

SSC Responses to Items Identified in the SSC Roadmap

December 3-5, 2006

1. **Gag - Review of the Gag Stock Assessment is postponed until the June 2007 SSC meeting.**
2. **Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 (MPAs)**
 - 1) Review the Delphi model that will be presented by Dr. Larry Perruso and the Alternative Methods for Amendment 14 Impact Analysis prepared by staff and determine which would be the best method for defining Amendment 14 impacts.

The SSC agreed that the Delphi approach is valuable for the problem at hand albeit with some qualifications. First, there should be an assessment of the variability of panel responses and an understanding of the extent to which there are patterned differences (e.g., based on a panel member's background) in responses. Some methods were recommended for addressing these issues and there was general agreement that these should be added to the final analysis. Second, there should be an attempt to triangulate or cross check the Delphi results with results from an analysis of the logbook data. This will potentially provide a reliability check and method for identifying potential problem areas where they exist. However, it should be noted that an analysis of the logbook data, unlike the Delphi analysis, is limited in scope and therefore cannot be used to understand the whole range of potential social and economic impacts. Finally, although there was general consensus on the value of the Delphi approach, the SSC did recommend a cautionary approach to its application. Information and analysis gained from the Delphi and logbook analysis should be included in the social and economic impact assessments in Amendment 14. Further, the SSC socioeconomic subcommittee should have the opportunity to review the socioeconomic section for at least a two week period prior to a meeting of SSC members via conference call.

- 2) Review the information provided in Attachment 1b and the language currently in Amendment 14 (contained in Attachment 1a) to determine which provides the best estimates of bycatch of snapper grouper complex species in the shark long line fishery.

The SSC Biological subcommittee compared the methods used by Siegfried et al. with those in Amendment 14. Siegfried et al. used the delta method to calculate the catch rate of long line sets and then expanded those estimates to the South Atlantic effort adjusted for the area of MPAs and for the proportion of the sets that were in the MPAs. The method in Amendment 14 used the average per set and then since 65% of the shark long line effort was in the South Atlantic, they expanded the estimates by 65% of the total shark effort; the committee thought that the expansion was inappropriate because it ignored the underlying spatial heterogeneity. The subcommittee approved of the approach taken by Siegfried et al. but had a few questions. Did they overcorrect by using the proportion of the long line sets that were in the MPAs in addition to the ratio of the MPA area to grid area? The basic sampling unit was the long line set and their universe was the total number of long line sets per grid and year. Therefore, accounting for the area of the MPA to the grid area should be adequate considering the small sample size of observer long line sets that were actually in the proposed MPA sites. Another question was whether they considered month as a classification variable in their analyses to

account for seasonal variation in catch rates. The subcommittee also had some editorial comments about their method section. The subcommittee thought that the foregone shark landings should be estimated in the same manner. If more observer data become available, higher resolution estimates could be obtained by restricting the analyses to the depth ranges of the MPAs.

3. Snapper Grouper Amendment 15 (Rebuilding programs, etc.)

The specific items to be addressed by the SSC are included (but not limited to) below. Please note that when a section is identified, that is where the alternatives are outlined. The actual effects of those alternatives are included in Section 4.

1) Review Estimates of Discards (Appendix F; page 427)

The SSC noted that the rebuilding projections for snowy grouper, black sea bass, and red porgy did not include all of the sources of mortality, such as post quota bycatch mortality, nor the effects of minimum size changes to vermilion snapper and black sea bass. The Amendment 15 Team has estimated discards for these species and the methodology and assumptions are included in the amendment. Three new actions have been added to the amendment that include rebuilding strategies that incorporate estimates of dead discards resulting from management measures in Amendment 13C. The alternatives are outlined on pages 55, 56, and 57 for snowy grouper, black sea bass and red porgy respectively. Are the assumptions and methodology for estimating discards appropriate, and estimates of discards realistic?

The SSC interpreted “appropriate” to mean “best available science” and “realistic” to mean “based on best available data”.

The methodology in Amendment 15 for estimating discards for snowy grouper, red porgy, and black sea bass is based on the best available science. Unfortunately, this is a highly uncertain type of science, but is the best available at this time. Much like statistical time series analysis, the methods are largely based on recently observed fishery characteristics. The methods assume these characteristics, including species co-occurrences and aspects of fisher behavior, will continue into the future. It is likely these characteristics will change after implementation of Amendment 13C. The difficulty is that the direction of these changes is largely unknown. Since it would be erroneous to assume discard levels will be zero, the methodology used in Amendment 15 is the best available at this time.

In Amendment 15 three scenarios for computing discards are presented for each species. The BSC discussed whether to go forward with all three scenarios or just a single scenario. The recommendation from the Biological Sub-Committee (BSC) is to go forward with one scenario for use in management, but report the values for the other scenarios for informational purposes. The BSC examined each of these scenarios and our conclusions are as follows:

For snowy grouper there are three potential discard scenarios, which are contingent on the behavioral response of longline fishermen to Amendment 13C regulations. The appendix makes a “most likely” behavioral assumption and then attempts to bound the most likely scenario from above and below. The proposed analysis assumes that 50% of longline fishermen will continue to fish after implementation of Amendments 13C and 15 (scenario 1). The two alternative scenarios are that (1) all longline fishermen will stop fishing (scenario 2), or that (2) all longline fishermen will continue fishing and behave as they did prior to the

implementation of Amendment 13C (scenario 3). The SSC feels that the two alternative scenarios are unrealistic and should be dropped from the analysis. Instead, we recommend that the analysis focus on 25% and 75% changes in fishing behavior. These will give more realistic estimates of the potential changes in bycatch due to the Amendments

Amendment 13C allows an increase in red porgy catch. Scenario 1 assumes the management changes in Amendment 13C will not result in any increase in effort and is therefore viewed as an unlikely scenario. Scenarios 2 and 3 assume an increase in recreational and commercial effort. The red porgy discard analysis uses data from 2001-2005. Because this is a period of increased regulation, these data may not support the necessary analysis. The SSC recommends that data from the 1995-1998 period be used in order to provide baseline data from a period that more closely reflects the conditions under which Amendment 15 is implemented.

