

OVERVIEW

Snapper Grouper Committee Meeting

March 4 & 5, 2009
Jekyll Island Club Hotel
371 Riverview Drive
Jekyll Island, GA

The Snapper Grouper Committee needs to: (A) receive an update on outreach and research/monitoring efforts associated with the *Oculina* Bank Experimental Closed Area; (B) receive a report on two studies involving species in the Snapper Grouper FMU; (C) review the request and model language for draft regulations in Gray's Reef and determine whether to approve or disapprove; (D) receive a presentation on the final rule that amends the National Standard 1 guidelines; (E) review alternatives in Amendment 17 and provide guidance to staff as necessary; (F) develop recommendations about submitting an interim rule for red snapper for formal secretarial review; (G) review the Amendment 18 scoping comments and provide guidance to staff as necessary in terms of the alternatives; and (H) review the Comprehensive ACL scoping comments that pertain to species in the Snapper Grouper FMU and provide guidance to staff as necessary.

A. *Oculina* Monitoring Report (Attachment 1)

Kim Iverson and Myra Brouwer will provide an update on outreach efforts and research/monitoring activities, respectively, associated with the *Oculina* Bank Experimental Closed Area (**Attachment 1**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Take action as necessary.

B. Reports on (a) Discard Mortality of Black Sea Bass and (b) Using Acoustics to Predict CPUE of Deepwater Reef Fish in the Snowy Wreck MPA

Paul Ruderhasuen, of North Carolina State University, will present two studies:

Topic 1:

'Refining the discard mortality rate of black sea bass with a novel tagging approach'

Researchers at NC State University used a tagging approach to estimate the rate of discard mortality for black sea bass. Fish were tagged in waters between 95 and 100 feet in Onslow Bay, NC. Mortality rates for various release conditions were estimated; these mortality rates were then applied to observed release conditions from five independent fishery data sets in which black sea bass were caught and discarded. We found that mortality rates increased with depth and differed by gear type; although the majority of fish with obvious pressure trauma survive release, the rates of discard mortality often

exceeded the assumed 15% discard mortality that was recently used to assess the stock. The rate of discard mortality used for assessments of black sea bass should be depth and gear-specific. Forthcoming work on this project will include estimating rates of predation on discarded black sea bass to improve estimates of discard mortality with the tagging approach.

Topic 2:

‘Pilot survey of deepwater reef fishes off North Carolina; developing a new monitoring approach’

The ability to monitor the abundance of deepwater reef fish has diminished as a result of recent regulations. In this ongoing study, we (NC State University, NOAA, and Duke University) are using SONAR and traditional commercial fishing gear to test a new monitoring technique. Our fieldwork is focused on the newly created Snowy Wreck MPA and a nearby control area. Three different model fits show a positive relationship between acoustic backscatter and CPUE. SONAR and CPUE data have shown that reef fish biomass is concentrated along the shelf break area of the MPA; dominant species include red porgy, snowy grouper, and scamp. With these models, CPUE of reef fish can be estimated from areas where only acoustic data have been collected; this supplemental information can improve estimates of CPUE. This approach shows promise as a new way to monitor the abundance of deepwater reef fish.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Take action as necessary.

C. Gray’s Reef Research Area Request for Draft Proposed Regulations (Attachment 2)

Dr. George Sedberry, Superintendent of Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary, will present a request for draft proposed regulations to establish a research area in the sanctuary (**Attachment 2**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review the request and model language for draft regulations and determine whether to approve or disapprove.

D. Final Rule That Amends the National Standard 1 Guidelines (Attachment 3)

The Final Rule that amends the National Standard 1 guidelines and provides guidance on Annual Catch Limits was published in the Federal Register on January 16th, 2009 (**Attachment 3**). NOAA Fisheries staff will present the final rule.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Take action as necessary.

E. Amendment 17 (Attachments 4 & 5)

The SSC has provided ABC recommendations for warsaw grouper, speckled hind, snowy grouper, black sea bass, red snapper, vermilion snapper, and gag. Black and red grouper will be assessed beginning this year; the Review Workshop will be held January 25-29, 2010. The SSC will most likely review the results when they meet in June of 2010. The SSC approved the TAC in Amendment 13C for golden tilefish and an assessment update is scheduled to begin mid-2010.

