



Content and Status of Active Snapper Grouper & Generic Amendments

March 18, 2015

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 16 (black sea bass pot closure and gear markings) Council lead: Brian

The amendment contains two actions: the first addresses the prohibition on the use of black sea bass pots that was implemented through Regulatory Amendment 19 and became effective on October 23, 2013; the second action specifies potential new black sea bass pot gear modifications to aid in gear identification in the event of a whale entanglement. The Council reviewed the analyses for this amendment at their December 2014 meeting, made modifications to the amendment, and revised the timeline for development. In March 2015, the Council selected a preferred alternative for Action 1. The Council is scheduled to approve the amendment for public hearings at their June 2015 meeting. Public hearings would be held in August 2015. The Council will review public hearing comments and make final decisions for the document at their September 2015 meeting. The Council is scheduled to approve the document to send to the Secretary at the December 2015 meeting.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 36 (Spawning Special Management Zones) Council lead: Gregg

Amendment 36 would specify a process for identifying spawning sites/aggregations for snapper grouper species, including speckled hind and warsaw grouper, based on the characteristics of sites important for spawning (bottom topography, current systems, etc.). Spawning SMZs would only consider prohibiting fishing for and/or possession of snapper grouper species (species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit); fishing for all other species would be allowed. The amendment would also revise the boundary of the Charleston Deep Reef MPA, and includes an action to address transit and anchoring provisions within newly designated Spawning SMZs. Note: The Spawning SMZ approach would not make any changes to the existing MPAs. The Council is developing a System Management Plan to specify the outreach, law enforcement, and monitoring/research projects necessary to effectively monitor and evaluate the existing MPAs. The necessary System Management Plan items for the Spawning SMZs will be added as an appendix to the amendment.

Scoping for this amendment took place in August 2014 and development continued in 2014. The Council reviewed the amendment at their March 2015 meeting and approved it for the first round of public hearings. Public hearings will be held via webinar in April 2015 and during the June 2015 Council meeting. The Council will review public input and approve the amendment for more public hearings at the June 2015 meeting. A second round of hearings would be held in August. The Council will review public comments at their September 2015 meeting and approve the amendment for formal review.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 20 (snowy grouper) Council lead: Myra

Regulatory Amendment 20 proposes to adjust the rebuilding strategy, acceptable biological Catch (ABC), annual catch limit (ACL), maximum sustainable yield (MSY), minimum stock size threshold (MSST), and optimum yield (OY), and revise management measures for snowy grouper.

At their March 2014 meeting, the Council approved the Purpose and Need, reviewed options, and selected a range of alternatives for each action. The Council opted to use the normal framework procedure to develop this amendment. Public hearings were held in August 2014 and the Council approved the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce at their September 2014 meeting. The amendment is undergoing formal review.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 22 (recreational tag program) Council lead: Myra

The Council initiated development of Amendment 22 to address annual harvest levels of snapper grouper species with exceptionally low recreational annual catch limits (ACLs). The Council requested that an amendment be developed to create a recreational tag program for these species. Recreational fishery participants would be issued tags through a pre-determined process. Tags issued to individuals or entities would allow the tag holder to harvest a set number of fish from federal waters in the South Atlantic Region.

The Council reviewed a revised Options Paper at their December 2013 meeting but suspended further development of the amendment pending NOAA CG's input on several issues, including whether a recreational harvest tag program would be considered a Limited Access Privilege Program (LAPP) and thus be subject to specific requirements. NOAA CG provided further guidance to the Council at their September 2014 meeting. At the December 2014 meeting, the Council received a presentation from the NC Division of Marine Fisheries on the state's catch card program for highly migratory species. The Council discussed whether to continue development of this amendment during the March 2015 meeting and voted to postpone further development.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 29 (ORCS and ABC Control Rule) Council lead: Myra

At the June 2013 Council meeting, the SSC presented to the Council their recommended changes to the ABC Control Rule. In addition, the SSC provided ABC recommendations for "Only Reliable Catch Stocks". To implement these recommendations, the Council requested development of Amendment 29. A Decision Document/Options Paper was presented to the Council at their September 2013 meeting. At that time, the Council also added actions to implement management measures for gray triggerfish.

