

**DRAFT**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**  
**SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE**  
**SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**  
**June 14-15, 2022**

The Committee approved the minutes from the March 2022 meeting and the agenda for the June 2022 meeting.

**Status of Amendments under formal review**

NMFS SERO provided an update on progress of Snapper Grouper Amendment 50, which was formally submitted to NMFS SERO on May 3, 2022.

**Release Mortality Reduction and Red Snapper Catch Levels (SG Reg Amendment 35)**

Regulatory Amendment 35 was initiated to revise red snapper catch levels to be based on the most recent acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations from the SSC and to reduce dead releases of snapper grouper species in response to concerns over red snapper dead releases. The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) met in April 2022 meeting, and AP Chair Bob Lorenz provided the AP's comments and recommendations. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) also discussed this topic at their April 2022 meeting, and SSC Chair Dr. Jeff Buckel provided the SSC's comments and recommendations. The Committee Chair provided a statement about development of the amendment to date and potential future directions. Council staff presented a decision document that included information requested by the Council to develop actions to reduce snapper grouper releases. The Committee gave the following direction to staff:

- Develop Reg Amendment 35 with the following components:
  - **Red Snapper Catch Levels** – Develop draft action and alternative language to change the South Atlantic red snapper OFL, ABC, OY, and ACLs based on SEDAR 73 and the SSC's most recent recommendations.
    - Include ACL alternatives for 90-100% of ABC.
  - **Gear Modifications** – Develop draft action and alternative language for consideration of the following regulations:
    1. Disallow use of electric reels for the recreational sector while fishing for snapper grouper species
      - Include appropriate language to accommodate individuals with physical disabilities
    2. Require single hook rigs for the recreational sector while fishing for snapper grouper species
  - **Outreach/Education** – This effort will not require a formal action in Reg Amendment 35. However, expanded outreach/education efforts are expected to contribute to Regulatory Amendment 35's goals of reduced dead releases and ending overfishing of red snapper.

- Staff will summarize current/previous outreach and education efforts and provide some description of how future expanded efforts could reduce dead releases of snapper grouper species.
- Staff/IPT should consider how to measure “success” of changing behavior
  - Outreach efforts have gone on for several years
  - Most education campaigns have cumulative benefit
  - Descending device use is already incorporated into assessment, but release information can be improved through ongoing data collection, such as through the SAFMC Release application.
  - [STAFF ADDITION] COVID effect – While the Council has been conducting outreach efforts for years, in-person contact has been limited over the last two years due to COVID-19. As in-person contact continues to increase, outreach efforts could become more effective.
- Suggestions of how to expand outreach/education include education/training on Best Fishing Practices (BFP), especially those other than descending device use.
  - While descending device use should continue to be encouraged when appropriate, other BFPs can also contribute to reducing dead releases by reducing catch of species that cannot be retained.
  - BFPs other than descending device use can also improve survival of released fish in situations when descending devices are not needed, such as during shallow water fishing when there are no physical signs of barotrauma.
  - Education could occur through an online video training requirement to obtain state recreational fishing permits (particularly Florida). After a federal recreational permit is developed through SG Amendment 46, a similar training should be required to obtain this permit.
- Potential additional benefits beyond discard mortality reduction, such as better species identification.
- **Time/Area** – Council, SEFSC, and SERO staff develop the analyses to inform discussion and consideration of time/area closures of the snapper grouper fishery at the September Council Meeting.
  - Consider alternative timing of the red snapper recreational season.
  - Consider a season with a recreational maximum depth limit.
  - Consider wave closures of private recreational bottom fishing
    - Possibly for hot spot area(s) only
    - Would need alternatives for which wave(s) and area(s)
    - Consider closure to align with Shallow Water Grouper Closure (Jan-Apr; Waves 1 and 2)
  - List of Requested Analyses:
    1. Commercial discards (numbers) for all stocks in the snapper grouper complex by wave for NC, SC, GA, north FL (Cape Canaveral north), central FL (Cape Canaveral to Jupiter), and south FL (south of Jupiter), 2005-2021.
    2. Private recreational discards (numbers) for all stocks in the snapper grouper complex by wave for NC, SC, GA, north FL, central FL, and south FL, 2005-2021.

