

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
DECEMBER 2020

(MEETING HELD VIA WEBINAR)

The Committee met via webinar on December 7 and 8, 2020. The Committee approved the minutes from the September 2020 meeting and the agenda for the December 2020 Committee meeting.

Status of Amendments under Formal Review

NMFS SERO staff updated the Committee on the status of amendments under review or recently submitted:

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 34 – Proposed rule published 11/16/20 with a comment period through 12/16/2020.

Yellowtail Snapper Stock Assessment

Chris Swanson, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) delivered a presentation to the Committee on the Yellowtail Snapper stock assessment (SEDAR 64). The Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs met jointly on October 30, 2020 to provide an ABC recommendation. Genny Nessler, Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Chair, delivered the SSCs' recommendations to the Committee. The following direction to staff is recommended:

1. Start a joint Amendment to set a new ACL for Yellowtail Snapper.
2. Ask the leadership of the two SSCs (Gulf and South Atlantic) to develop a game plan, that the Councils will review, for how to deal with developing ABCs for jointly managed stocks with two different Council ABC control rules.
 - a. This problem was surfaced during the Yellowtail Snapper assessment, but it will come up again with future assessments, such as with the Mutton Snapper assessment.
 - b. This group should also address how to deal with the differences in the Stock Synthesis (SS3) and Beaufort Assessment Model (BAM) when applying the ABC control rules.

Additional rationale and direction below were provided at Full Council:

- Engage staff from SEFSC and FRWI modeling staff who were conducting comparison between the two models (BAM and SS3).
- Issues between models are based on modeling styles.
- SSCs to discuss jointly (sub-set of SSCs initially and eventually whole SSCs) and then bring input back to Councils.
- A workgroup would:
 - Develop procedures to address stocks crossing jurisdictional boundaries. Guidance is needed for SSCs to move forward with addressing species that overlap jurisdictions but are managed under separate FMPs and control rules.
 - Develop best practices for resolving use of different control rules.

Evaluating the Need for Conservation and Management for 9 Snapper Grouper Species

Council staff facilitated discussion of whether Blackfin Snapper, Coney, Cubera Snapper, Margate, Misty Grouper, Silk Snapper, Saucereye Porgy, Yellowedge Grouper, and Yellowfin Grouper need continue to need conservation and management or merit designation as ecosystem component species. Jimmy Hull, Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) Chair, presented the AP's recommendations on this topic. Committee members stated that Misty Grouper, Saucereye Porgy, and Blackfin Snapper are important in some species areas of the South Atlantic and provided the following direction to staff:

- Do not consider Margate, Yellowedge Grouper, Yellowfin Grouper, Silk Snapper and Cubera Snapper for removal from the Snapper Grouper FMP.
- Include possible action to evaluate species for need of conservation and management under the Snapper Grouper FMP in a future unassessed species amendment. Work with SEFSC on possible approach for setting a single ACL with an (assessed) indicator species for data-poor species.

Wreckfish ITQ Modernization (Amendment 48)

The Committee discussed an options paper and reviewed input from Wreckfish ITQ shareholders. In addition, the Committee received a presentation from SERO staff on how other ITQ Programs are administered in the Gulf of Mexico and on the usefulness of the current Wreckfish Permit. The Committee provided the following direction to staff:

- Retain the current goals and objectives for the Wreckfish ITQ Program without modification. The Committee recommended no substantial changes to the program other than modernizing existing systems.
- Include an action that would consider the following recreational allocations: *de minimis*, 1%, and a percentage between 1% and 5%. Corresponding commercial allocations would be 100%, 99%, and between 99% and 95%. The no action alternative would retain the 95% commercial and 5% recreational allocation.
- Develop actions and alternatives to transition from the current paper-based system to an electronic reporting system.
- Develop actions and alternatives to modify the commercial fishing year (currently from April 15-April 14 with a January 16 to April 14 closure) and include an alternative for a calendar fishing year to alleviate potential administrative issues associated with resetting the IFQ computing systems.
- Obtain input on offloading requirements from the Law Enforcement AP, perhaps with additional input from a shareholder representative, and develop an action and alternatives to modify the current offloading time and site protocols.
- Develop an action with alternatives to address issues with wreckfish permit.
- Develop an action to address economic data collection (if the SEFSC is able to stratify the current snapper grouper economic data collection to ensure that all wreckfish shareholders are included, this action may not be needed).
- Develop actions to implement a cost recovery program to include where all participants would follow the same timing for payment.

Included in this amendment are the Snapper Grouper FMP Goals and Objectives that were approved in the Vision Blueprint but have yet to be adopted for the FMP.

The Committee made the following motion:

MOTION 1: APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPE AMENDMENT 48 FOR SCOPING DURING THE MARCH 2021 COUNCIL MEETING.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Red Porgy (Amendment 50)

Council staff presented an overview of a decision document including preliminary analyses and recommendations from the Snapper Grouper AP. The Committee discussed that decades of management measures have not helped improve the status of Red Porgy in the region and recruitment has continued to be poor. It was acknowledged that the stock's condition may be due to factors unrelated to fishing. It was also stated that it is possible there have been changes in the environment that have caused low recruitment, but scientists do not know the timescale of that change and for how long it will persist into the future. Also, projections tend to be optimistic because they assume that discards are decreasing at the same rate as landings, so part of the reason recovery has been elusive could be because the projections have been too optimistic.

The Committee provided the following guidance and made the motions below:

**MOTION 2: DO NOT SELECT A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE PRIOR TO SCOPING
SUBSTITUTE MOTION: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 2 AS PREFERRED
Action 2. Revise the Red Porgy total annual catch limit and optimum yield**

Alternative 2. Revise the annual catch limit and optimum yield for Red Porgy to equal the updated acceptable biological catch based on the results of the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 60 2020). The 2026 annual catch limit would remain in place until modified.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION BECOMES MAIN MOTION

MAIN MOTION APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Direct staff/IPT to:

- Examine the following range of trip limits for the commercial sector:
 - 15, 20, 30, and 45 fish in season 1 (Jan-Apr)
 - 15, 20, 30, 45, and 60 fish in season 2 (May-Dec)
 - Do not consider a spawning season closure for the commercial sector
- Prepare analyses to examine the effects of closing the recreational fishery for red porgy in synchrony with the shallow water grouper spawning season closure (January-April)
- Prepare analyses to examine the effects of closing the recreational fishery for red porgy in waves 3 and 4.
- Prepare analyses to examine the effects of reducing the red porgy bag limit to:
 - 1 fish per angler per trip;
 - 2 fish per angler per trip;
 - 3 fish per angler per trip; (no action) and

- examine the combined effects of bag limit reductions with closures above.
- Prepare analyses to examine a recreational fishing season occurring in wave 3 or wave 4.
- Prepare analyses with a range of recreational vessel limits (if there are adequate data for such analyses).
- Include options for modifications to accountability measures.

Greater Amberjack (Amendment 49)

At the June 2020 meeting, the Council directed staff to begin work on an amendment to adjust catch limits and allocations based on information from SEDAR 59 (2020) and SSC recommendations. At this meeting, staff presented an overview of the drafted options paper and requested guidance from the Committee on possible actions and a range of alternatives to develop for consideration at the March 2021 meeting. A draft timeline was presented that would complete development of this amendment in 2022. The Committee requested information on how the fishing year has evolved throughout the recent management history. The Committee also requested that the IPT explore a range of optimum yield values separate from the total ACL and additional allocation options. Finally, the Committee requested the AP discuss and provide input on potential changes to management measures that could be incorporated into Amendment 49. The AP is currently scheduled to meet next in April 2021.

Snapper Grouper AP Recommendations not covered in previous items

The Committee did not discuss additional input or recommendations from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel due to time constraints.

Other Business

There was no Committee discussion under Other Business.

