State, such as Brunswick County, and South Carolina; and

Whereas, higher creel and season limits in South Carolina in 2024 gives that state a significant competitive advantage in the competition for recreational fishing tourism; and

Whereas, state policies regarding recreational catch and release reporting and data analysis overestimate overall mortality, thus skewing the science on the flounder fishery; and

Whereas, coastal fishing charters or individual boats report catching large amounts of these species by accident and having to release them, indicating the populations are plentiful; and

Whereas, these unnecessarily strict and possibly unscientific restrictions on the recreational fishing industry forces recreational fishing customers and captains to move much of their business to South Carolina and Virginia; Now, therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Directive. – Notwithstanding G.S. 113-221.1 and G.S. 143B-289.52 and any other provision of law to the contrary, the Fisheries Director (as defined in G.S. 113-251), the Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission), and the Division of Marine Fisheries of the Department of Environmental Quality (Division) shall do all of the following:

- (1) Issue a proclamation and undertake a supplement to the Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan to increase recreational and commercial access to the southern flounder resource by allowing a recreational harvest season not less than six weeks between May 15 and November 15 of each year with a limit of one fish per person per day, and no seasonal limit; and set a commercial quota with a total allowed catch of 750,000 pounds with quota overages in one year deducted from the following year's quota and any unused quota in one year added to the following year's quota. All other size and



manner of take limits, season opening dates, area designations, and specific area and gear sub-allocations implemented through Amendment 3 to the Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan shall continue to apply.

(2) Allow a year-round red snapper season with a limit of two fish per person per day and a 20-inch minimum size limit in State waters.

(3) By July 1, 2026, complete a southern flounder stock assessment based on the most recent years of available data.

SECTION 2. Report. – The Division shall report the results of the southern flounder stock assessment no later than August 1, 2026, to the chairs and members of the House Wildlife Resources Committee and the Senate Agriculture, Energy, and Environment Committee and shall annually report no later than August 1 thereafter with an assessment of progress in rebuilding the southern flounder stock and an estimated time line of further increasing recreational and commercial access to the southern flounder resource.

SECTION 3. Effective Date; Expiration. – This act is effective when it becomes law and expires August 1, 2029.