

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

Summary Report

Crowne Plaza Hotel
4381 Tanger Outlet Boulevard
North Charleston, SC

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) met on November 19-20, 2013 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in North Charleston, SC. The AP discussed the following topics and made motions and recommendations as indicated.

Status of Snapper Grouper Amendments and SSC Report

Council staff gave the AP a brief overview of the status of snapper grouper FMP amendments and other relevant amendments. Council staff then provided an overview of discussions and recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) including results of stock assessments for blueline tilefish, snowy grouper, and mutton snapper. AP members expressed some concern about landings data used in the blueline tilefish assessment (1981-1986) that may have been wrongly attributed as blueline tilefish when they may have represented landings of golden tilefish.

Amendment 22 (Recreational Tag Program)

Council staff reviewed the Options Paper, including changes made at the September 2013 meeting, and presented the proposed timeline for development. This was the AP's first opportunity to discuss this amendment. The AP provided the following motions and recommendations:

- TAGS SHOULD NOT BE TRANSFERABLE
- A PERCENTAGE OF THE TAGS SHOULD GO TO THE FOR-HIRE SECTOR?
- CONSIDER ISSUING A LARGER NUMBER OF TAGS THAN THE ACL AND REQUIRING THAT UNUSED TAGS BE RETURNED AT THE END OF THE YEAR/SEASON?
- CONSIDER A NON-PROFIT AGENCY OR CONTRACTOR TO ADMINISTER THE TAG PROGRAM?
- AP DID NOT HAVE A STRONG OPINION AS FAR AS WHICH ENTITY SHOULD MANAGE THE TAG PROGRAM.

The AP discussed the possibility of a stamp program for the recreational sector. The AP has, in the past, recommended to the Council that a stamp program be developed for the snapper grouper recreational sector. Advantages of a stamp program would include: broader participation than that allowed by a recreational harvest tag program, precursor to a recreational permit (which AP members have advocated in the past), and an estimate of potential recreational effort for the target species. Among the concerns that were expressed regarding a stamp program

was the necessity to involve the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) in its development and implementation. This would be necessary because the current methodology employed by MRIP would have to be altered to accommodate a stamp program.

MOTION: THE COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER ESTABLISHING A SNAPPER GROUPER STAMP (FOR THE SG COMPLEX).
APPROVED (11 IN FAVOR)

MOTION: SUPPORT ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 1 TO ESTABLISH A RECREATIONAL HARVEST TAG PROGRAM FOR SNAPPER GROUPER SPECIES WITH LOW RECREATIONAL ACLs.
APPROVED (8 IN FAVOR, 6 OPPOSED, 1 ABSTENTION)

SUBSTITUTE MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A RECREATIONAL HARVEST TAG SYSTEM.

MOTION WITHDRAWN

MOTION: THE AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 3 UNDER ACTION 2 AS PREFERRED: Alternative 3. To be eligible to receive a recreational harvest tag the applicant must own a valid recreational fishing license from the state in which they will be fishing if granted a harvest tag, or have a valid/renewable Charter/Headboat for Snapper Grouper permit (if the Council chooses Alternative 3 under Action 1). [this option would address the issue of Canadian and other non-citizens not being able to get tags].

MOTION FAILS

MOTION: THE AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 2 AS PREFERRED: **Alternative 2.** To be eligible to receive a recreational harvest tag the applicant must be a U.S. Citizen or permanent resident alien, own a valid recreational fishing license from the state in which they will be fishing if granted a harvest tag, or have a valid/renewable Charter/Headboat for Snapper Grouper permit (if the Council chooses Alternative 3 under Action 1). [this option would prohibit foreign vacationers from getting tags].
APPROVED

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS ADDING AN ALTERNATIVE TO ACTION 3: ALTERNATIVE 4. ESTABLISH A TAG ISSUANCE PROGRAM THAT WOULD BASE A PERCENTAGE OF THE TAGS ISSUED ON FOR-HIRE HISTORICAL PARTICIPATION AND CONSIDER A CONTROL DATE.
APPROVED

MOTION: AP RECOGNIZES THE DIFFICULTY OF ACHIEVING ALLOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION AND WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE COUNCIL ALLOCATE TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE TO HISTORICAL PARTICIPANTS AND RESORT TO LOTTERY DISTRIBUTION WHEN ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.
APPROVED (1 OPPOSED).