Amendment 13C increases the bag limit for black sea bass. Appendix F assumes that discard mortality is 15%, based on the results of SEDAR 2, and the sensitivity analysis is conducted for 20% and 25% discard rates. The SSC recommends that the analysis be conducted with alternative scenarios of 10% and 20% discard mortality rates in order to bracket the most likely scenario.

- 2) Review Snowy Grouper Socioeconomic Analysis as it applies to Amendment 15 (Appendix G; page 494)

The Council, at their September 2006 meeting, voted to add the section in Amendment 13C addressing snowy grouper into Amendment 15 for reanalysis. The Council is asking the SSC to look at the language and make comments/recommendations relative to any necessary changes as they would apply to Amendment 15.

The SSC recommends that the time horizon in the long run simulation model be limited to 10 years (year 2017) for all species due to (1) increasing uncertainty in biological stock assessment projections over time, (2) the decreasing present value of economic impacts over time due to financial discounting, and (3) the lack of information on potential target species switching and vessel entry/exit behavior in response to regulatory changes.

The SSC notes that the number of combinations of management alternatives across management actions is very large, and modeling the impacts of all combinations is not feasible. A reasonable modeling approach is to compare alternatives within one action while holding alternatives in other actions at their status quo levels.

The SSC notes that the language in line 17122 of page 527 of Appendix G that reads “Alternative 2 and the Council’s Preferred Alternative 3 would not have a disproportionately negative affect (sic) on fishermen from North Carolina and Florida” conflicts with discussion of differential impacts across states in succeeding paragraphs. The SSC recommends that line 17122 be replaced with language such as “Some of the differential effects across states of Alternative 2 and the Council’s Preferred Alternative 3 are discussed below.” Other factors that differ across states and cause differential management impacts across states include, for example, alternative employment opportunities, loss of marine infrastructure, and access to

markets. Although the economic simulation model cannot address these factors, the committee recommends that the Amendment include qualitative discussion of these issues. In addition, the subcommittee recommends that summary results similar to those presented in Table 4-7e should be estimated and presented for each state separately to better convey differential effects across states.

3) Snowy Grouper Projections (Section 2.1.1.3; page 31)

There is an issue with the snowy grouper rebuilding projections that affects the overall timing of the amendment. The snowy grouper projections currently include landings through 2005. However, landings for 2004 and 2005 were estimated from 2001- 2003 landings. The Council is looking for guidance from the SSC on whether or not to incorporate recent years (2004-2006) into the projections, particularly since the commercial landings for 2006 have exceeded the commercial quota specified in Amendment 13C and the first year of the rebuilding projections contained in Amendment 15.

Possible alternatives are to: 1) retain the current projections and develop the economic model based upon those projections; 2) incorporate 2004 and 2005 landings into the projections; or 3) wait for 2006 landings to be finalized (early March) and incorporate actual 2005 and 2006 landings into the projections. Provide guidance to the Council on the most appropriate way to proceed in terms of the use of best available science in the amendment.

Snowy grouper projections (Section 3.3)

The council asked for guidance on whether to replace the 2004 and 2005 landings with the actual landings rather than use those in Amendment 15, which were based on the 2001-2003 landings. Another option was to wait until later in 2007 and update the landings through 2006. Council staff had noted that landings in 2004 and 2005 were less than forecasted but higher in 2006. Since Amendment 13C was only implemented on October 23, 2006, the more recent landings would not provide any evaluation of the Amendment 13C measures. Therefore, the SSC recommends staying with the current projections.

4) New Actions/Sections in the Amendment

Since the SSC's review of the amendment at their June 2006 meeting, new actions have been added to the Amendment. The SSC should review for range of alternatives and whether the alternatives adequately address the purpose and need. The newly added actions include:

- a) Adjust Rebuilding Strategies to Account for Bycatch (Sections 2.1.10-2.1.10.3; pages 55-57)

As discussed above, the SSC recommended the consideration of discards into the rebuilding strategies. Actions have been added for snowy grouper, black sea bass and red porgy. The methodology used to estimate the discards is included in Appendix F.

The methodology used to estimate the discards in Appendix F has been deemed the best available science by the SSC. Alternative 2 for each section, 2.1.10.1 through 2.1.10.3 of Amendment 15, for Snowy Grouper, Red Porgy, and Black Sea Bass, take into consideration

discards and are recommended as the preferred alternative, using the Council's preferred Rebuilding Strategy (Alternative 4b, Modified Constant F Strategy, pages 33-35, Amendment 15) to revise TACs downward to address discards.

b) Reduce Bycatch of Deep Water Snappers and Groupers (Section 2.1.3; page 37)

The Council is currently considering actions in Amendment 15 that would reduce regulatory discards of deep water snapper and grouper. This includes removing the queen snapper and silk snapper size limits and one vessel limit of speckled hind and warsaw grouper and implementing an aggregate quota(s) and trip limits for species in a deep water snapper grouper complex. The intention is to eliminate fishing activities to the extent possible once aggregate quotas are met. The third table in Section 2.1.3.2 of the amendment outlines the specifics of this action. This approach has been adopted in the Gulf of Mexico EEZ for shallow water groupers.

