

# Revised Overview

## Snapper Grouper Committee

Westin Jekyll Island  
110 Ocean Way  
Jekyll Island GA

March 8-9, 2016

The committee will: (A) receive reports on the status of commercial and recreational catches versus the respective ACLs for snapper grouper species; (B) receive a status report on snapper grouper amendments under Secretarial review; (C) receive a presentation from Dr. Paul Rudershausen (NC State University) on black sea bass pot selectivity; (D) receive the SSC's input on setting ABC for the FLK/EFL stock of hogfish; (E) review public hearing comment and discuss Amendment 37 (hogfish); (F) review scoping comments and discuss Amendment 41 (mutton snapper); (G) review and approve the Oculina Experimental Closed Area Evaluation Report; (H) review and approve the draft System Management Plan for Deepwater MPAs; (I) approve Amendment 36 for formal review and approve the System Management Plan for Spawning SMZs; (J) discuss possible actions to include in Amendment 43 (red snapper); (K) discuss items to include in next amendment(s) to the Snapper Grouper FMP resulting from Visioning; and (L) address other business as appropriate.

### **A. Status of landings for snapper grouper species under ACLs (*Attachments 1a & 1b*)**

The Committee will receive an update on the status of landings (commercial and recreational) for snapper grouper species under ACLs.

**COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and take action as necessary.

### **B. Status of amendments approved for secretarial review**

The Committee will receive a status report from SERO staff on the following amendments:

- Amendment 33 (transport of fillets from The Bahamas) – sent to NMFS 5/1/15
- Amendment 34 (Comprehensive Accountability Measures) – sent to NMFS 2/27/15
- Amendment 35 (removal of species and golden tilefish endorsements) – sent to NMFS 9/10/15
- Regulatory Amendment 25
- Regulatory Amendment 16

### **C. Black Sea Bass Pot Selectivity Study (*Attachment 2*)**

Dr. Paul Rudershausen, North Carolina State University, will present results of a study to explore the selectivity of different mesh sizes in commercial black sea bass pot gear. The commercial black sea bass minimum size in the South Atlantic was increased to 11 inches without a concurrent increase in the minimum size of trap mesh to harvest the species. Researchers from North Carolina State University teamed up with Tom Burgess (Sneads Ferry,

NC) in cooperative research funded by North Carolina Sea Grant to investigate trap mesh sizes larger than the current minimum trap mesh configuration (five sides 1.5 inch mesh, one side 2 inch mesh). The purpose of the study was to determine whether larger mesh traps would optimize selectivity; that is, maximize escape of sub-legal fish while maintaining catch of legal fish. Traps with uniform mesh sizes of 2, 2.25, and 2.5 inches were tested. The study found that at the current minimum size limit of 11 inches, the 2.25-inch mesh trap would optimize selectivity. The research also showed that the current minimum trap mesh configuration retains a higher number of sub-legal fish than traps of larger mesh sizes. Researchers were able to successfully predicted approximate black sea bass sizes at first retention by the experimental traps of uniform mesh sizes; this is useful information given any future changes in the minimum size limit for this species.

**COMMITTEE ACTION:** Provide guidance as needed

**D. SSC Input on setting ABC for the FLK/EFL stock of hogfish (*Attachment 3*)**

The Council has given staff guidance to specify the recreational ACL for hogfish in numbers of fish. This would be accomplished most appropriately by utilizing ABC values in numbers, instead of pounds, from the assessment projections. This approach would necessitate recalculating sector allocations also using values in numbers. However, the Council does not want to deviate from the way sector allocations have been defined (using pounds) until allocations can be addressed for all managed species through a comprehensive amendment. Therefore, the proposed ABC for the FLK/EFL hogfish is currently expressed in pounds and the recreational ACL has been converted to numbers using the average weight of a recreationally caught hogfish. A potential issue arises, however, when the minimum size is increased above what the fishery is harvesting. Amendment 37 proposes a range of minimum size limit increases for the FLK/EFL stock from 14 to 17 inches whereas the average size of a landed hogfish in Florida is around 14 inches. The concern is that the average weight used to convert the recreational ACL from pounds to numbers will no longer be applicable if the fishery begins to harvest larger fish. Two methods have been proposed to address the issue, which the SSC will review during a special webinar on March 4, 2016. Dr. Luiz Barbieri, SSC Chair will present the SSC's recommendations to the Committee.

**COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and provide guidance to staff.

**E. Amendment 37 (Hogfish; *Attachments 4a-4c*)**

Amendment 37 to the Snapper Grouper FMP contains twelve actions pertaining to management of hogfish in federal waters of the South Atlantic. Hogfish in the South Atlantic can be split into two genetically distinct stocks: one off Georgia and the Carolinas (GA-NC) and one Florida Keys/East Florida (FLK/EFL) stock. The stock status for the GA-NC stock is unknown due to insufficient data for a stock assessment to be accepted. The FLK/EFL stock of hogfish is undergoing overfishing and is overfished based on a completed stock assessment in 2014 (SEDAR 37 2014). Since the FLK/EFL stock is overfished a rebuilding plan is needed. Amendment 37 would specify the boundary between the FLK/EFL hogfish stock and the Gulf of Mexico stock, specify Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limits (ACLs), and Optimum Yield (OY) for both stocks, establish a rebuilding plan for the FLK/EFL stock, and implement or modify management measures for both stocks to attain the desired level of harvest.