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 3: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Include action to evaluate species for need of conservation and management under the Snapper Grouper FMP in a future unassessed species amendment. Work with SEFSC on possible approach for setting a single ACL with an (assessed) indicator species for data-poor species.
- Prepare the Wreckfish ITQ Modernization Amendment (Amendment 48) for scoping during the March 2021 Council meeting.
- Start an amendment (in cooperation with the Gulf Council) to set a new ACL for Yellowtail Snapper. Direction to continue this work in SG Am 44 (which had been suspended).
- Refer to guidance under item above addressing Yellowtail Snapper to create workgroup.
- Conduct scoping hearings for the Red Porgy Amendment (Amendment 50) in winter 2021 and bring back comments to the Committee at the March 2021 meeting.
- Schedule online public seminar: Red Snapper diet composition using DNA barcoding of fish prey (MARMAP).
- Prepare Greater Amberjack Amendment (Amendment 49) draft scoping document for the Committee to consider during the March 2021 meeting.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEE COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
March 2-3, 2021

The Committee approved the minutes from the December 2020 meeting and the agenda for the March 2021 meeting noting two items to be discussed under Other Business.

Status of Amendments under Formal Review

SERO staff update the Committee on the status of Regulatory Amendment 34 (SMZs in NC and SC). A final rule for this amendment is awaiting publication.

Snowy Grouper Stock Assessment

The update to SEDAR 36 conducted in 2020, using data through 2018, showed the stock remains overfished and is experiencing overfishing. A lower natural mortality at age was likely the primary driver of any differences between SEDAR 36 and the 2020 update. SEFSC staff delivered a presentation on the assessment's results to the Committee and the SSC Chair delivered the SSC's recommendations. The SSC accepted the base run of the assessment model as Best Available Information Available and suitable for management and presented OFL and ABC recommendations ([SSC Report](#)). In addition, Council staff provided an overview of available Snowy Grouper landings and other pertinent data using an [online application](#). The Committee made the following motion:

**MOTION 1: INSTRUCT STAFF TO INITIATE A FULL PLAN AMENDMENT FOR
SNOWY GROUPEE
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

Note: The IPT will develop a suite of possible actions for the Council's consideration at a subsequent meeting in 2021 and Council staff will obtain input from the Snapper Grouper AP regarding potential modifications to management measures.

Wreckfish ITQ Modernization (Amendment 48)

Council staff reviewed modifications to actions and alternatives and IPT and relevant LE AP recommendations. Scoping for this amendment was held during the Public Comment session on March 3. No scoping comments were received.

Staff explained there will likely be additional actions needed as a significant overhaul of the regulations will be required to move from a paper-based reporting system to an electronic reporting system. Hence, the timeline of development will need adjustment. Final approval of this amendment is now tentatively expected in June 2022. The Committee provide the following guidance:

- Remove *de minimis* allocation alternative from Action 1.

- Explore allocations that would match expected recreational landings, it might be possible to allocate between 1-2% to the recreational sector.
 - Consider number of fish associated with allocated poundage.
- Separate actions to consider a fishing year change and modification of the spawning season closure and obtain feedback from shareholders on the spawning season closure.
- It was reiterated that a Snapper Grouper Unlimited permit (SG1) should be the one required to obtain a wreckfish permit.
- Move action to modify the fishing year to follow implementation of the electronic system since fishing year is tied to those modifications.
- Continue to develop actions and alternatives related to a VMS requirement. Include consideration of current requirements in the Gulf of Mexico IFQ fisheries.
- Hold a shareholders meeting after the June 2021 Council meeting.

Greater Amberjack (Amendment 49)

Staff presented available data on Greater Amberjack landings and other relevant information on the online application (link above). Subsequently, staff provided an overview of the decision document with modifications since the December 2020 meeting and IPT recommendations. Staff indicated that revised projections had been recently received from the SEFSC and presented revised total annual catch limit (ACL) alternatives based on those projections. It was clarified that the poundages under other actions in the amendment currently do not reflect those revisions. The Committee also discussed revising the recreational Annual Catch Target (ACT) for this species (Action 3) and supported the IPT’s to consider more general removal of recreational ACTs from the Snapper Grouper FMP, as these levels are not currently being used in management. The Committee made the following motions and provided the guidance below:

- Include language under Action 2 that notes an alternative that maintained the current commercial ACL poundage and only varied the recreational ACL according to any increase in the total ACL was previously considered and removed, due to the long-term allocations (2026-2027+) being very similar (within 1%) to allocation percentages from Alternative 2, which applies the current allocation formula to landings that include recreational catch estimates calibrated to the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (FES).
- For Action 3, remove Alternative 2 and revise the language to consider removing recreational ACTs for all species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

MOTION 2: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 1 AS PREFERRED

Action 1. Revise the Greater Amberjack annual catch limit and annual optimum yield

Alternative 2. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for Greater Amberjack and set equal to the updated acceptable biological catch based on the results of the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 59 2020). The 2026-27 total annual catch limit would remain in place until modified.

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022-23	4,380,000
2023-2024	3,233,000
2024-2025	2,818,000
2025-2026	2,699,000
2026-2027+	2,669,000

NOTE: Proposed annual catch limits are based on recreational data calibrated to the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (FES). Future recreational catches under these limits would be monitored by the FES.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 3: APPROVE AMENDMENT 49 FOR SCOPING

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Red Porgy (Amendment 50)

During the December meeting, the Council reviewed preliminary analyses and recommendations from the Snapper Grouper AP, requested specific analyses for review at this meeting, and approved the amendment for scoping. Scoping hearings were held on February 3 and 4, 2021 via webinar. Staff reviewed scoping comments, actions and alternatives with available analyses, and IPT recommendations. The Committee reviewed, modified, and approved actions and the range of alternatives under each action. The Committee provided the following guidance to the IPT:

- Request the IPT discuss possibly adding an alternative for catch level that reflects rebuilding at T_{min} (ACL = 0). Add discussion to the amendment to explain the apparent disconnect between the projected catch levels under rebuilding projections and the recommended ABC (similar situation noted for snowy grouper) and the role of recruitment.
- Incorporate reference to “annual” OY to Action 2 and its alternatives. It was noted the language for a similar action in Amendment 49 (Greater Amberjack) includes this language and the Committee suggested being consistent.
- Remove Action 4 (revision of the recreational ACT) for Red Porgy (since an action was included in Amendment 49 to consider removing the recreational ACT for all species for which it has been specified under the Snapper Grouper FMP).
- Modify alternatives for a recreational vessel (Action 6) limit to include 6, 12, and 18 fish per vessel.
- Include an alternative that explores options for different vessel limits for headboats for analysis and discussion.
- Remove action to consider modification to commercial accountability measures.
- Direct the IPT to develop an alternative to modify recreational accountability measures to incorporate multi-year (3 years or longer) running averages.
- Direct IPT to explore use of geometric mean vs arithmetic mean for triggering recreational accountability measures

Updates

Red Snapper and Greater Amberjack Research Projects:

In 2020, the NMFS Sea Grant Consortium received funding to administer programs to solicit research on Red Snapper (South Atlantic) and Greater Amberjack (South Atlantic and Gulf). The goal is to support research that would generate absolute estimates of abundance, with accompanying measures of uncertainty, for these stocks. The intent is for this information to be used as an “anchor point” for future stock assessments. These are sister projects to the much larger “Great Red Snapper Count” that was conducted in the Gulf of Mexico. Council staffs serve on the Steering Committees for each project and provided updates on progress to date for each project.

South Atlantic Preliminary Recreational Landings and 2021 Red Snapper Season

SERO staff presented preliminary 2020 recreational landings for Red Snapper and other information that will be used to determine the duration of the 2021 recreational season. The Committee discussed several issues related to Red Snapper:

- The SSC is scheduled to review the assessment at their April meeting (scheduled for April 27-29 and May 3, 2021) and provide their recommendations to the Council in June.
- The Red Snapper assessment will be presented to the Council at the June meeting.
- Adjusting catch levels, if allowed, could be done via an abbreviated framework. However, adjusting sector allocations would have to be done through a plan amendment (which takes much longer to develop).
- An approach where the Red Snapper ACL is adjusted through a framework amendment and allocations are addressed through a separate amendment was offered (the Gulf Council is pursuing such an approach). *Clarification – Gulf Council’s action to change red snapper ACLs is related to an interim analysis and does not consider changes in allocation because the assessment does not incorporate MRIP FES data.*
- NOAA GC will be providing further advice to the Council regarding the approach above.

MOTION 4: REQUEST THE SSC PROVIDE SHORT-TERM MANAGEMENT (3 to 5 YEARS) ADVICE FOR RED SNAPPER ASSUMING RECENT HIGH RECRUITMENT APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 5: REQUEST THAT STAFF DETERMINE WHETHER AN ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK CAN BE USED TO ADJUST CATCH LEVELS OF RED SNAPPER AND, IF SO, PREPARE SUCH AN AMENDMENT FOR COUNCIL REVIEW IN JUNE 2021 APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Agenda topics for Spring 2021 Snapper Grouper AP Meeting

The Snapper Grouper AP is scheduled to convene via webinar on April 21-23, 2021. The Committee reviewed the list of topics below and approved it for staff to develop the AP’s agenda.

- Fishery overviews for Greater Amberjack, Yellowtail Snapper, and Snowy Grouper – recommendations on potential management measures
- Mutton Snapper FPR
- Amendment 49 (Greater Amberjack) – overview of proposed actions/alternatives and available analyses
- Amendment 50 (Red Porgy) – overview of proposed actions/alternatives and available analyses
- Amendment 48 (Wreckfish ITQ Modernization) – brief update and schedule shareholders meeting separately (include in T&T). Request input on recreational catch of wreckfish.
- SEDAR updates (Red Snapper, golden Tilefish, Gag, others)
- CitSci – the new ACCSP CitSci app (SciFish) combining Release and CatchULater. Demo of the app and short update on the general program
- Discussion on possible approaches to reduce recreational discards
- Feedback on Council’s research recommendations
- Request feedback on vermilion snapper trip limit

Other Business

The Committee discussed the two items below:

Golden Tilefish –

Projections indicate that the longline fishery for golden Tilefish may be reopened for an additional 11 days (this estimate subject to change). Fishermen indicated their preference for the fishery to be reopened in the days leading up to Easter (April 4), such as on or around March 20. NMFS staff stated that this can be done, and staff will prepare to announce the reopening as requested in late March.

Vermilion Snapper –

An emergency rule went into place in 2020 to increase the commercial trip limit for Vermilion Snapper to 1,500 pounds to help mitigate impacts of the pandemic on the commercial industry in the region. The emergency rule will expire on March 31, 2021. A Committee member requested discussion on whether the emergency rule could be extended. NOAA GC explained the emergency measures could not be extended without proper public notice and comment and without the Council actively working on an amendment to address the emergency. Neither of these criteria have been met. Additionally, the Council modified the commercial trip limit for Vermilion Snapper recently (in 2020)

The Committee made the motion below but did not vote on it.

MOTION: INCREASE THE VERMILION SNAPPER TRIP LIMIT TO 1,500 LBS

MOTION WITHDRAWN

The Council discussed looking for added flexibility to make adjustments to management measures as the need arises. The Council requested input from the Snapper Grouper AP on this topic.

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 6: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Request a presentation from the SEFSC on pilot longline surveys in the region to be provided to the Committee at the June meeting, if time allows.
- Prepare Amendment 49 (Greater Amberjack) for scoping and conduct scoping hearings before the June meeting.
- Schedule and facilitate a meeting of the Snapper Grouper AP with approved agenda topics in April.
- Schedule wreckfish shareholders meeting after the June 2021 meeting.
- Request that the SSC explore ABC recommendations based on recent high recruitment for Red Snapper
- Prepare an abbreviated framework to adjust catch levels for Red Snapper for review and approval in June 2021, if appropriate
- Initiate amendment to address snowy grouper and direct staff to ensure appropriate timeline for development

APPROVED BY COUNCIL