

# Summary Report

## **Snapper Grouper Private Angler Advisory Panel**

### Meeting 1: May 7, 2024

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Snapper Grouper Private Angler Advisory Panel (AP) convened via webinar on May 7, 2024.

AP members approved the agenda for the meeting. There was no public comment offered at the beginning of the meeting.

#### **1. Introductory presentation**

Since this was the first meeting of the AP, a brief orientation was provided for AP members by Council staff. The presentation provided an overview of the mission for the newly formed AP, work that has been accomplished on Snapper Grouper Amendment 46, and the general contents of the amendment.

#### **2. Comment on potential Council actions in Snapper Grouper Amendment 46 (Private Recreational Permitting)**

After reviewing background information on recent Council actions related to Snapper Grouper Amendment 46, the AP reviewed the first two actions in the amendment, providing the following comments and recommendations for the Council's consideration:

##### Purpose of a permit and planning:

- The Council will need to consider the purpose of the permit and how it will be used. It is important to make sure that anglers understand this.
- The Council should keep in mind what the vision for the future is after the permit is established. Will there be another amendment targeted toward data collection and reporting? If so, that will influence decisions made in this amendment.

##### Perception of a permit, building trust, and messaging:

- Anglers young and old have lost trust in the Council and NOAA. People may be willing to get a permit, but they may not provide survey or intercept data unless they trust the process. Need to educate and reassure anglers that managers are not out to take more of their fish away.
- Gaining back trust starts with this permit. This is an opportunity to rebuild trust. Communicating clearly how this permit is going to get recreational data back on track is very important.
- The premise for the permit is that data that have been gathered are often not accurate or dependable but there have been restrictive rules and regulations put in place based on these data. That's a difficult premise and phrase to hear because restrictions are being placed on fishermen with data that are not adequate.
- This permit will be viewed by some as a constraint. The Council is implementing a restriction that will likely make people pay for a permit to do what they have already been doing for years, there may be an additional education requirement that will take

time to satisfy, and there is not going to be reporting that allows anglers to state what they are catching.

- It would be helpful if the Council reinforces that they are not considering reporting in Amendment 46 and that the permit is not asking anglers for any additional data at this point. Need to focus on task of “narrowing the universe” of anglers. Data collection methodologies that already exist will remain in place but can be improved with the implementation of a permit.
- It needs to be clarified that the intent of this permit is not to restrict access and that the permit would be open access, posing no limits on the number of anglers. Creation of this permit is in pursuit of better effort and catch estimates that will lead to prevention of future access restrictions. If we do not get better estimates, the Council will be left with fewer options and may have to consider alternatives that include access restrictions.
- Most people that fish offshore are going to get the permit even if they do not intend to fish for snapper grouper species. So you are likely to capture snapper grouper fishery participants but others may have the permit as well (oversubscription). It may not reduce your sample size all that much over the existing sample.
- If this requirement is established, it will likely never go away. It would be preferable if the permit could be an endorsement on the existing saltwater fishing license rather than requiring anglers to obtain a separate permit. This would help make it as non-invasive and non-restrictive as possible.
- It would be easier if state agencies administered the permit. States already have apps and saltwater licensing infrastructure that anglers are used to, so it would make compliance much easier.

### **Action 1. Establish a private recreational permit requirement in the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region**

#### Rental vessels, boat club vessels, and circumstances where a vessel owner may not be present on a vessel:

- Boat club vessels are not likely going to be a major concern. Boat club vessel operators must be certified and there are often restrictions on how far offshore they can go.
- There are more and more rental boat companies out there and some have boats that are fishing for snapper grouper species in federal and state waters. In some scenarios it would be unclear who is responsible for getting the permit.
- In South Carolina, boat club vessels are likely not going to be an issue and do not foresee them becoming very prevalent in the snapper grouper fishery.
- In northern Florida boat club vessels do not often go offshore to target snapper grouper species.
- In North Carolina the number of rental or boat club vessels active in the snapper grouper fishery is likely very small.

#### Angler-based versus vessel-based permits:

- Satisfying the permit requirements should be the responsibility of the vessel operator, not necessarily the owner. It is also better in the long run if the captain of the vessel is responsible for the education requirement and can better direct anglers onboard.