Public hearings on this amendment were held in January 2014 and the Council reviewed comments at their March 2014 meeting. The Council took public comment on the amendment at their September 2014 meeting and approved submission of the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce. The amendment was approved by the Secretary on February 20 and publication of the Final Rule is expected soon. Regulations would be effective in April 2015.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 32 (blueline tilefish) Council lead: Myra

The SSC reviewed the stock assessment for blueline tilefish (SEDAR 32) in October 2013 and found it to be suitable for management. The assessment indicated the stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing. The Council is required to take action to end overfishing and/or establish a rebuilding plan within two years of being notified that a stock is undergoing overfishing and/or is overfished. The Council received the notification on the status of the blueline tilefish stock on December 6, 2013. However, the Council adopted an alternate definition of MSST (through Regulatory Amendment 21)

that indicates the stock is in fact not overfished and a rebuilding plan is not necessary. A scoping document was developed and a scoping webinar was held on November 7, 2013.

At the December 2013 meeting the Council requested that NMFS take emergency action to set the blueline tilefish ACL at 224,100 pounds whole weight, the yield at 75%F_{MSY}. The emergency rule became effective in April 2014. At their June 2014 meeting, the Council reviewed the actions and alternatives in the amendment and approved it for public hearings in August 2014. At their September 2014 meeting, the Council requested an extension of the emergency rule to allow completion of Amendment 32 and approved the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce. The amendment is undergoing formal review. It is expected that regulations will be effective prior to the April 18, 2015 expiration of the temporary rule.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 22 (gag and wreckfish) Council lead: Myra

At their June 2014 meeting, the Council approved development of Regulatory Amendment 22 to address adjustments to the ABC, ACLs, and OY for gag and wreckfish based on results of the stock assessment for those two species. The amendment also includes an action to consider modifying the bag limit for gag; however, the Council chose to take no action at this time.

The Council reviewed the amendment at their September meeting and approved it for public hearings, which were held via webinar in fall 2014. The Council reviewed public hearing comments at their December 2014 meeting and approved the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce. The amendment was submitted to NMFS for formal review on February 26, 2015.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 33 (transport of snapper grouper fillets from the Bahamas) Council lead: Brian

This amendment modifies what is currently allowed by recreational fishermen to bring snapper grouper species fillets from the Bahamas into the US EEZ. Also included for consideration is leaving skin on the fillets, onboard documentation requirements, as well as determining how many Bahamian fillets may be aboard the vessel in the U.S. EEZ.

At the March 2014 Council meeting, the Council received input on the proposed actions and alternatives from the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel and the Law Enforcement Committee. The Council made revisions to the Purpose and Need and revised actions and alternatives. In June 2014, the Council approved the amendment for public hearings in August 2014. Approval for submission to the Secretary of Commerce took place in December 2014.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 34 (accountability measures for snapper grouper species) Council lead: Brian

The Generic Accountability Measures and Dolphin Allocation Amendment considers changes in accountability measures for snapper grouper species to determine when ACL overages need to be paid back and to bring consistency to accountability measures. A scoping webinar was held in February 2014 and the Council reviewed the amendment at their March 2014 meeting. The Council approved the Purpose and Need and revised the range of alternatives. The Council also clarified that payback of an ACL overage would apply only to the amount above the total ACL, not the sector ACL. In June 2014, the Council approved the amendment for public hearings in August 2014. The Council approved the amendment for formal review in December 2014.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 35 (removal of species from the FMU) Council lead: Myra

This amendment would remove 4 species from the Snapper Grouper FMU: black snapper, dog snapper, mahogany snapper, and schoolmaster. Representatives from the State of Florida requested the South Atlantic Council remove the above 4 species from the Snapper Grouper FMU as well as Nassau grouper. At their June 2014 meeting, however, the Council opted to retain Nassau grouper in the FMU given its ESA status. Florida regulations would be extended into federal waters off Florida to manage the remaining 4 species.

Scoping for Amendment 35 took place in August 2014. At their September meeting, the Council reviewed the scoping comments and provided guidance to continue development of the amendment. Additionally, the Council added an action to the amendment to address issues with golden tilefish longline endorsements. The Council reviewed the amendment at their December 2014 meeting and approved it for public hearings in January 2015. The Council considered public comment during the March 2015 meeting and approved all actions. Approval for submission to the Secretary is scheduled to take place during the June 2015 Council meeting.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 37 (multiple species) Council Lead: Myra

At their March 2015 meeting, the Council directed staff to begin development of Amendment 37 and include the following actions:

- Modification of the management unit for hogfish
- Partial delegation of commercial and/or recreational management measures for Florida hogfish in federal waters adjacent to the state of Florida
- Adjustment to hogfish fishing levels and management measures for each of the two Atlantic stocks (NC-GA and Florida-Florida Keys)
- Commercial and recreational management measures for hogfish
- Revision to the composition of the Jacks Complex and commercial management measures for almaco jack
- Removal of size limits for deepwater species (silk snapper, queen snapper, and blackfin snapper)
- Adjustment to spawning season closure for shallow water grouper
- Adjustment of size limit for red grouper
- Adjustment of bag limit for black sea bass

The amendment will be developed with the intent of approving it for public hearings in September 2015. The Council would consider public input at their December meeting, make any modifications to the amendment and approve all actions. Approval for formal review would take place during the Council's March 2016 meeting.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 23 (golden tilefish) Council Lead: Myra

At their March 2015 meeting, the Council directed staff to initiate development of Regulatory Amendment 23 to address management of the commercial golden tilefish fishery. The amendment would include actions to lengthen the commercial longline fishing season, modify the fishing year start date for the commercial hook-and-line sector, and make modifications to the longline endorsement requirements to allow holders of unlimited snapper grouper permits who own multiple vessels to fish on both the longline and the hook-and line directed commercial quotas. The amendment would be presented to the Council to approve for public hearings at their September 2015 meeting with final approval scheduled for March 2016.

Generic Amendments

Joint Commercial Logbook Amendment Council lead: Gregg

During the December 2012 meeting, the South Atlantic Council approved a motion moving the commercial logbook reporting action out of CE-BA 3 and indicated their wish to work with the Gulf Council on a joint amendment to address commercial logbook issues in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.

The amendment includes an action to consider modifying the timing of reporting requirements for commercial logbooks in fisheries for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagic resources, dolphin/wahoo, and golden crab fisheries, and providing an option for logbooks to be submitted electronically. Currently, logbook reports from commercial fishermen targeting snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagic, and dolphin/wahoo must be submitted to the Science and Research Director postmarked no later than 7 days after the end of each fishing trip. Logbook reporting forms for golden crab must be submitted to the Science and Research Director postmarked no later than 30 days after sale of the golden crab offloaded from a trip. The amendment also considers requiring that the components of the commercial logbooks (landings, economic, and bycatch) be submitted within 21 days after the end of each trip. This would increase the timeline for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagic, and dolphin/wahoo fishermen to complete logbooks, and decrease the timeline for golden crab fishermen. Commercial electronic logbooks, as proposed in this amendment, would not be used to monitor annual catch limits; however, they could serve as a means to verify dealer reports and comply with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program standards that require two sources for verification of quota-monitored species. It is the Council's intent that NMFS use the commercial logbook landings, with the new timing and compliance requirements specified in this amendment, to compare with commercial trip ticket landings to help ensure the commercial ACLs are not exceeded.

At their June 2013 meeting, the Council approved scheduling a NMFS SEFSC presentation on the details of the commercial electronic logbook pilot study at the September 2013 meeting. The Council receives updates at each Council meeting. SA Council staff will work with Gulf staff and NMFS staff to plan for completion of the amendment incorporating results from year 1 of the pilot study and target regulations being effective on January 1, 2016.

Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 3 (bycatch) Council lead: Chip

The action in CE-BA 3 considers improvements in bycatch/discard data collection methods to better quantify all sources of fishing mortality in South Atlantic fisheries. Alternatives consider expanding aspects of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program's Release, Discard and Protected Species Module to coastal migratory pelagic (SA Council area only) and dolphin and wahoo fisheries; and also implementing a commercial observer program at 2-5% coverage levels for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagic (SA Council area only), dolphin and wahoo, and golden crab vessels.

Based on discussions at the September 2014 Council meeting, the SEFSC/SERO agreed to draft a comprehensive bycatch reporting system for the southeast. The SEFSC and SERO will provide an update on their efforts at each Council meeting. The Council's intent is that the bycatch reporting system would be specified and implemented through this amendment.

Joint Charterboat Logbook Amendment Council lead: Gregg

During the March 2015 meeting, the South Atlantic Council approved draft actions/alternatives that would require weekly electronic reporting by charterboats. The actions/alternatives are patterned after the recently implemented headboat electronic reporting requirements. The Gulf Council is reviewing the actions/alternatives at their March/April 2015 meeting, and the two Councils are scheduled to review

and approve the amendment for public hearings at the Joint June Council meeting in Key West. Public hearings are planned for July/August, and the Councils hope to complete the amendment by the end of 2015.