



Content and Status of Active Snapper Grouper Amendments

March 20, 2014

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 14 (management measures for snapper grouper species)

Regulatory Amendment 14 proposes actions to: (1) modify the commercial and recreational fishing years for greater amberjack, (2) modify the recreational fishing year for black sea bass; (3) modify the recreational accountability measure for black sea bass; (4) modify the commercial fishing year for black sea bass; (5) change the commercial fishing seasons for vermilion snapper; (6) modify the trip limit for gag; and (7) modify the recreational accountability measure for vermilion snapper.

Public hearings were held in August 2013 and the Council approved this amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce at their September 2013 meeting.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 16

The amendment includes one action to address the prohibition on the use of black sea bass pots that was implemented through Regulatory Amendment 19 and became effective on October 23, 2013. Scoping meetings were held in January 2014 and the Council reviewed alternatives at the March 2014 meeting. The Council will review analyses for the range of alternatives at their June 2014 meeting and approve for public hearings to be held in August 2014.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 17 (MPAs for speckled hind and warsaw grouper)

This amendment would consider alternatives for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that would help diminish bycatch of speckled hind and warsaw grouper. The Council initially convened a group of experts and held an MPA Expert Workgroup meeting in Pooler, GA in May 2012. The Workgroup comprised scientists with expertise in deepwater groupers and/or MPAs and commercial and recreational fishermen with extensive experience in the South Atlantic. The Workgroup produced a report that was presented to the Council in June 2012 and contained recommendations for both re-orientation of existing deepwater MPAs as well as options for new MPAs. The Council stated their intent to initially only consider re-orientation of some of the existing deepwater MPAs, however, they approved a motion at the December 2012 meeting to consider other areas. The MPA Expert Workgroup was convened again in February 4-6, 2013 in Charleston to provide further advice to the Council.

At the September 2013 meeting the Council revised the Purpose and Need for the amendment and reviewed the amendment at the December 2013. The Council received presentations on outreach efforts, law enforcement, and research and monitoring for the existing MPAs (established in 2009 through Amendment 14) and the proposed sites. The Council approved a motion to take all the MPA alternatives to scoping in August 2014 and have the Snapper Grouper AP receive the same presentations the Council received at their December 2013 meeting when the AP meets in April 2014. The AP is to provide their recommendations to the Council at the June 2014 meeting.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 20 (snowy grouper)

A standard assessment for snowy grouper was completed in 2013 (SEDAR 36) and the SSC was scheduled to review it at their October 2013 meeting. Due to delays caused by the government shutdown, however, SEFSC analysts who conducted the assessment were unable to present the assessment to the SSC. The SSC felt that a detailed presentation and discussion were necessary considering this was a 'standard assessment' with no CIE or other peer review prior to the SSC meeting (as was the case with blueline tilefish). Therefore, the SSC postponed review until the April 2014 SSC meeting.

The assessment for mutton snapper is being conducted by the Florida Marine Research Institute and was scheduled for SSC review at the October 2013 meeting. However, issues with recreational data for this species have caused a delay, and the SSC will not be reviewing the assessment until their April 2014 meeting. Therefore, at their March 2014 meeting, the Council opted to remove mutton snapper from Regulatory Amendment 20.

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 with the intent to conduct public hearings in August and submit for final approval in September 2014.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 22 (recreational tag program)

Amendment 22 is being developed to closely control annual harvest levels of snapper grouper species with exceptionally low recreational annual catch limits (ACLs). In order to accomplish this, 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 is currently developing guidelines that can be applied nationally to determine whether proposed programs fit the criteria of a LAPP. More information is currently needed to establish whether the proposed recreational harvest tag program proposed in Amendment 22 would need to adhere to the requirements of a LAPP. NOAA GC will provide further guidance to the Council at the June 2014 meeting.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 29 (ORCS and ABC Control Rule)

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 revised the Purpose and Need, the range of alternatives for each action, and selected preferred alternatives. Analyses will be presented to the Council at their June 2014 meeting with the intent of the Council approving the amendment for submission at the September 2014 meeting.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 32 (blueline tilefish)

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. However, the SSC recommended an alternate definition of MSST that, if adopted (through Regulatory Amendment 21), would indicate the stock is in fact not overfished and a rebuilding plan would not be necessary. A scoping document was developed and a scoping webinar was held on November 7, 2013. Comments were requested on the scoping document by 5 p.m. on November 20, 2013. At the December 2013 Council meeting, staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in the scoping document and provided a summary of the comments received. In addition, staff reviewed the projection results but indicated they had not been vetted through the SSC.

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.

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 $75\%F_{MSY}$. Final action on the emergency rule is expected in March or April 2014. At the March 2014 meeting, the Council reviewed and approved a range of alternatives for each action. Amendment 32 will continue to be developed and presented to the Council at their June 2014 meeting. If approved, public hearings would be held in August 2014.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 21 (MSST definition for species with low M)

The SSC recommended that for blueline tilefish, and other species with low natural mortalities, the MSST be set at $75\%SSB_{MSY}$ to avoid a stock’s status shifting between “overfished” and “not overfished” simply because of natural annual variation in recruitment, etc.

At the December 2013 meeting, the Council requested that Regulatory Amendment 21 be developed to consider changing the MSST definition to $75\%SSB_{MSY}$ for snapper grouper species with low natural mortalities. The Council reviewed the amendment at the March 2014 and approved it for submission to the Secretary of Commerce. A public hearing was held during the March 2014 Council meeting week.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 33 (transport of snapper grouper fillets from the Bahamas)

At the December 2013 meeting the Council directed staff to develop and action that consider options related to modifying how fishermen may bring snapper grouper fillets back from The Bahamas into the U.S. EEZ. Currently, fishermen are allowed to bring back up to 60 lbs of snapper grouper fillets. However, there is no way to identify what species those fillets came from.

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. The Council will review the amendment at their June 2014 meeting with the intent to approve it for public hearings in August 2014.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 34 (accountability measures for snapper grouper species)

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. The amendment will continue to be developed for the Council to review at their June 2014 meeting with the intent of approving for public hearings in August 2014.