Myra Brouwer will present a summary of comments obtained during public hearings. In-person public hearings for Amendment 37 were held from January 25 through February 3, 2016. Public testimony was obtained at the meetings and written comments were accepted until February 10, 2016.

**COMMITTEE ACTION:** Consider public comment and make appropriate modifications, review preliminary analyses, and provide guidance to staff.

**F. Amendment 41 (Mutton snapper; Attachments 5a & 5b)**

In June 2015, the Council directed staff to begin development of a new amendment to revise the biological parameters, catch levels, and management measures for mutton snapper in response to the latest stock assessment for that species (completed in 2015 with data through 2013). At their December 2015 meeting, the Council approved Amendment 41 for scoping. Scoping meetings were held in-person from January 25 to February 3, 2016. Meetings in Florida were held in conjunction with workshops conducted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), which is also considering changes to management of mutton snapper in Florida state waters. Scoping comments were accepted until February 10, 2016. Myra Brouwer will present a summary of scoping comments received and give an overview of current actions in the draft amendment.

**COMMITTEE ACTION:** Consider scoping comments, make changes as needed, and provide guidance to staff.

**G. Oculina Experimental Closed Area Evaluation Report (Attachment 6)**

In 2004, the Council requested a 10-year review be conducted of the *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area (OECA). The *Oculina* Evaluation Team, comprised of law enforcement representatives, research scientists, resource managers, commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, outreach experts, and non-governmental organization representatives, reviewed the objectives listed in the *Oculina* Evaluation Plan and commented on progress to-date. After reviewing the objectives, the team discussed the size, configuration, and regulations for the OECA and responded to the Council's request to evaluate the possible designation of a Shrimp Access Area in the *Oculina* Habitat Area of Particular Concern and the OECA. The team did not recommend any changes to the OECA and did not support creation of a Shrimp Access Area in the OECA. Chip Collier will review the *Oculina* Evaluation Team's recommendations.

**COMMITTEE ACTION:** Review, provide input as necessary, approve the document as the completed *Oculina* Evaluation Team Report, and provide recommendations for next review including timing and scope.

**H. System Management Plan for Deepwater MPAs (Attachment 7)**

Eight Deepwater MPAs were established through Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 in January 2009. The Council has developed a System Management Plan (SMP) that serves as the framework for resource protection, research and monitoring, outreach, administration, and evaluation of the MPAs. The SMP includes action items to assist in achieving the goals and objectives of the SMP and potential metrics for evaluating the management effectiveness of the MPAs. Eventually, the SMP will be expanded to encompass all the Council's managed areas, with sections for MPAs, Spawning SMZs, SMZs, and Coral HAPCs. Chip Collier will present the overview of the SMP.

**COMMITTEE ACTION:** Review, provide input as necessary, approve the document as the completed System Management Plan for Deepwater MPAs, and provide recommendations on timing and scope of review.

**I. Amendment 36 (Spawning Special Management Zones; Attachments 8a-8c)**

Amendment 36 would specify a process for identifying spawning sites/aggregations for snapper grouper species, including speckled hind and warsaw grouper, based on the characteristics of sites important for spawning. Proposed regulations only prohibiting fishing for and/or possessing snapper grouper species in areas designated as Spawning SMZs. The amendment would also revise the boundary of the Charleston Deep Reef MPA, and address transit and anchoring provisions within newly designated Spawning SMZs. A 10-year sunset provision whereby the Spawning SMZs designation would be discontinued unless spawning were documented and the Council approved a framework action to reauthorize the Spawning SMZs is also included. At their December 2015, the Council approved all actions in Amendment 36. The Council also developed a System Management Plan (SMP) to specify the outreach, law enforcement, and monitoring/research projects necessary to effectively monitor and evaluate the Spawning SMZs. Gregg Waugh will present an overview of the actions in the amendment and Chip Collier will lead the discussion of the draft SMP.

**COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and make any necessary modifications to the amendment, deem the codified text, and recommend approval for formal review by the Secretary of Commerce. Review and approve the SMP.

**J. Amendment 43 (red snapper; Attachments 9a-9c)**

A synopsis of red snapper data is being provided to inform Council discussions on potential red snapper management measures for inclusion in Amendment 43. The data include commercial and recreational landings, seasonality of harvest, size distribution of red snapper catch, and distribution of bag/trip sizes. Chip Collier will give an overview of the information compiled. Attachments 9b and 9c are correspondence between Congressmen Jones and Murphy and NMFS regarding red snapper management.

**COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and provide guidance to staff.

**K. Results of Ranking Actions for Fisheries Seasonality/Retention Regulatory Amendment (Attachments 10a & 10b)**

In December 2015, Council members completed a survey to rank different amendment approaches/topics for a Visioning Amendment in 2016. The highest ranked approach/topic was Fishery Seasonality/Retention. Additionally, Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 23/24 was put on hold in 2015 until the Vision Blueprint was complete. This draft regulatory amendment included items that address several of the short-term management strategies identified in the Vision Blueprint. To prioritize items for inclusion in a Visioning Amendment, Council members were asked to complete another survey in February 2016 to rank specific management strategies on Fishery Seasonality/Retention and Sub-regional Approaches to Management. Council staff will review the survey results and the Committee should discuss which items to recommend for inclusion in the 2016 Visioning Amendment. Gregg Waugh and Amber Von Harten will assist the Committee in discussions.

**COMMITTEE ACTION:** Select actions for Visioning Amendment and provide guidance to staff.

**L. Other Business**

The Committee will address other items as appropriate.