

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE



**SSC Meeting Report
October 20 - 22, 2015
Crowne Plaza
North Charleston, SC**

**VERSION
Final Report (11/17/15)**

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Documents:

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- Attachment 3. Minutes of the September 2015 webinar meeting
- Attachment 4. SEFSC Headboat Data Evaluation Report
- Attachment 5. Data Best Practices Report
- Attachment 6. SEDAR Steering Committee Report*
- Attachment 7. SEFSC Assessment Proposal (PPT)
- Attachment 8. SEDAR Project List
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- Attachment 10. Amendment 36 (Spawning SMZs) Document*
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- Attachment 14. Hogfish projections
- Attachment 15. GA-NC Hogfish landings and intercepts*
- Attachment 16. Regulatory Amendment 16 (BSB Pots) Document
- Attachment 17. Draft System Management Plan for the Deepwater MPAs
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- Attachment 20. Prioritization report
- Attachment 21. Mid-Atlantic Blueline Tilefish Draft Action Plan
- Attachment 22. SAFMC Work Plan, September 2015
- Attachment 23. SAFMC Amendments Overview, September 2015

*** Indicates documents not available for the first Briefing Book. These will be distributed as they become available.**

TABLES:

Table 1. SAFMC Assessment Priorities, 2018-2020

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SAFMC PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS

Written comment:

Written comment on SSC agenda topics is to be distributed to the Committee through the Council office, similar to all other Council briefing materials. Written comment to be considered by the SSC shall be provided to the Council office no later than one week prior to an SSC meeting. For this meeting, the deadline for submission of written comment is 12:00 pm Tuesday, October 13, 2015.

SAFMC
4055 Faber Place Drive
Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

Verbal comment:

Two opportunities for comment on agenda items will be provided during SSC meetings. The first will be at the beginning of the meeting, and the second near the conclusion, when the SSC reviews its recommendations. Those wishing to comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, which may be through a show of hands or a written list if the number of interested parties is extensive, who will then recognize individuals to come forward and provide comment. All comments are part of the record of the meeting.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Documents

Agenda

Attachment 1. Minutes of the April 2015 meeting

Attachment 2. Minutes of the June 2015 webinar meeting

Attachment 3. Minutes of the September 2015 webinar meeting

1.2. Action

- Introductions – Including the new Council liaison Ben Hartig
- Review and Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes

The SSC meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. as scheduled.

The agenda was adopted after one change: item number 21, Election of SSC Chair and Vice Chair was mistakenly scheduled for this meeting. Elections for Chair and Vice Chair are supposed to take place at the May 2016 SSC meeting.

The minutes of the April 2015 meeting as well as June and September 2015 webinar meetings were adopted without further comment or changes.

Member introductions were made, including the new SSC members and the new Council liaison, Mr. Ben Hartig.

The Chair reviewed the agenda and outlined the general format and conduct of the meeting as presented in the overview document.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public will be provided two opportunities to comment on SSC agenda items during this meeting. The first at the start of the meeting, and the final will be provided at the end during the review of recommendations. Those wishing to make comment should indicate their desire to do so to the Committee Chair.

The Chair opened the floor for the first opportunity for public comment. No members of the public indicated an interest in providing comments at this time.

3. 2014-2015 LANDINGS AND ACLS

3.1. Documents

None.

3.2. Presentation

Landings and ACLs: Mike Larkin, SERO, via Webinar

3.3. Overview

The SSC will be provided final 2014 and an update on 2015 landings, catch limits, and application of accountability measures.

3.4. Action

- Review and comment, with attention toward any ABC recommendation updates.
- Consider assessment schedule and research plan implications

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC received a report by Dr. Mike Larkin, NMFS-SERO on (a) 2014 landings; (b) provisional 2015 landings, (c) catch limits, and (d) the application of accountability measures. The Committee provided the following comments:

- *The recreational cobia overage is the result of a very high MRIP Wave 3 catch estimate from the northern area. It is not clear if there is need for a management response.*
- *There is an apparent discrepancy between recreational landings reported here and those used in recent assessments. For example, the landings figures presented to the SSC were not adjusted for revised MRIP methods (APALS) that are now in effect*
- *Information reported here to the SSC does not represent total catch, because discards are not included. The SSC expressed concerns regarding over continued omission of discards, and cautioned that it is difficult to evaluate the performance of current management measures without knowledge of total fishery removals.*
- *Further detail was requested on which stocks are responsible for overages in multi-stock complexes. Dr. Larkin provided this information to the Committee via email following the presentation.*
- *The SSC requested that future reports (1) indicate total landings relative to the overall ABC and OFL for any stocks where sector landings exceed the sector ACL, and (2) be provided as a document, addressing the further details noted here, in addition to the PowerPoint summary.*
- *The SSC also brought up the fact that some of the larger overages and underages might be due to assessments or catch specifications that inadequately represent stock productivity. Continued and extensive differences between specifications and outcomes may provide insight to stocks that need assessing.*

4. UNITS FOR FISHING LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Documents

None.

4.2. Presentation

The use of pounds versus numbers for setting catch level recommendations and implications for sector ACLs: Mike Errigo, SAFMC

4.3. Overview

ACLs for all federally managed species were set in pounds, for both sectors, up until several years ago. Some of the deep-water species, which had very low recreational allocations, were set in umbers rather than in pounds due to the low numbers of intercepts and very high PSE values around those estimates. Currently, Snowy Grouper, Golden Tilefish, and Wreckfish all have their recreational ACLs set in numbers of fish rather than in pounds.

The Council discussed setting the recreational ACLs for the two Hogfish stocks in numbers as well and decided to do so at their June 2015 meeting. However, the current method of setting recreational ACLs in numbers is to get the total ABC from the assessment (or some other methodology, such as ORCS) and then convert pounds to numbers of fish using the average weight from the recreational sector. This methodology first became a problem with Snowy Grouper, when there weren't enough recreational samples to calculate a representative average weight. Instead, the average weight from the commercial hook and line samples was used to convert the recreational ACL from pounds to numbers. More recently, the GA-NC stock of Hogfish has become problematic for two reasons. First, there are very few samples of Hogfish in any given year. Second, the Hogfish intercepts include other species that are significantly smaller, skewing the average weight of Hogfish from this stock.

Issues such as the ones listed above, in conjunction with the fact that the recreational catch is typically under-sampled in comparison to the commercial catch, led to the suggestion of using the total ABC in numbers, applying the allocation to divide into recreational and commercial sectors, and then convert the commercial ACL into pounds. The SSC is asked to evaluate these methodologies, as well as the idea of setting the recreational ACL in numbers versus pounds, so the Council can move forward with setting the recreational ACLs for recreational stocks.

The Council wants to track the recreational ACLs in numbers of fish to reduce the likelihood of exceeding recreational ACLs. Currently the headboats provide weekly electronic reports, and the Council is proposing the same requirement for charter vessels. This would provide weekly updates of the for-hire sector and provide more insight into the recreational rate of harvest by the private sector. This would help reduce the risk of exceeding the recreational sector ACLs.

4.1. Action

- Review the utility and methodologies for setting fishing level recommendations in numbers vs. pounds and provide a recommendation to the Council on specifying recreational ACLs in numbers of fish.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC reviewed the background documents and presentations provided for this agenda item and offered the following comments and suggestions: Age-based assessments track cohorts by numbers and apply F to numbers at age, therefore using yield in numbers for management specifications is convenient and feasible.

- The Committee cautioned that potential changes in sizes and weights in the catch (e.g., due to changes in selectivity and/or catchability due to targeting, gear changes) need to be properly monitored so assessment-based estimates are not disconnected from what is happening in the fishery, and future assessments become more uncertain. Specifying Fishing Level Recommendations in numbers is not an appropriate response to inadequate size monitoring of the fishery, and does not remove the need for such sampling. Accurate and representative dockside sampling data (including the number and total weight of the animals landed and the associated species and age compositions) are critical for high-quality stock assessments and reliable catch forecasts.*
- Also, there was considerable discussion as to the different impact using numbers or weights may have in areas with significant differences in mean size of the fish in the population (e.g., north vs. south).*
- Specifying recreational Fishing Levels (ABC, ACL) in numbers could be useful in some situations, but may not be appropriate in all situations.*

5. FINAL SEFSC HEADBOAT DATA EVALUATION**5.1. Documents**

Attachment 4. SEFSC Headboat Data Evaluation Report

5.2. Presentation

Final Evaluation Overview: TBD, SEFSC

5.3. Overview

The Committee will receive an overview on the final SEFSC evaluation of the concerns raised regarding the reliability of historical headboat data records.