3. Recreational charter discards (numbers) for all stocks in the snapper grouper complex by wave for NC, SC, GA, north FL, central FL, and south FL, 2005-2021.
  4. Head boat discards (numbers) for all stocks in the snapper grouper complex by wave for NC, SC, GA, north FL, central FL, and south FL, 2005-2021.
  5. Commercial landings (numbers and pounds) for all stocks in the snapper grouper complex by wave for NC, SC, GA, north FL, central FL, and south FL, 2005-2021.
  6. Private recreational landings (numbers and pounds) for all stocks in the snapper grouper complex by wave for NC, SC, GA, north FL, central FL, and south FL, 2005-2021.
  7. Recreational charter landings (numbers and pounds) for all stocks in the snapper grouper complex by wave for NC, SC, GA, north FL, central FL, and south FL, 2005-2021.
  8. Head boat landings (numbers and pounds) for all stocks in the snapper grouper complex by wave for NC, SC, GA, north FL, central FL, and south FL, 2005-2021.
  9. A discard-only projection ( $F_{\text{landed}}=0$ ) and ABC recommendation for red snapper. This projection would assume no landings occur and would give perspective on the minimum number of red snapper removals (in this case, all removals would be dead discards) that must be reduced to end overfishing.
  10. Analysis of discard hot spots as described by the SEFSC.
  11. FWC State Reef Fish Survey discard estimates to compare with MRIP discard estimates.
  12. Analyses and discussion of expected economic and social impacts resulting from reduced effort and catch of snapper grouper species.
- The Committee additionally discussed an aggregate snapper grouper bag limit, but did not direct it for inclusion in Regulatory Amendment 35.
  - The Committee noted that revisions to sector allocations are not needed at this time for red snapper. While most other species are considering changes to allocation due to the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) transition from the Coastal Household Telephone Survey to the Fishing Effort Survey, a large majority of the red snapper recreational landings estimates are from the Florida State Reef Fish Survey. Since the landings data did not change, the Committee did not feel the need to consider reallocation through this amendment.

### **Gag (SG Amendment 53)**

The Committee received an overview of the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel's April 2022 recommendations. Staff then presented a decision document. The Committee made the following motions and gave the following direction to staff:

**MOTION 1:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 4B AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 3.

### **Action 3. Revise the gag sector allocations and sector annual catch limits**

**Preferred Alternative 4.** To determine allocations throughout the rebuilding plan, use the following method: Use the total commercial and Marine Recreational Information Program

Fishery Effort Survey recreational landings (*Sub-alternatives 4a and 4b*) as a baseline for initial reductions; apply the percent reduction from the total landings scenarios to the 2023 total annual catch limit evenly between sectors; apply each subsequent annual increase in the total ACL evenly to each sector ACL for Year 2 and each year thereafter throughout the rebuilding plan. Sector annual catch limits in the terminal year of the rebuilding plan (2032) would remain in place until modified.

**Preferred Sub-Alternative 4b.** To determine allocations throughout the rebuilding plan, use the average commercial and recreational MRIP FES landings from 2015-2019 as the baseline (5-year average).

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**MOTION 2:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 AS THE PREFERRED FOR ACTION 4A.

**Action 4a. Reduce the commercial trip limit**

**Alternative 3.** Reduce the commercial trip limit to 300 lbs gutted weight.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**MOTION 3:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 4B, AND SELECT ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 5B.

**Action 4b. Modify the commercial spawning season closure for gag**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The annual commercial gag spawning season closure is from January 1 through April 30.

**Action 5b. Modify the recreational spawning season closure for gag**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The annual recreational gag spawning season closure is from January 1 through April 30.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**MOTION 4:** REMOVE ACTION 6 FROM AMENDMENT 53.

**Action 6. Revise the gag commercial accountability measures**

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**MOTION 5:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 4 AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 7.

**Action 7. Revise the gag recreational accountability measures**

**Alternative 4.** Retain the current recreational in-season accountability measures. If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, reduce the length of the following year's recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational annual catch limit from being exceeded in the following year. However, the length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that it is not necessary.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

Direction to Staff:

- **Action 4a (Reduce the commercial trip limit)** – Direct the IPT to consider a commercial trip limit increase during the rebuilding plan and when such an increase would be optimal given the preferred ACL and allocations alternatives. Include additional alternatives which incorporate a commercial trip limit increase starting at 300

lbs gutted weight, increasing to 500 lbs ending at 1000 lbs gutted weight throughout the rebuilding plan.

- **Action 5a (Establish a recreational vessel limit)** – Direct the IPT to consider a recreational vessel limit increase during the rebuilding plan and when such an increase would be optimal given the preferred ACL and allocations alternatives. Include additional alternatives which incorporate a vessel limit increase from 2 fish to 4 fish, and 6 fish per vessel per day. Include alternatives that would exclude charter or headboats from a vessel limit.
- Gather input from the public on excluding charter/for-hire in the establishment of a recreational vessel limit.
- Include the current black grouper bag limit into the alternative language for **Action 5a**.
- Remove **Alternative 5** from **Action 7**.