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER RE-INTRODUCING AN ACTION TO DEFINE “LOW ACL” AND REMOVE THE TAG PROGRAM WHEN THE ACL IS NO LONGER CONSIDERED “LOW”.

APPROVED

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 3 UNDER ACTION 3 AS PREFERRED:

Alternative 3. Tags would be issued primarily through an electronic web-based lottery with a secondary option to enter the lottery through a mail-in or call in system.

APPROVED

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 2 AS PREFERRED:

Alternative 2. All cost recovery fees would be the responsibility of the recreational harvest tag lottery entrant. Fees would be assessed at the time of entering the lottery.

APPROVED

Amendment 29 (ORCS and ABC Control Rule)

Council staff will present the draft document with alternatives for amending the ABC Control Rule as per the SSC’s recommendations and the resulting adjustments to ABCs for unassessed snapper grouper species.

The amendment also includes actions for gray triggerfish management measures. The AP had the following general comments and made the following motions and recommendations:

- Concern over red hind and rock hind being in different exploitation categories.
- Harvest of gray triggerfish has been closed in-season the past two years. These in-season closures seem to have benefited the stock significantly. The AP was not concern over an increase in the ABC/ACL.
- The AP wants the Council to consider a commercial split-season for gray triggerfish that would make gray triggerfish available when other snapper grouper species are closed.

Action 1. Amend the South Atlantic Council’s ABC Control Rule and specify ABCs based on those modifications.

MOTION: AP RECOMMENDS SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2D AS THE PREFERRED

Sub-alternative 2d. Use 0.90(catch statistic x scalar) for stocks with low risk of overexploitation, 0.80(catch statistic x scalar) for stocks with moderate risk of overexploitation, and 0.70(catch statistic x scalar) stocks with moderately high risk of overexploitation.

APPROVED

MOTION: CONSIDER USING A 0.50 RISK TOLERANCE LEVEL FOR HOGFISH

APPROVED

MOTION: AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER INCREASING THE MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT FOR HOGFISH

APPROVED

LOOK AT 14 TO 18 INCHES*

Action 2. Modify the measurement method for gray triggerfish and establish a size limit

MOTION: AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 3 AS THE PREFERRED

Alternative 3. Specify a minimum size limit for gray triggerfish of 12 inches FL in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida.

MOTION FAILS

MOTION: RECOMMEND A MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT OF 14 INCHES FOR GRAY TRIGGERFISH IN FEDERAL WATERS OFF NORTH CAROLINA, SOUTH CAROLINA, GEORGIA, AND EAST FLORIDA.

APPROVED

Action 3. Establish a commercial split season for gray triggerfish

MOTION: AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 2 AS PREFERRED

Alternative 2. Allocate the directed commercial gray triggerfish ACL 50% to the period January 1 through June 30 and 50% to the period July 1 through December 31. Any remaining ACL from season 1 would transfer to season 2. Any remaining ACL from season 2 would not be carried forward.

APPROVED

CONSIDER A SPAWNING SEASON CLOSURE (COMMERCIAL) FOR GRAY TRIGGERFISH*

MOTION: COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER REDUCING THE BAG LIMIT OF GRAY TRIGGERFISH TO 8 FISH

APPROVED

Action 4. Establish a commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish

MOTION: AP RECOMMENDS SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2A AS PREFERRED

MOTION FAILS

MOTION: COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER TRIP STEP-DOWN ALTERNATIVES (75-85%) AND DIFFERENT POUNDAGE LIMITS

APPROVED

MOTION: AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 1 AS PREFERRED

MOTION FAILS FOR LACK OF A SECOND

MOTION: RECOMMEND A COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT OF 1,000 POUNDS (SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2B).

