



Content and Status of Active Amendments

October 1, 2014

Snapper Grouper

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. The proposed rule published on April 25 and written comments were accepted until May 27. The amendment is still pending Secretarial approval.

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 and provided guidance on changes and additional alternatives to include. The Council will review the analyses for this amendment at their December 2014 meeting. Public hearings will be held in January 2015, and the amendment will most likely be approved for submission to the Secretary of Commerce at the Council's June 2015 meeting.

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

This amendment was initiated to 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 their June 2014 meeting, the Council decided to stop development of Regulatory Amendment 17 and focus instead of development of Amendment 36 (see below) based on recommendations from the Snapper Grouper AP and public input received through the Visioning Project.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 36 (Spawning Special Management Zones)

The Council is considering the following actions in Amendment 36:

- 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.) Note: Currently 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.
- During scoping and public hearings, the public will be encouraged to suggest sites that could be considered. The scoping document will not include any proposed sites. It is anticipated that the public hearing draft would include preliminary sites (based on public input from scoping, as well as additional information), and the final amendment would specify proposed Spawning SMZ sites.
- Explore placement of artificial reefs on appropriate bottom type within existing MPAs to target warsaw grouper, speckled hind, and other snapper grouper species.
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 (with cost estimates) necessary to effectively monitor and evaluate the existing MPAs.

Scoping for this amendment took place in August 2014. At their September 2014 meeting the Council reviewed the amendment and provided guidance to staff to continue development. The amendment is scheduled to be approved for public hearings in January 2015 at the Council's December 2014 meeting.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 20 (snowy grouper)

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 and the Council approved the amendment for formal review at their September 2014 meeting.

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 provided further guidance to the Council at their September 2014 meeting. However, the Council decided to postpone further development of the amendment and instead requested a presentation from the NC Division of marine Fisheries on the state's catch card program for highly migratory species. The presentation will be given at the December 2014 Council 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. The Council reviewed the amendment at their June 2014 meeting and requested some changes to the alternatives to address concerns over scamp grouper. The Council took public comment on the amendment at their September 2014 meeting and approved the amendment for Secretarial review.

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.

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 $75\%F_{MSY}$. 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 formal review.

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. The amendment was submitted for formal review on April 1, 2014 and is awaiting final approval.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 22 (gag and wreckfish)

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 modify the bag limit for gag.

The Council reviewed the amendment at their September meeting and approved it for public hearings, which will be held via webinar in fall 2014. The Council will review public hearing comments at their December 2014 meeting and approve the amendment for Secretarial review.

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

This amendment modifies what is currently allowed by recreational fishermen to bring snapper grouper species fillets from the Bahamas into the US EEZ. The Council directed this amendment be developed at the September 2013 meeting. Public hearings will be held online in and at the December 2013 Council meeting. Now to be included for consideration are 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. The Council is scheduled to take final action in December 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. In June 2014, the Council approved the amendment for public hearings in August 2014. The Council is scheduled to take final action in December 2014.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 35 (removal of species from the FMU and golden tilefish endorsements)

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 will review the amendment at their December 2014 meeting and approve it for public hearings in January 2015.

Generics

Joint Commercial Logbook Amendment

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. 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)

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.

At their March 2013 meeting, the Council delayed action on CE-BA 3 until a presentation by NOAA General Counsel staff was provided that assesses how the Council is meeting bycatch requirements under the Magnuson Act for SA fisheries. The NOAA General Counsel assessment has been postponed but will be presented at the December 2014 meeting.