**Alternative 5.** Remove the current recreational in-season accountability measures. If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit OR landings exceed the total annual catch limit, reduce the length of the following year's recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational sector's annual catch limit from being exceeded in the following year. However, the length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that it is not necessary.

### **Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish (SG Amendment 52)**

The Committee received an overview of the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel's April 2022 recommendations. Staff then presented a decision document. The Committee made the following motions and gave the following direction to staff:

#### **MOTION 6:** APPROVE PURPOSE AND NEED AS MODIFIED.

**Purpose:** The purpose is to revise the acceptable biological catch, overfishing limit, annual optimum yield, total annual catch limit and sector allocations for golden tilefish based on the most recent stock assessment. Additionally, the purpose is to consider modifications to management measures and accountability measures for golden tilefish and blueline tilefish.

**Need:** The need is to base conservation and management measures on the best scientific information available and achieve optimum yield, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and its National Standards.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

#### **MOTION 7:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3, SUB-ALTERNATIVE 3A AS PREFERRED FOR ACTION 3.

**Action 3. Modify the fishing year for the commercial golden tilefish hook and line and longline sectors**

**Alternative 3.** Modify the fishing year for the commercial longline component.

**Sub-Alternative 3a.** Modify the fishing year to start January 15.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

- Intent to retain the January 1 start date for the hook and line component

**MOTION 8:** REMOVE ACTION 4 FROM AMENDMENT 52 TO CONSIDER AT A LATER TIME

**Action 4. Establish an incidental trip limit allowance for the golden tilefish longline sector once the longline quota is caught**

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**MOTION 9:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 AS PREFERRED FOR ACTION 5.

**Action 5. Modify postseason recreational accountability measures for golden tilefish**

**Alternative 3.** NMFS would annually announce the recreational fishing season start and end. The fishing season will start on (date) and end on the date National Marine Fisheries Service projects the recreational annual catch limit will be met.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

- Intent to retain the January 1 start date for the recreational fishing year.

**MOTION 10:** SELECT ALTERNATIVES 2 AND 4 AS PREFERRED FOR ACTION 6.

**Action 6. Modify blueline tilefish recreational bag limit**

**Alternative 2.** Reduce recreational blueline tilefish bag limit to 2 fish per person per day.

**Alternative 4.** Do not allow retention of blueline tilefish by captain and crew.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

THE COMMITTEE DID NOT SELECT A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 7 (REVISIT ACTION 7?)

**Action 7. Modify blueline tilefish recreational season.**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not modify the blueline tilefish recreational season. The current recreational season is May 1-August 31.

**Alternative 2.** Modify blueline tilefish recreational season to May 1 through July 30.

**Alternative 3.** Modify blueline tilefish recreational season to June 1 through August 31.

**Alternative 4.** Modify blueline tilefish recreational season to May 1 through June 30.

**Alternative 5.** Modify blueline tilefish recreational season to July 1 through August 31.

**MOTION 11:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 AS PREFERRED FOR ACTION 8.

**Action 8. Modify postseason recreational accountability measures for blueline tilefish**

**Alternative 3.** NMFS will annually announce the recreational fishing season start and end. The fishing season will start on (date) and end on the date National Marine Fisheries Service projects the recreational annual catch limit will be met.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**DRAFT MOTION:** APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPER AMENDMENT 52 (GOLDEN TILEFISH AND BLUELINE TILEFISH) FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.

Direction to Staff:

- **Action 1** – Incorporate OFL into the action language.
- **Action 2** – Include clarification for the difference in allocation percentages being due to the MRIP transition from CHTS to FES. Recalculate recreational ACLs using 5.6 pound average weight (from SEDAR 66).

- **Action 5** – Clarify that **Alternative 3** is not technically a post-season AM.
- **Action 8** – Clarify that the in-season AM would remain in place.

