



HOUSE BILL 442: Flounder/Red Snapper Seasons & Shrimp Trawl.

2025-2026 General Assembly

Committee: Senate Rules and Operations of the Senate
Introduced by: Reps. Iler, Goodwin, Davis
Analysis of: Fourth Edition

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OVERVIEW: *House Bill 442 would direct the Fisheries Director, Marine Fisheries Commission, and the Division of Marine Fisheries to do all of the following: (i) open the southern flounder fishery for recreational fishing at least six weeks each year; (ii) set a commercial quota for southern flounder harvest at 750,000 lbs. each year; (iii) open a year-round red snapper season; (iv) conduct a southern flounder stock assessment; and (v) submit annual progress reports to the General Assembly. This act would also make it unlawful to take or attempt to take shrimp using a trawl net in any coastal fishing waters other than areas of the Atlantic Ocean located more than one-half mile from shore.*

CURRENT LAW/BACKGROUND: The marine fisheries resources of the State are largely managed through the Fishery Management Plan Process. The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (Division) prepares proposed Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for adoption by the Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) for all commercially or recreationally significant species or fisheries. The goal of the FMPs is to ensure the long-term viability of the State's commercially and recreationally significant species or fisheries. The Commission may delegate to the Fisheries Director the authority to issue proclamations suspending or implementing, in whole or in part, particular rules of the Commission that may be affected by variable conditions.

BILL ANALYSIS:

RESTORE FLOUNDER AND RED SNAPPER SEASONS

Section 1 of the bill would direct the Fisheries Director, the Commission, and the Division to do all of the following:

- Undertake a supplement to the Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan that: (i) allows a recreational harvest season of not less than six weeks between May 15 and November 15, with a daily creel limit of one fish per person and no seasonal limit; and (ii) sets 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. Any unused quota in one year would be 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 would continue to apply.
- Allow a year-round red snapper season with a daily limit of two fish per person and a 20-inch minimum size limit in State waters.
- By July 1, 2026, complete a southern flounder stock assessment based on the most recent years of available data.

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Section 2 of the bill would require the Division to report the results of the southern flounder stock assessment no later than August 1, 2026 to the House Wildlife Resources Committee and the Senate Agriculture, Energy, and Environment Committee, and to submit annual reports each year thereafter assessing efforts to rebuild southern flounder stock and estimating a timeframe for increasing recreational and commercial access to southern flounder.

PROHIBIT SHRIMP TRAWLING IN ALL INSHORE FISHING WATERS AND WITHIN ONE-HALF MILE OF THE SHORELINE

"Coastal fishing waters" is defined to include the Atlantic Ocean; the various coastal sounds; and estuarine waters up to the dividing line between coastal fishing waters and inland fishing waters agreed upon by the Marine Fisheries Commission and the Wildlife Resources Commission.

Section 3 would make it unlawful to take or attempt to take shrimp using a trawl net in any coastal fishing waters other than areas of the Atlantic Ocean located more than one-half mile from shore. Violating this prohibition would be punishable by a Class A1 misdemeanor.

The Marine Fisheries Commission would be required to adopt rules to implement this section.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Sections 1 and 2 are effective when they become law and expire August 1, 2029. Section 3 becomes effective December 1, 2025, and applies to offenses committed on or after that date.