APPROVED

Regulatory Amendment 17 (MPAs for speckled hind and warsaw grouper)

Council staff reviewed the Summary Document, including the proposed timeline for development and the impacts of proposed MPAs developed by the SERO. The AP had a number of questions and/or points:

1. What level of reduction in bycatch is needed? A lot has been done for these 2 species and we don't know the benefits. Doing more without knowing the effects of what was done is not appropriate.
2. These species will take a while to recover and may take long to see any benefits. These are not the best 2 species to use to justify more MPAs.
3. Need to protect fish when spawning. Be specific with the areas and make them as small as possible. Consider closing when spawning. The AP approved a motion addressing protecting spawning fish (see below).
4. The estimates of economic impacts are way off. Commercial fishermen can only choose 1 grid on a trip and the grids are very large. The impact analysis does not include private recreational and you cannot use the headboat impacts as a proxy because private recreational boats fish in different locations. The actual impacts from these alternatives are higher than shown (see motion below).
5. Information on how well the previous MPAs have worked and information on the economic value of switching/changing existing MPAs not provided which makes it difficult for the AP to comment.

MOTION: PROTECTING SPAWNING FISH IS A COMMON-SENSE APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT. THE COUNCIL SHOULD PRIORITIZE AREAS OF KNOWN SPAWNING ACTIVITY WHEN IT CONSIDERS REGULATORY AMENDMENT 17 AND PUT IN PLACE TARGETED CLOSURES TO BOTTOM-FISHING ONLY, TO ALLOW FOR SURFACE TROLLING AND MINIMIZE SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED MPAS.

APPROVED

MOTION: THE COUNCIL AND SEFSC REMOVE THE IMPACT TABLE FROM THE AMENDMENT DUE TO THE DIFFERENT INFORMATION FROM FISHERMEN VERSUS WHAT THE TABLE SHOWS

APPROVED

NC Potential MPA Sites:

MOTION: KEEP SNOWY WRECK MPA THE SAME SIZE

APPROVED

MOTION: DO AWAY WITH THE SOUTH CAPE LOOKOUT MPA & SOUTHERN NORTH CAROLINA MPA; ADD 780 BOTTOM & MALCHASE WRECK AS TEST SITES; AND REQUIRE MONITORING

APPROVED

SC Potential MPA Sites:

MOTION: CONSIDER REDUCING THE SIZE OF THE DEVILS HOLE/GEORGETOWN HOLE MPA TO 1 SQUARE MILE

APPROVED

MOTION: SUPPORT ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION)

APPROVED

GA Potential MPA Sites:

MOTION: EXTEND THE EXISTING MPA WESTWARD TO THE SAME DEPTH AS THE PROPOSED SITES

DISAPPROVED

FL Potential MPA Sites:

MOTION: ESTABLISH THE WARSAW HOLE AS A MPA.

DISAPPROVED

MOTION: USE ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) AS PREFERRED

APPROVED

Regulatory Amendment 16 (Black Sea Bass Pot Closure Removal)

Council staff reviewed alternatives to address the proposed annual closure of black sea bass pots from November 1 to April 30. Regulatory Amendment 19 implemented this regulation as well as an increase to the black sea bass ACL. The AP discussed the feasibility of the pot closure only applying to within designated Right Whale Critical Habitat. Some of the AP members from North Carolina indicated that migratory whales are frequently encountered in water 30-60 feet deep off the NC coast. Migrating whales are distributed from the Gulf of Maine south in spring and fall and congregate at calving grounds. The number of black sea bass pots the whales encounter in the South Atlantic is minuscule relative to the number of pots in the Gulf of Maine. The AP made the following motions:

MOTION: RECOMMEND ALTERNATIVE 4 AS PREFERRED

Alternative 4. Prohibit retention, possession, and fishing for black sea bass using black sea bass pot gear, annually, from November 1 to April 30, in designated right whale critical habitat in the South Atlantic region.

APPROVED

MOTION: COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER AN ALTERNATIVE THAT WOULD PROHIBIT THE USE OF BSB POTS IN A 5-MILE CORRIDOR UP TO CAPE HATTERAS, NORTH CAROLINA.

MOTION FAILS

Visioning and Strategic Planning for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

Council staff briefed the AP on ongoing activities pertaining to the Visioning and Strategic Planning process. Staff reviewed draft outreach materials and requested feedback from the AP on draft strategic goals, and structure and location of port meetings.