### **Snowy Grouper (SG Amendment 51)**

The Committee received an overview of the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel's April 2022 recommendations. Staff then reviewed a decision document. The Committee made the following motions:

**MOTION 12:** MOVE ACTION 3 TO CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED

**Action 3. Reduce the snowy grouper commercial trip limit**

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**MOTION 13:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 4

**Action 4. Modify the snowy grouper recreational season**

**Alternative 2.** The recreational snowy grouper season is May 1 to June 30.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**MOTION 14:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 5

**Action 5. Modify the snowy grouper recreational accountability measures**

**Alternative 3.** If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, reduce the length of the following year's recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational annual catch limit from being exceeded in the following year. However, the length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that it is not necessary.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**MOTION 15:** APPROVE AMENDMENT 51 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

### **Greater Amberjack (SG Amendment 49)**

Staff presented a decision document summarizing the draft amendment and analyses of the current actions. A public hearing for this amendment was held during the Council Meeting Public Comment session. The Committee postponed discussion of some actions until the Full Council session (after the public hearing). The Committee also made the following motions:

**MOTION 16:** MOVE ACTION 3 TO CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED.

**Action 3. Increase the recreational minimum size limit for greater amberjack**

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**MOTION 17:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 (32-INCH MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT) AS PREFERRED FOR ACTION 4.

**Action 4. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack**

**Alternative 2.** Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 32 inches fork length.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE



**MOTION 18:** ADD AN ALTERNATIVE THAT CONSIDERS A 34-INCH MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT FOR ACTION 4.

**Action 4. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack**

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

- From Appendix F: "...reliable estimates of percent reductions in harvest from decreasing the minimum size limit are not possible because of two factors: 1) low number of available data on discarded greater amberjack lengths, and, 2) not having a reliable estimate of the proportion of discards to the total South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial catch. Reducing the minimum size limit will allow harvest of smaller greater amberjack which will likely increase harvest."
- Therefore, no additional info will be available before they consider for final action in September.

**OUTSTANDING COUNCIL ACTION:**

- **SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 5 (COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT)**

**Action 5. Increase the seasonal commercial trip limits for greater amberjack**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) commercial trip limit is 1,200 pounds gutted or whole weight for greater amberjack, and the September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit is 1,000 pounds gutted or whole weight.

**Alternative 2.** Increase the March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to be:

- 2a. 1,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.
- 2b. 2,000 pounds gutted or whole weight.
- 2c. 2,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.

**Alternative 3.** Increase the September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to be:

- 3a. 1,200 pounds gutted or whole weight.
- 3b. 1,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.
- 3c. 2,000 pounds gutted or whole weight.
- 3d. 2,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.

- **SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 6 (APRIL SPAWNING CLOSURE)**

**Action 6. Revise the April spawning closure for greater amberjack**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** During April each year, no person may sell or purchase a greater amberjack harvested from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest and possession limit is one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.

**Alternative 2.** Specify during April each year, no person may sell or purchase, harvest or possess a greater amberjack from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest



and possession limit is zero. This closure would apply to both the recreational and commercial sectors.

**Alternative 3.** Remove the April spawning closure for greater amberjack. Allow purchase, harvest, and possession of greater amberjack from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone according to regulations specified for the rest of the year.

#### • **APPROVE ALL ACTIONS IN SG AMENDMENT 49**

#### **Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel input not covered in previous agenda items (*SG AP Report*)**

The AP Chair presented the AP's comments on additional items discussed during their April 2022 meeting, including the continued need for a federal recreational snapper grouper permit (currently being addressed through SG Amendment 46), consideration of including barrelfish in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan, and initial questions about the Southeast Observer Program expansion.

#### **South Atlantic Reef Observer Coverage Expansion**

Starting in July 2022 the Southeast Observer Program will increase coverage in the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The Committee received a presentation on the program's expansion from the Southeast Observer Program Branch Chief, Scott Leach.

#### **Exempted Fishing Permit Brief**

The Committee reviewed an EFP application for a project testing of Subsea Buoy Retrieval Systems (SBRS) in commercial black sea bass pots.

#### **Other Business**

The Committee further discussed the possibility of a federal recreational permit for the deep water component of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The committee discussed how the new Recreational Reporting and Permitting and Technical AP could make this a priority.

#### **Timing and Tasks:**

##### **DRAFT MOTION 19:** DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Develop actions and analyses for Regulatory Amendment 35 (Snapper Grouper Release Mortality Reduction and Red Snapper Catch Levels) for the Committee's consideration at the September 2022 meeting.
- Convene a meeting of the golden tilefish longline endorsement holders to discuss alternative ways to manage that fishery. **(DISCUSS TIMING)**
- Conduct public comment for Amendment 51 (Snowy Grouper) and **Amendment 52 (Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish)** via webinar before the September 2022 Council meeting and during the public comment session at the September meeting.
- Prepare Amendment 49 (Greater Amberjack) for consideration of final approval at the September 2022 Council meeting.
- Prepare Amendment 53 (Gag) for consideration of approval for public hearings at the September 2022 Council meeting.