Actions proposed in Amendment 17 (**Attachments 4 & 5**) would:

- Specify Annual Catch Limits (ACLs), Annual Catch Targets (ACTs), and Accountability Measures (AMs) for 10 species undergoing overfishing;
- Modify management measures as needed to limit harvest to the ACL or ACT;
- Specify status determination criteria for red snapper; and
- Specify a rebuilding plan for red snapper.

Team members have been assigned to work on the following:

- (1) Determine reduction in red snapper total removals that would occur if there was no harvest considering: (a) effect of management measures in Amendment 16; (b) reduction in effort that could occur due to economic situation; (c) effect of de-hooking and venting tools on release mortality; and (d) ability of fishermen to avoid red snapper by fishing differently or avoiding hot spots. This would be modeled with a range of assumptions.
- (2) Develop a monitoring program for red snapper that would monitor the recovery of the stock. One possible method would track CPUE through a fishery independent monitoring program. The group will evaluate how to monitor discards, particularly if the red snapper fishery becomes a discard-only fishery and discard data are collected through self-reporting means.

The timeline is for the Council to review the options in Amendment 17 at their March and June 2009 meetings and to review a more complete document at their September meeting (June if possible).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review the alternatives in the amendment and provide guidance to staff as necessary.

F. Interim Rule (Attachments 6-12)

A SEDAR assessment was completed in February 2008 and indicated that red snapper are overfished and undergoing overfishing (**Attachments 7 and 8**). The Council received notification, in a letter dated July 8th, 2008, that the South Atlantic red snapper stock is undergoing overfishing and is overfished and that the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the Council to prepare a plan amendment or proposed regulations to end overfishing within one year (**Attachment 9**). Pursuant to Section 305(c)(1) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act as reauthorized, the Council discussed, at their June 2008 meeting, a prohibition on harvest and possession of red snapper to be implemented through interim measures. The Council approved the following motion at their June 2008 meeting in Orlando, Florida after reviewing the SSC's approval of the SEDAR stock assessment, extensive public input received during the scoping process and input from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel:

“The Council directed staff to develop a letter to the Regional Administrator requesting the regional office develop an interim rule closing harvest of red snapper and implementing the reductions in fishing mortality as specified in the preferred alternatives in Amendment 16 for gag grouper, vermilion snapper, black grouper, and red grouper.” The Council's intent is that the Interim Rule would be brought before the Council for consideration at the September 2008 meeting.

A letter, dated July 16th, 2008, was sent to the Regional Administrator requesting the Regional Office to develop an interim rule (**Attachment 10**). NOAA Fisheries (SERO) presented actions in the interim rule to the Committee at the September Council meeting. The Council decided not to proceed with a red snapper interim rule at the time and decided to postpone discussions until the December Council meeting. The Council discussed a red snapper interim rule at the meeting, decided to not to take action, and decided to discuss at the March 2009 meeting.

The Committee should discuss an interim rule for red snapper (**Attachment 6**). The interim rule request for red porgy is included as background information on use of emergency/interim rules (**Attachment 11**). A PowerPoint presentation outlining the stock status of red snapper and alternatives that were taken to scoping is included as **Attachment 12**. Measures to end overfishing and establish a rebuilding program are being developed in Amendment 17.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Develop recommendations about submitting an interim rule for red snapper for formal secretarial review.

G. Amendment 18 (Attachments 13-15)

Actions proposed in Amendment 18 (**Attachment 13**) would:

- Extend snapper grouper FMU northward;
- Limit participation in golden tilefish fishery;
- Limit participation in black sea bass pot fishery;
- Separate snowy grouper quota into regions/states;
- Separate gag recreational allocation into regions/states;
- Adjust golden tilefish fishing year;
- Improve data reporting and statistics for the commercial, for-hire, and private recreational sectors;
- Review and update wreckfish ITQ program; and
- Designate EFH in northern areas.

The scoping letters are included as **Attachment 14**. The audio files of the public's comments at the meetings have been sent to Council members. Staff will summarize the comments received from scoping (**Attachment 15**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review the scoping comments and modify document as necessary.

H. Comprehensive ACL Amendment (Attachments 16-18)

The Comprehensive ACL amendment will specify ACLs, ACTs, AMs, and allocations for all species managed by the Council not subject to overfishing. Scoping meetings were held in late January and early February. A list of items that were scoped is included as **Attachment 16**.

The scoping letters are included as **Attachment 17**. The audio files of the public's comments at the meetings have been sent to Council members. Staff will summarize the comments received from scoping (**Attachment 18**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review the scoping comments and proposed actions in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment.