




UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Fisheries Science Center
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15 February, 2017

MEMORANDUM FOR: Gregg Waugh, Executive Director
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

FROM: Bonnie J. Ponwith, Ph.D. 
Science and Research Director

SUBJECT: **Red Snapper Projections**

On January 18, 2017, you sent a memo requesting, "Provide projections to 2044 (the end of the rebuilding period) based on fixed fishing mortality rates at Fmax, F20%SPR, F27%SPR, F30%SPR, and F40%SPR under the assumptions that all fish caught at each F level are subsequently discarded and the scenario mortality level is the total mortality (i.e., there are no additional discard mortalities). For each scenario, provide the full suite of projection outputs as provided for SEDAR 41 projections."

In working on those projections, Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff have advised, and I concur, that the proposed projections are not appropriate for management use for the following reasons:

- The uncertainty in the assessment is already large, and will increase due to the MRIP discard data, especially for the interim period (2015-16), the upcoming changes to MRIP from the new effort survey. For some background: the uncertainty in projections is generally high after 3-5 years, and these projections would have 2-3 years of an interim period (depending on whether 2017 or 2018 was the effective year of regulations).
- The SAFMC SSC has indicated that overfishing for this stock is occurring, but cannot quantify by how much. Fishing mortality rates in the last few years of the assessment are very sensitive to 2014 data and retrospective analyses indicate fishing mortality rates are considerably lower if these data are excluded. This uncertainty in the stock assessment inhibits the ability to set an ABC that can be effectively monitored.
- Fishing mortality in the interim period is calculated using actual landings and discards in 2015, though the status was determined using fishing mortality when there was a fishery occurring during mini-seasons (2012-2014). There were no fishing seasons for red snapper in 2015 or 2016 and final 2016 MRIP data are not yet available.
- The MRIP telephone survey will end this year and be replaced by a new mail-based effort survey. The new effort survey will be calibrated with the old telephone survey and undergo peer-review this summer. Preliminary results from the calibration study will be available in late-2017 and final results incorporating all three years of side-by-

side surveys will be available in 2018. Projections timed to benefit from the completed calibration study would be stronger than if based on the preliminary results.

- We feel that a more complete evaluation of the effect of the upcoming changes to MRIP on the Red Snapper assessment is needed before it can be useful to management.
 - We further recommend a thorough investigation, possibly through a workshop, into the reliability and utility of mail survey based MRIP estimates of catch and discards for many of our offshore species, which are known to have low intercept rates relative to other species covered by MRIP.

cc: Roy Crabtree
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