- This may make it easier for law enforcement. The details of how this could be enforced would be a good topic for further discussion from the Law Enforcement AP.
- A vessel-based permit would be a better option than an angler-based permit. If there is an angler-based permit, it may deter some people from participating. There are a lot of people who participate infrequently and if they must jump through a bunch of regulatory hoops to participate in the fishery, they may be deterred from participating all together.
- A lot of anglers tend to not be as experienced in fishing and fish ID as vessel owners. There's a degree of additional responsibility that comes with being in charge of operating a vessel. A vessel-based permit would improve any subsequent sampling or data collection from a fishing trip compared to an angler-based permit. Also vessel-based makes more sense if there is not a reporting requirement.
- There are a lot of anglers who fish for snapper grouper species only once every few years. They are going to fall in and out of the permit database quite often. If you want better data, make the permit be vessel-based.
- A vessel-based permit would be easier to keep track of and enforce on the water or at the boat ramp. There would be only one permit to check versus multiple permits if angler-based.

**Action 2. Specify the species for which a private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required**

- It is an unnecessary burden on fishermen to have to identify a subset of species that are covered under the permit. Also, if reporting eventually follows, it would be preferable to have the permit cover all species to facilitate reporting down the road.
- The number of species covered is likely to affect estimates of participation. The species covered could influence the universe of anglers and how well they represent actual participants in the fishery.
- If the Council stays with all 55 snapper grouper species, consider implications for the Florida Reef Fish Survey. Would Florida have to expand their program to cover all 55 species to allow the state to opt out of the federal permit requirement?
- Including all snapper grouper species is a big ask. Anglers would be more receptive if there was no cost associated with the permit. Many in the recreational fishing community see NOAA and the Council as picking away at species after species that can no longer be harvested or that have severe restrictions on harvest.
- A concern with including all snapper grouper species is that some species are caught differently than others and may be caught incidentally (e.g. Greater Amberjack are caught at times when trolling for highly migratory species). You may be requiring people to get a permit that do not participate in the snapper grouper fishery but incidentally interact with some of the species. This may affect your ability to measure the “true” number of participants in the fishery.
- Gray snapper is a potential issue in Florida because you can catch them inshore easily as well as in federal waters. This is an example of a species that is difficult to place. What does the Council really want? Is it to count the number of people who are *targeting* snapper grouper species or people who are *catching* the species. Also is the intent to eventually require people to report?

*The AP ran out of time at this meeting to discuss subsequent actions in the amendment (Actions 3 through 5). The AP will discuss these actions at the next meeting.*

### **Other Business**

There were no items under other business. Public comment was provided at the end of the meeting by 3 commenters verbally and there was one written comment. These comments are summarized below:

- It seems like the primary purpose of a permit is to increase precision of the sampling frame. Federal waters are just 3 miles offshore so almost every fisherman in Florida will have to have this permit. There are people on jon boats fishing in federal waters. So this may not work for improving sampling frame. The secondary purpose is to build trust, but adding fees and regulations is not going to be conducive to building trust.
  - Perhaps the Council could consider a gear-based permit. Can attach a tag to a descending device that is already supposed to be on board a vessel. It would be easy for law enforcement to request to see the tag when they check for a descending device. If in the future we needed to get data, it would be easy to collect from the sale point of that device.
- There needs to be a push for an education requirement. Lots of people in Florida do not know what they are catching or about proper fish handling techniques. There needs to be more education.
- An angler-based permit will not be the best permit type because anglers will obtain the permit when buying a fishing license just in case they happen to go snapper grouper fishing. A vessel-based permit is better and lends itself to reporting if it is implemented in the future.
- A vessel-based permit is preferred and an app for catch reporting. Also believe that there should be a publicly available weekly report that shows catch totals by state (*comment submitted via the webinar question box*).

### **Advisory Panel Members present**

Trip Aukeman, FL

Logan Barnes, SC

John Cooper, SC

Clement Cullens, GA

Austin Dohrn, GA

Martha Guyas, FL

Daniel Leschorn, SC

Brendan Runde, NC

Bradley Schenk, SC

Darrin Willingham, FL