Alternative 2, sub-alternative 2a of Amendment 15, Section 2.1.3.1, Reduce Bycatch of Deep Water Snapper and Groupers, and Alternative 2 of Amendment 15, Section 2.1.3.2, Management Measures, are the preferred alternatives, in combination, for the SSC, with the following provisions:

Speckled hind and Warsaw grouper bag limits be retained (status quo). Removing the bag limits has the potential to increase mortality for these species.

Quota limits, presented on page 191, Table 4-ax, Amendment 15, are recalculated as needed with consideration of the previous recommendation of Alternative 2 for snowy grouper, red porgy, and black sea bass of Amendment 15, Section 2.1.10, Adjust Rebuilding Strategies to Account for Bycatch

Trip limits for snowy grouper, golden tilefish, and non-indicator species as specified on page 191, Table 4-bx, Amendment 15, be put in place of the aggregate trip limit for the entire unit.

c) Sea Turtle and Smalltooth Sawfish Incidental Take Impact Minimization Measures (Section 2.1.11; page 58)

NMFS, in cooperation with the SAFMC, is required to implement sea turtle bycatch release equipment requirements and sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish handling protocols and/or guidelines in the permitted commercial and for-hire snapper grouper fishery. The equipment, protocol, and guidelines would help minimize the impacts on sea turtles and smalltooth sawfish resulting from incidental take in the snapper grouper fishery. The equipment required per alternative is outlined in the table on page 60. The Council has not chosen a preferred alternative.

The SSC's opinion on the Sea Turtle and Smalltooth Sawfish Incidental Take Impact Minimization Measures is that as long as the survival of each aforementioned species is enhanced, the committee has no specific recommendation or opinion on the matter.

d) Bycatch Practicability Analysis (Section 4.16; page 297)

50 CFR §600.350(d)(3)(i) outlines ten factors that should be considered in determining whether a management measure minimizes bycatch or bycatch mortality to the extent practicable. The Amendment 15

Team has developed a Bycatch Practicability Analysis that analyzes the effects of the actions in the amendment on these ten factors. Is the Bycatch Practicability Analysis based upon the best available science?

It is the SSC's opinion that the bycatch practicability analyses are based on the best available science.

e) Monitor and Assess Bycatch in the Snapper Grouper Fishery (Section 4.16; page 297)

The first step in reducing and minimizing bycatch is to characterize the magnitude and species composition of animals that are discarded. The U.S. Congress established Section 303(a)(11) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which states that any FMP prepared by any Council, or by the Secretary of Commerce, with respect to any fishery, shall “establish a standardized reporting methodology to assess the amount and type of bycatch occurring in the fishery....” To support this mandate, the National Standard Guidelines call for development of a database for each fishery to house bycatch and bycatch mortality information (63 FR 24212). The Council is seeking to implement a long-term, standardized monitoring and assessment program as part of this snapper grouper amendment through this action.

The SSC recommends alternative 2 (preferred) to monitor and assess bycatch. Where Alternative 2 (preferred) is stated as: Adopt the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) Release, Discard and Protected Species Module as the preferred methodology. Until this module is fully funded, require the use of a variety of sources to assess and monitor bycatch including: observer coverage on vessels; logbooks; electronic logbook; video monitoring; MRFSS; state cooperation; and grant funded projects. After the ACCSP Bycatch Module is implemented, continue the use of technologies to augment and verify observer data. As each of the technological techniques has strengths and weaknesses in data collection, the SSC recommends that the Council evaluate at-sea needs, develop goals and objectives for data, and develop a comprehensive electronic data acquisition (EDA) program to best collect data in support of the goals and objectives.

5) Economic Model

Dr. Jim Waters will be briefing the SSC Socioeconomic Subcommittee on the economic model being used to analyze the effects of the actions in Amendment 15 and will present preliminary results.

The only analyses that had been completed were done using the models for 13c, the first three years using the step down quotas. The SSC made suggestions on analyses he should also consider and which ones he should consider dropping. For example, for snowy groupers, it was suggested that he not run the models assuming all fishermen would stop fishing once the trip limit was reached, or that all fishermen would continue fishing once the trip limit was met. The third alternative was that 50% would continue fishing and 50% would stop. The SSC suggested Dr. Waters run two additional models assuming 25% and 75% would continue fishing, which were seemingly more realistic scenarios. The SSC did acknowledge the current time constraints on him, seeing as Dr. Waters is supposed to have the work completed for the March Council Meeting. The SSC expects to see the results of his economic modeling work at the June 2007 meeting.

4. National MPA Framework

- 1) Review the draft National MPA Framework document (Attachment 4) and develop recommendations for the Council's comments to NMFS on the document.

Our remarks address the general tenor of the total document and not small points or rhetoric or style. The SAFMC SSC is greatly troubled by this initiative. We regularly review data and stock assessments that are inadequate for the task of providing the managers with analyses that result in lowering the level of uncertainty. Fishery management plans have research needs detailed in them that remain unfulfilled, and in many cases, apparently will remain so. These unavailable data are exactly what is required to justify the creation of an MPA and assessment of its stated objectives. We see no advantage to creation of the national network until the agency addresses the current needs of its units with existing responsibilities.

