



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Fisheries Science Center
75 Virginia Beach Drive
Miami, Florida 33149 U.S.A.
(305) 361-4200 Fax: (305) 361-4499

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January 28, 2014

Mr. Robert Mahood
Executive Director
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

Dear Mr. Mahood,

In a memo dated December 16, 2013, the SAFMC requested, *“that an update assessment of blueline tilefish be prepared as soon as practicable. The Science Center is asked to consider potential timing of such an update, and its impacts on other scheduled projects, and report findings to the Council for consideration at the March SAFMC meeting, or at the next meeting of the SEDAR Steering Committee, whichever occurs first.”* The SEFSC reviewed the 2014 and 2015 SEDAR schedules and provides the following options/recommendations for your consideration:

Option 1: Start the blueline tilefish update assessment in 2015 – replace vermilion snapper update assessment.

The current list of 2015 stock assessments includes:

- (a) Complete SEDAR 41 benchmark assessments for South Atlantic Red Snapper and Gray Triggerfish;
- (b) Update assessments for tilefish, vermilion snapper, and red grouper; or
- (c) Begin benchmark stock assessments for scamp and gray snapper.

Of the three update assessments scheduled for 2015, vermilion snapper was completed most recently in 2012, therefore, from a science perspective, the best option is to replace the 2015 vermilion snapper update assessment with blueline tilefish. Starting the blueline tilefish assessment after June 2015 would allow for inclusion of all 2014 data. No loss of time would be incurred with this option.

Option 2: Start blueline tilefish update assessment in 2014 by replacing one SEDAR 41 assessment.

Since the SEDAR schedule for 2014 is in place and full, a currently scheduled assessment would have to be replaced with blueline tilefish. The available choices include:

- (a) Gag update assessment,
- (b) Red snapper benchmark assessment (SEDAR 41),
- (c) Gray triggerfish benchmark assessment (SEDAR 41), or
- (d) Atlantic menhaden benchmark assessment.

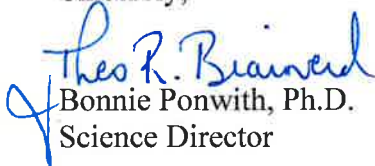
I do not recommend replacing (d) Atlantic menhaden as this assessment is already underway and would result in significant disruption and considerable time lost. SEDAR 41 consists of benchmark assessments for (b) red snapper and (c) gray triggerfish. If blueline tilefish were to replace one of the SEDAR 41 assessments, I recommend red snapper, since gray triggerfish has not had a SEDAR stock assessment. Given the timing of SEDAR 41, inclusion of 2013 data would be possible. No loss of time would be incurred with this option, as work has not yet begun for SEDAR 41.

Option 3: Start blueline tilefish update assessment in 2014 by replacing the gag update assessment.

Replacing the gag update assessment with blueline tilefish is the least favorable option. It would result in loss of time that has already been spent on this assessment. Additionally, timing the update assessment within the calendar year would preclude inclusion of 2013 data, resulting in only one additional year of data beyond the last benchmark stock assessment, which may not add considerable value to the assessment in terms of answering questions about year class strength.

Please let me know your perspective and preference with respect to the above options.

Sincerely,


Bonnie Ponwith, Ph.D.
Science Director

Cc:

F/SEC – Theo Brainerd, Peter Thompson, Sophia Howard, Stacy Hargrove, Tom Jamir
F/SER – Roy Crabtree, Phil Steele, Jack McGovern
SAFMC – Ben Hartig, Michelle Duval, Greg Waugh, John Carmichael, Myra Brouwer