The AP was supportive of the 4 strategic goals. AP members recommended developing “Best Fishing Practices” to guide the development of amendments in the future. For instance, one of the “rules” might be to establish spawning season closures. Another suggestion was, for species that have low ACLs, it might be better to treat them as a bycatch fishery rather than a directed harvest. Another comment was made that the Council has talked about developing management strategies that address regional differences in the fishery and the suggestion was made to make this a focus of conversation at port meetings.

Recommendations for Port meetings:

- Split up meetings by sector. Consider using breakout groups for the sectors.
- Have just two or three questions to answer.
- Consider different approaches to the format of the port meetings based on participation:
 - Keep group together and walk through facilitated questions - useful for small groups; still use small cards to write out ideas and place on sticky wall.
 - Divide into small group breakouts to answer questions and then come back together to report out by group. This approach will facilitate everyone’s participation, not just those who are comfortable talking in an audience setting.
 - Have participants to individually write down ideas first; then put them in small groups to compile 2-3 ideas collectively; then report out by group.
 - Breakout groups that can go off on their own and report back.
- Try to create an atmosphere that will make people comfortable and encourage them to voice their opinions, not just their complaints.
- Make sure you provide the participants with an overview of the responsibilities of the South Atlantic Council.
- Make sure that participants understand the limitations of what the Council can do.
- Recommendation to focus efforts on the recreational sector since they are the ones that commonly do not participate in Council-sponsored meetings.
- Consider a questionnaire prior to the meeting? Perhaps request that participants register.
- Have questionnaire online that meeting participants can download and be prepared for the discussions.
- Are the participants going to be asked to provide their input just on management strategies?
- Expect disappointment: most people will simply want more fish and fewer regulations.
- Be mindful of the time of year for scheduling meetings. Winter months are best for the Carolinas.
- Consider radio broadcasts in the Keys.

Locations:

- Fort Pierce, Canaveral, FL – Rodney Smith
- Waters Edge Restaurant, Charleston, SC – Mark Brown
- Charleston, SC – Mark Marhefka (could organize a meeting for chefs/restaurants)
- St. Augustine, FL – Robert Johnson
- Recreational Fishing Clubs in NC – Terrell Gould
- Marathon, FL – Don Demaria
- St. Simmons Island/Brunswick, GA – Jack Perrett
- Outer Banks, NC – Suggested to hold meetings in both Hatteras and Wanchese
- Southport/Oak Island, NC – Kenny Fex
- Hampstead, NC – Kenny Fex has a contact
- Timing for meetings suggested: Winter for SC (For-hire/recreational/commercial); March for northern NC (for-hire/commercial); Early April for NC (commercial; before grouper opens and weather is still bad).

Feedback on Flyer:

- Does not address the seafood consumer and restaurant owners.
- Re-order the list of questions.

Additional Materials for Port Meetings:

- Port meeting posters to include: list of SG complex species; list of commonly used acronyms/definitions; legal mandates of MSA; list of key issues/topics the Council wants feedback on.

Other Business

MOTION: RECOMMEND TO THE COUNCIL TO ADD SPEARING AS AN ALLOWABLE GEAR FOR SPANISH MACKEREL, KING MACKEREL AND COBIA.

REQUEST THAT NOAA GC PROVIDE CLARIFICATION IN WRITING AS TO WHETHER THIS PRACTICE IS CURRENTLY LEGAL*

APPROVED

MOTION: RECOMMEND THAT A HIGHER SIZE LIMIT BE SET FOR SPEARFISHING GEAR.

MOTION FAILS

MOTION: COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER SETTING THE BSB COMMERCIAL SIZE LIMIT AT 13 INCHES LIKE IT IS CURRENTLY FOR THE RECREATIONAL SECTOR

MOTION FAILS

The AP requested that the discussion on black sea bass minimum size limits for both sectors be included in their agenda for the April 2014 meeting.

SEDAR staff requested volunteers to participate in SEDAR 41 (red snapper and gray triggerfish) and went over the schedule of meetings. Two AP members volunteered to participate.