We find the draft puzzling for several reasons. First, the document alleges to provide guidance for collaborative efforts to develop an interactive network system from existing sites, enhance coordination and stewardship and identify ecosystem-based gaps in protection for possible future action by governmental MPA programs. However, what is provided in the document is the creation of an administrative structure that is redundant with existing federal and state and tribal organizations. It will contribute no new information but rather will demand information from other entities that will require them to commit staff and research efforts without providing them with the financial resources necessary to fulfill those requests. It will create an organization that would probably compete with existing entities for limited financial resources in NOAA. Specifically and ironically, when you examine the items listed in item 2 on page 26 "Identify and Support Priorities for Enhancing Stewardship and Coordination" and Enhancing MPA Stewardship on page 27, the list is replete with items that are mandated in existing legislation and currently in place for existing units. Unfortunately, the existing level of activity and results by those units is not due to a lack of understanding of the problems or the will to address them, but rather it is due to a lack of financial resources.

Paragraph 2 on page 2 is an apparent disclaimer and acknowledgement of the existing roles and responsibilities of agencies, states and tribes. If that is truly recognized, then why is it necessary to create an administrative unit that will have not have authority or responsibility? Indeed, it appears that their framework will absolve themselves of such roles. The Comprehensive Themes state on page 4 (Natural Heritage, Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Production) are clearly objectives that have been operational in the activities of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council for more than a decade.

The "Guiding Principles" (pages 4-5) are nice rhetoric but do not provide any guidance on the basic issues of the creation and management of MPAs. There is little in the document on lessons learned from existing MPAs and models for alternative situations. The draft appears to be a promotional piece and it is questionable whether it justifies the time and effort that has gone into its production.

On page 8 paragraph 3, the document refers to NMFS programs and uses terms that are not used in the regional fishery management councils MPAs. This appears inconsistent and is counter productive after earlier stating the need for clarification and definition of terms. It is puzzling why in the last sentence the draft states that NMFS intends to consult with councils

in the implementation of the Framework whereas in the next paragraph referencing the interaction with NERRS, the NERRS system will require close consultation etc. We think there is a substantive difference between “intends” and “require” in interpretation and usage.

In the first paragraph on page 11 under the “Seamless Network” heading, there is a reference to a cooperative enforcement agreement among several agencies and the statement “these agreements will ultimately contribute to several important elements of the National system, such as the identification of science and stewardship priorities for enhancing MAS effectiveness. It is obscure as to how the Draft makes the leap from a statement on enforcement, which is one of the few areas in the Draft that even acknowledge that enforcement is perhaps the most critical issue that must be addressed in the management of MPAs to identification of science and stewardship priorities.

It is unclear why the draft introduces the term Marine Managed Areas on page 13, which is confusing. There is a brief statement on the introduction in the middle of the draft on the use of the term Marine Management Areas (MMA) which is confusing after the use of the term MPA in the title and all the material in the text to this point. It appears from a reading of the literature that many organizations have used MPA as the generic umbrella term and that MMAs, as described in the first paragraph of page 13 are a type of MPA. This entire section is meaningful to a narrow group, albeit well intentioned, but apparently lacking in an understanding of how the greater public is skeptical of MPAs and such rhetoric as appears in the draft does not enhance the perception of the MPAs as management tools for marine resources. As an example, the data used to generate the figures on page 14 and referring the MMAs, appears to be very similar to the data on numbers on page iv referring to MPAs.

The Rationale for the National System (B on page 15) is troubling. The preceding pages of the Draft propose the creation of the MMAs to accomplish a number of objectives (conservation, increase in biodiversity etc). However paragraph two states unequivocally that “the cumulative effectiveness of the existing suite of MPAs in contributing to the long term sustainability of marine resources, habitats and ecosystems, and the services and values they provide is largely unproven”. That statement is precisely the objection received to most proposals to create any single MPA. This is most troubling, as it is not consistent with the current literature. In addition, it goes counter to all the rhetoric presented by NOAA in the past, which is well documented in all of the administrative record, on the justifications for the existing MPAs such as the Stellwagen Bank and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuaries.

We suggest that there are existing forums and organizations that can fulfill the MPA national coordination role without development of a new administrative structure.

5. Oculina Evaluation Report

- 1) Review the Oculina Evaluation report (Attachment 5) and develop recommendations on changing the size and/or configuration of the Oculina closed area.

The SSC fully supports the recommendations made in the Oculina Evaluation Report. We also believe that public support is critical to the success of the OECA. Users are getting

accustomed to it, and would likely be confused by changes. The SSC recommends that no changes be made to the current size and/or configuration of the OECA.

SSC ORAL AND WRITTEN RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ABOVE FIVE ITEMS ARE TO BE PRESENTED TO SNAPPER GROUPE COMMITTEE ON TUESDAY AT 8:30 A.M.

6. Mackerel Amendment 18

- 1) Review Mackerel Amendment 18 (Attachment 6) and develop recommendations as appropriate.

The SSC recommends the preferred alternatives for all three action items.

The SSC was uncomfortable using data from SEDAR 5, an assessment rejected by the SSC, as the data source and justification for adjusting the TAC. However, as the new TAC was calculated using a mixing ratio of 50:50, the committee considered that one of the major issues used to reject the SEDAR 5 assessment had been addressed (to the extent practicable). The SSC feels that there is likely to be little socioeconomic impact from Actions 1 and 2 because in recent years the catches of King and Spanish mackerels has been below or close to the levels in the revised TACs. Action 3, which is to apply the trip limit of 3500 pounds beginning March 1, is in response to the changing the season from April 1 to March 1. This is seen as reasonable and is unlikely to create significant socioeconomic impacts.

Among the concerns addressed by this Amendment is that there may be more activity in these fisheries as greater restrictions are placed in the Snapper/Grouper fisheries. Taking these actions at this time can help to prevent the fishery from experiencing overfishing or becoming overfished. The SSC has requested that the cumulative effects section include a table showing the numbers of fishermen who have a SA Snapper/Grouper Permit, those with a SA Mackerel Permit, and those who have both permits.

7. Mackerel Amendment 19

- 1) Review the update of King mackerel projections for the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic stocks based on results presented at SEDAR 5 (Attachment 7) and develop recommendations as appropriate.

In response to a request from the SAFMC and GMFMC joint SSC subcommittee, projections of stock trends were carried out for the Gulf and Atlantic King mackerel stocks with updated catches assuming different levels of mixing between stocks. The methods used followed those described in the sensitivity to mixing assumptions section of Ortiz (2004) except that the catches for the fishing seasons 2002/2003 through 2005/2006 were updated. The updates of directed catch by fishing year within the mixing area (Florida east coast for recreational catch, MRFSS and Headboat; and Monroe to Volusia counties for commercial catch) were allocated according to fixed percentages for each stock.

In the absence of any data, no recommendations were made.

8. Fishery Ecosystem Plan and Comprehensive Amendment

- 1) Review draft documents and provide input as appropriate (Attachment 8).

The SSC concurs with the management measures listed for the FEP Comprehensive Amendment in a move toward ecosystem-based fishery management. However, the SSC believes that these measures are integral components of fishery management plans, should be part of the management plans, and that listing them as actions for the FEP Comprehensive Amendment adds nothing beyond existing management platforms.

The SSC notes that the FEP will “describe,” “define,” “develop,” “calculate,” “characterize,” and “make recommendations” for a number of important issues. However, the FEP does not have any mechanism to evaluate the progress toward or success of ecosystem-based fishery management. The SSC recommends that the Council develop practical indicators for ecosystem-based fishery management such as: preventing and reversing overfishing; minimizing bycatch; identifying and protecting essential habitat; and maintaining species diversity and key ecological interactions. Until consensus definition of ecosystem-based fishery management is available with mechanisms for implementation, these indicators would provide practical tracking of ecosystem-based fishery management.

The SSC would like to comment on two specific actions#5.2.C. Logbook Modifications and #8.3 Enforcement/Data Collection. Rather than consider these actions separately, the SSC recommends a comprehensive analysis of electronic data acquisition (EDA) that combines appropriate electronic monitoring to achieve specified data goals and objectives.

The SSC feels that the Plan needs to ensure that specific connections between groups of people and natural systems. For example, many subsistence fishermen may be fishing on a recreational fishing license, however, they fish differently than do fishermen who fish purely for recreation. Overall, we felt the information we were provided were really not of sufficient detail to make recommendations at this point.

9. Deepwater Coral Research Plan

- 1) Review the draft Deepwater Coral Research Plan and provide input as appropriate (Attachment 9).

The research and monitoring plan for South Atlantic Deepwater Coral Ecosystems is extremely thorough and very ambitious. However, the SSC was extremely concerned that many of these research recommendations would reduce research funding on projects that are more pressing for management of resource species. This dilution of funds should be taken into account when the council recommends research priorities to MARFIN and CRP programs from this plan. In order to reduce the expenditure on mapping DWCEs to establish new HAPCs, the SSC recommends that all waters at least 400m deep (or a depth determined to best approximate halfway down continental slope) to the seaward boundary of the EEZ be given the status of Habitat Areas of Particular Concern. There is precedence as the North Pacific Council, Pacific Council, and the New Zealand Department of Fisheries have used a similar management strategy. Benthic fisheries that are currently operating >400m of water can continue but they may not expand their operations.

The SSC chose the proposed alternative definition for Deepwater Coral Ecosystems of: “Deepwater coral, coral reefs, and live/hard bottom habitat in waters extending from 200 m to the seaward boundary of the EEZ.” Minor editorial and duplication problems are detailed

below. The SSC recommends that this research and monitoring plan be included as an appendix in the South Atlantic Coral Fishery Management Plan.

The group supported that human interaction (Who? What? When? Where?) with the deep water coral communities should be elucidated and evaluated. Such interaction can be through direct contact with the corals, as would be the case for fishing and diving activities. Alternatively, the interaction could be indirect, for example, through activities that introduce destructive chemicals into the coral environment, such as spills or purging bilge or other holding tanks on ships.

Once defined, the economic and social factors relevant to modifications in the activities can be assessed.

Deepwater Coral Research and Monitoring Plan for the South Atlantic Region-minor edits and duplications

p. 2 – line 1, “this will allow” to “this allowed”

p. 2 – Provide list of regional experts who are primary contributors.

p. 2 – first management goal: should ‘refine’ be ‘restore’? or do you mean refine locations of known DWCE areas?

p. 3 – first full paragraph. Topic sentence does not match last sentence unless ‘local’ (which should be changed to be more specific “south Atlantic region?”) in topic sentence does not include Florida’s Oculina banks for some reason??

p. 3 – “(7) Southwest Florida Lithoherms—dozens of 15-m tall Lophelia lithoherms in 500 m in the Gulf of Mexico.” Is this in SAFMC’s jurisdiction??

p. 5 – typo on Objective 2B – DSCE to DWCE. The task under 2B needs more specifics. What kind of model and what will inputs and outputs be?

p. 6, What does ‘epochal’ refer to in Task 4B?

p. 6 – How does task 1 under 4A differ from Tasks described in 2a to determine abiotic conditions associated with DWCEs

p. 7 – 4C – Give example of episodic event and develop this further either here or above when first describing objective 4.

p. 7 – last paragraph, first sentence – Need reference instead of “ref needed” statement.

P. 9 - Need to know turnover rate of stable isotopes...

p. 10, Task under 2A, remove parenthetical statement ‘(ambitious!)’.

p. 11, two lines up from bottom, remove parenthetical statement '(this is very broad and vague)' and replace with a statement with a list of taxa that is prioritized.

p. 12, line 11, replace 'analyses (??)' with appropriate verbiage- maybe 'findings'.

p. 16, should question 2A be 'What is clonal genetic structure...??'

10. Design and Use of Limited Access Privilege Programs

- 1) Review the draft Design and Use of Limited Access Privilege Programs document and provide input as appropriate (Attachment 10).

The SSC would like to have further time to review this document over the next few weeks and provide comments back to council staff. The overall first impression is that the document is too lengthy and technical for a lay audience. We also recognize that the guidelines provided by the document are not mandatory.

11. SEDAR Research Report

1) Prioritize Research Needs

The Committee is asked to review SEDAR research recommendations and prioritize research needs for South Atlantic stocks. Prioritizations will provide important guidance to the Council's SEDAR Committee and the Council representatives to the SEDAR Steering Committee. A report is expected at the Council SEDAR Committee.

Briefing Materials:

- a) The guidance memo (Attachment 13) provides further details on this task, including the specific request of the SEDAR Steering Committee.
- b) The Review Consolidated Research Recommendations document (Attachment 12) is a consolidation of all SEDAR workshop research recommendations
- c) The Review Research Needs Overview (Attachment 11) provides a general overview of research needs and tabulation of research needs by categories across assessments, and highlights those needs that are common to many stocks.

The Committee is asked to review SEDAR research recommendations and prioritize research needs for South Atlantic stocks. Prioritizations will provide important guidance to the Council's SEDAR Committee and the Council representatives to the SEDAR Steering Committee. A report is expected at the Council SEDAR Committee.

The SSC recommends that long-term research on the characterization of fishery catches and fundamental biology of core species in the fisheries be implemented to support stock assessments. Fishery-independent and -dependent data in SE are inadequate and very poor when compared to other U.S. regions. Age and growth studies, for example, have been more reactionary than long-term. The SSC sees a critical need for a long-term, continual, and reliable funding source to do sampling right; a comprehensive sampling program that is well designed and appropriate for the fisheries will be required. This will avoid piecemeal, two to three year studies with breaks in between that result in incomplete datasets. The SSC did not begin to design such a plan because funding is not identified. The SSC is concerned that re-

allocation of budgets within agencies (e.g., MPA initiatives) may lead to lowered funding for much needed fisheries-research. The diversity of fishes in SE leads to logistical issues not seen in other regions; in SE, sampling needs to be on whole fisheries each year and not on single species.

The SSC did discuss data needs that should be considered for sampling program. Trends reports (see below for SSC recommendation) can be used to assist with prioritizing data needs by species. Data needs expressed in SEDAR assessment reports included monitoring (catch, length, weight, age), assessing and dealing with age and length variance, and discard information. Since landings data are by strata, these biological data should be collected by strata. Studies are needed to determine the number of fish samples required for biological and stock assessment needs. Current funding agencies (e.g., MARFIN) only give 12 to 24 months of funding; the resulting data often are not applicable to assessments. However, research projects can provide a tool (e.g., new age and growth, or estimates of fecundity that only need to be done over a two year period) but implementation requires a different approach; the proposal requests from CRP, MARFIN, MARMAP should take into account the need for tool development.

As part of the discussions on the SEDAR process, it was noted that the snapper-grouper complex and coastal pelagics have many more species than can be assessed given SEDAR's current and, in all likelihood, future level of resources. At this time SEDAR, only has two levels of assessments: benchmark and updates of species that already have benchmark assessments. The idea of resurrecting a modified annual trends report to provide the councils information on the landings, effort, and catch rates. NMFS's Beaufort Laboratory used to provide these reports to the Snapper-Grouper Committee. While it is acknowledged that the trends reports are not substitutes for stock assessments, it can be viewed as an Early Warning System. The SSC was concerned that some of these species could be getting in to trouble without NMFS and the Council being aware of it. For example, the request for an update assessment for vermilion snapper was prompted, in part, by decreased landings in recent years; the trends report could quickly show whether that decline was due to decreased effort. If the catch rates were not declining then the urgency of the update would be reduced. Also because the trends report would require less effort on the part of NMFS, it would allow analysts conducting SEDAR assessments to concentrate on the higher priority stocks. NMFS should consider conducting an analysis using historical data that would enable the Council to establish a "trigger" level based upon CPUE that would move a species onto a track for collection of the data necessary to conduct an assessment. In that way, it would be possible to show that we are not ignoring all those species, but rather using severely limited resources in the most cost effective manner. In short, the SSC sees the trends report as a means of helping the Council to prioritize which species need stock assessments and would reduce the reliance on anecdotal information and best judgments.

The Subcommittee recommends that the trends reports begin in 2007.

2) Future Assessment Priorities and Recommendations (Refer to the SEDAR Committee TAB 6, Attachments 5, 6a, 6b) and (Attachment 11)

The SSC is asked to review data availability for South Atlantic Stocks to determine which stocks should be considered for future SEDAR assessments. The Committee is asked to classify stocks in two ways: 1)

Stocks to assess - representing those stocks which are assessment priorities and have adequate data for consideration on the SEDAR schedule; and 2) Stocks of Concern - representing those for which an assessment may be needed but not feasible in the near future due to severe data deficiencies. Comments are solicited for both stocks that are currently scheduled for assessment as well as those that do not appear on the current plan.

Committee members are asked to review data available within their state or University research and monitoring programs to 1) help ensure that the various aggregated databases (such as TIP) are complete and up-to-date, and 2) notify the SEDAR Committee of any additional databases that should be considered for future assessments.

Briefing Materials:

- a) The guidance memo (TAB 6, Attachment 6a) provides further details on this task, including the specific request of the SEDAR Steering Committee. It provides a summary of stocks to consider based on past assessment efforts and the NOAA Fisheries Report to Congress on stock status.
- b) The current SEDAR Schedule (TAB 6, Attachment 5 indicates stocks planned for assessment over the next 5 years.
- c) The Research and Monitoring Needs Overview (TAB 1, Attachment 11) provides a summary of available biological sampling information for those stocks scheduled to be assessed in near future SEDARs.
 - d) The Supplemental Data Evaluation, Excel workbook, (TAB 6, Attachment 6b) provides a tabulation of available biological data from the TIP, MRFSS, and Headboat programs for those stocks addressed in the NOAA Fisheries Report to Congress.

The SSC is asked to review data availability for South Atlantic Stocks to determine which stocks should be considered for future SEDAR assessments. The Committee is asked to classify stocks in two ways: 1) Stocks to assess - representing those stocks which are assessment priorities and have adequate data for consideration on the SEDAR schedule; and 2) Stocks of Concern - representing those for which an assessment may be needed but not feasible in the near future due to severe data deficiencies.

The committee did not review data availability as no documentation was provided to do this.

Stocks that should be assessed

Scamp
Mutton snapper
Black grouper
Triggerfish
Blueline tilefish
Cobia

Species of concern

Speckled hind
Warsaw
Yellowedge grouper
Goliath
Little tunny-data deficiency
Dolphinfish –data deficiency
Wahoo – data deficiency

3) Assessment schedule review (Refer to the SEDAR Committee TAB 6, Attachment 5)

The Committee is asked to review the current SEDAR Assessment Schedule and provide guidance to the SAFMC SEDAR Committee on the following items:

- > Red Drum - Are data adequate to assess the South Atlantic Stock? Have critical research needs noted in previous assessments been addressed? Have critical data deficiencies noted in previous assessments been addressed?
- > Goliath Grouper - Are data adequate to assess Goliath Grouper? Have critical research needs noted in previous assessments been addressed? Have critical data deficiencies noted in previous assessments been addressed?

Briefing Materials:

a) Two Motions of the SEDAR Steering Committee are relevant to this task:

- > Red Drum: "The Council SSCs are requested to review red drum data and recommend whether benchmark assessments are appropriate. The South Atlantic Council will coordinate with South Atlantic states and the ASMFC. A report will be provided at the next Steering Committee meeting."
- > Goliath Grouper: "The Councils are asked to have their SSC's review available data on Goliath grouper and progress on significant research needs identified in the benchmark assessment to determine whether an update or benchmark is appropriate and recommend the timing of the next action."

The Committee is asked to review the current SEDAR Assessment Schedule and provide guidance to the SAFMC SEDAR Committee on the following items:

- Red Drum - Are data adequate to assess the South Atlantic Stock? Have critical research needs noted in previous assessments been addressed? Have critical data deficiencies noted in previous assessments been addressed?

The SSC notes that the council has no management measures in place for red drum and has no plans for addressing management. Therefore, the SSC concludes that the Council has no immediate interest in red drum, and recommends against a red drum stock assessment. Red drum assessment done at the state and ASMFC level may have need for SEDAR review, and the SEDAR Steering Committee may insert red drum in the SEDAR schedule if its regional importance exceeds the lack of relevance for the Council.

- Goliath Grouper - Are data adequate to assess Goliath Grouper? Have critical research needs noted in previous assessments been addressed? Have critical data deficiencies noted in previous assessments been addressed?

The SSC felt that goliath grouper could not be assessed because data are not sufficient.

No update was provided detailing what (if any) additional data beyond those utilized for the most recent assessment were available for goliath grouper. Therefore, the previous

recommendation of the committee that the data were insufficient for an assessment is unchanged.

4) SEDAR 15, South Atlantic Greater Amberjack and White Grunt (Refer to the SEDAR Committee TAB 6, Attachments 7 & 8)

The next SEDAR assessment involving South Atlantic stocks will be SEDAR 15, greater amberjack and white grunt. The SSC is requested to provide advice to the SAFMC SEDAR Committee on scheduling, terms of reference, and participants. Specific items are detailed below:

- > Review the Terms of Reference for SEDAR 15
- > Review the proposed workshop schedule for SEDAR 15
- > Suggest appropriate participants, both as SSC representatives as well as others agency employees or researchers who the SSC deems appropriate

Briefing Materials:

- a) Draft SEDAR 15 Terms of Reference (TAB 6, Attachment 7)
- b) Draft SEDAR 15 Schedule (TAB 6, Attachment 8)

The next SEDAR assessment involving South Atlantic stocks will be SEDAR 15, greater amberjack and white grunt. The SSC is requested to provide advice to the SAFMC SEDAR Committee on scheduling, terms of reference, and participants. Specific items are detailed below:

- > Review the Terms of Reference for SEDAR 15

The SSC agrees with the Terms of Reference for these two species.

- > Review the proposed workshop schedule for SEDAR 15

Overall, the SEDAR process needs more time. Currently, there is no leeway to address the unforeseen. For example, if an issue arises that causes a delay, then the schedule begins to drive the process. There is a potential for a trade off in getting the job done on schedule and getting the job done right. Full participation by many participants is often hindered by the difficulty in getting the commitment from superiors to allow time away from main responsibilities.

Additionally, the SSC has concerns with putting resources into species that are in good shape and not addressing species that are in trouble. The SSC strongly recommends a trends report (see above) to support prioritization of species for SEDAR. Without a trends report, the SSC must rely on anecdotal information and best judgment to identify which stocks need to be assessed. The SSC desires to provide input on priorities and scheduling to the SEDAR steering committee.

Although the trends report will not be completed for at least a year, the SSC wanted to provide guidance to SEDAR steering committee on upcoming assessments. For this, the SSC used anecdotal information and best judgment. The SSC recommends red grouper and black grouper be assessed in SEDAR17, Spanish mackerel and red snapper in 18, and black sea bass in 22. King mackerel should be assessed before 2010 – as soon as practicable.

Additional issues that should be taken into account include whether or not the benchmark assessment is a first timer, which will add time to the process. The SSC felt that a “SEDAR assessment and monitoring workshop” with appropriate materials (e.g., trends report) available should take place in late Fall or early 2008 to better recommend order of assessments from 2012 onward; a report from this workshop would need to be available in June 2008 before steering committee meets to plan >2012 SEDARs. Our recommendations through SEDAR 22 will handle through 2011.

For white grunt and greater amberjack, the SSC agrees with the start date but recommends data review in July 2007, assessment workshop in December 2007, and assessment review July 2008. At a minimum, the review workshop for SEDAR 15 should be delayed by three months.

- Suggest appropriate participants, both as SSC representatives as well as others agency employees or researchers who the SSC deems appropriate

Voluntary Participants were:

Dr. Brian Chevront – Willing to attend all three workshops

Dr. Pat Harris – Data workshop

Dr. Jeff Buckel – Assessment Workshop

5) Vermilion Snapper Update (Refer to the SEDAR Committee TAB 6, Attachment 9)

The next SEDAR assessment update involving South Atlantic stocks will be vermilion snapper. The SSC is expected to provide advice to the SAFMC SEDAR Committee on terms of reference, scheduling, and participants. Because this is an update, the SSC has the additional responsibilities of providing a chair for the assessment workshop and serving as a review body.

Specific items are detailed below:

- > Review the Terms of Reference for the vermilion snapper update.
- > Recommend dates for the data scoping conference call and the assessment workshop.
- > Suggest appropriate participants, both as SSC representatives as well as others agency employees or researchers who the SSC deems appropriate.
- > Appoint SSC chair for the assessment workshop

Briefing Materials:

a) Draft Vermilion Snapper update Terms of Reference (TAB 6, Attachment 9)

b) Excerpt from the SEDAR Guidelines regarding the assessment update process:

“Once an assessment is approved through SEDAR, the basic framework of input data and model configuration may be updated in the future by adding additional years of data. It is intended that the update process should be considerably less time consuming and require less manpower than benchmark assessments. Minor modifications and changes to input data and modeling techniques may also be incorporated in updates, although in all instances a strict update, defined as only including incorporation of additional data into the previous framework, should be prepared.

The general update process is described below. Each Council is allowed latitude to develop a more detailed process to conduct assessment updates.

The SEDAR Steering Committee will approve and schedule requests for assessment updates and determine the entity which will take lead in conducting the assessment update.

The Council or Councils involved in the update assessment shall make appointments to the update workshop panel in accordance with their SEDAR appointment guidelines. The Regional Administrator and Science Center Director shall designate appropriate participants from their staff.

Oversight and review of assessment updates will be provided by each Councils' SSC. The Council's SSCs shall establish terms of reference for the update assessments and determine acceptable changes and modifications of the benchmark assessment. It is suggested that a representative of the SSC or other appropriate council committee chair the update workshop and present workshop findings to their council.

Prior to conducting an update, the SSC shall provide a written report to the Council describing the terms of the update. Following the update, the SSC shall provide a written Consensus Summary and Advisory Report to the Council detailing their review of the update. The Council shall provide copies of these reports to the SEDAR Coordinator for inclusion in the SEDAR Administrative Record. The Consensus Summary and Advisory Report should follow the same format as those prepared for SEDAR benchmark assessments.

All documentation standards of SEDAR workshops apply to assessment updates. Working papers, Assessment Reports, and the Consensus Summary and Advisory Report shall be provided to the SEDAR coordinator for inclusion in the Administrative Record and website posting.”

The next SEDAR assessment update involving South Atlantic stocks will be vermilion snapper. The SSC is expected to provide advice to the SAFMC SEDAR Committee on terms of reference, scheduling, and participants. Because this is an update, the SSC has the additional responsibilities of providing a chair for the assessment workshop and serving as a review body.

Specific items are detailed below:

- > Review the Terms of Reference for the vermilion snapper update.
- > Recommend dates for the data scoping conference call and the assessment workshop.
- > Suggest appropriate participants, both as SSC representatives as well as others agency employees or researchers who the SSC deems appropriate.
- > Appoint SSC chair for the assessment workshop

SSC recommends that SEDAR not conduct the vermilion snapper update stock assessment when scheduled because of the need to wait for regulations to take effect. The SSC also recommends that this not be an update but rather a benchmark assessment with new data and a different modeling approach.