5.4. Action

- None Required.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC appreciated the overview presentation provided by Dr. Erik Williams, NMFS/SEFSC. Given the more detailed information on the analyses conducted the SSC considers the analysis and approach “best available science” and recommends that the SEFSC Headboat Data continue to be used in stock assessments.

6. SEDAR ACTIVITIES

6.1. Documents

Attachment 5. Data Best Practices Report
 Attachment 6. SEDAR Steering Committee Report*
 Attachment 7. SEFSC Assessment Proposal (PPT)
 Attachment 8. SEDAR Project List

6.2. Overview

The SEDAR Steering Committee met September 28-29 in Charleston SC. The Committee took the following actions:

- Approved Marcel Reichert as Chair for SEDAR 47 (Goliath Grouper), and appointing both Gulf appointees as reviewers.
- Approved creating a standing Data Best Practices Panel that will meet regularly to review data issues and keep best practices recommendations up to date.
- Approved a stock ID and meristics workshop in 2016.
- Directed that Council Cooperators review the NOAA Fisheries Stock Assessment Prioritization plan, and to consider SEDAR implications at the next meeting.
- Scheduled a meeting via webinar for October 30 to resolve 2018 assessment projects.
 - Concern arose with scheduling updates to address MRIP CHTS-Effort survey changes.
 - Agency proposed updating existing assessments with revised catch data through the terminal year of the prior assessment.
 - Committee could not resolve at this time. It was not clear how much time and effort this would involve nor how it would affect Council priorities.

Table 1. SAFMC Assessment Priorities, 2018-2020

	Stock	Type	Lead	SSC Review
2016	Red Snapper/Gray Triggerfish*	Benchmark	SEFSC	Oct 2016
	(golden) Tilefish*	Update	SEFSC	Apr. 2016
	Blueline Tilefish*	Update	SEFSC	Apr. 2017
	Red Grouper*	Update	SEFSC	Apr. 2017
2017	Gulf & SA Scamp, Gray Snapper	Benchmark	SEFSC	April 2019
	Vermilion Snapper	Update	SEFSC	Apr. 2018
	Greater Amberjack	Update		Apr. 2018
	Yellowtail Snapper	S/B	FWC	Oct 2018
2018	Red Snapper	Update	SEFSC	Apr. 2019
	Black Sea Bass	Standard	SEFSC	Apr. 2019

2019	Red Porgy	Standard	SEFSC	Apr. 2019
	Snowy Grouper	Standard	SEFSC	Apr. 2019
	Blueline Tilefish	Update	SEFSC	
	Spanish Mackerel	Update	SEFSC	
	Cobia	Update	SEFSC	
	Gag	Standard	SEFSC	
	Yellowtail Snapper	Update	FL FWCC	
2020	White Grunt (potentially multiple stocks)	Benchmark	SEFSC	
	King Mackerel	Update	SEFSC	
	Tilefish	Update	SEFSC	
	Hogfish	Update	FL FWCC	

*Denotes stocks that will not include revised MRIP estimates.

6.3. Action

- Comment on the assessment priorities for 2018-2020.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC reviewed and approved the latest SEDAR project schedule.

- ***SEDAR 41 Review:***
 - *As this is an important activity, the SSC discussed the importance of having extra time to review the assessment report and rescheduling the SSC meeting to allow for sufficient review.*
 - *The Committee agreed to shift the April 2016 SSC meeting back a week (to early May) to accommodate an appropriate review time for the SEDAR 41 report.*
 - *Re-scheduling of the SEDAR 41 Assessment Workshop required a change in some of the members previously selected to participate in the workshop. The final list of SSC representatives attending the SEDAR 41 AW are: Marcel Reichert, Luiz Barbieri, Jeff Buckel, and Alexi Sharov.*
- ***Blueline Tilefish assessment type and schedule:***
 - *Blueline Tilefish is scheduled for updates in 2016 and 2019. However, given the issues identified in the benchmark assessment in 2013, the SSC discussed that it might be better to plan on a new benchmark in 2019.*
 - *Given ongoing genetic and fishery independent sampling studies focused on Blueline Tilefish stock structure north and south of Cape Hatteras the SSC recommended that a webinar meeting be scheduled for Jan-Feb to discuss the results of these studies as they might relate to future Blueline Tilefish assessments.*

7. SAFMC CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT

7.1. Documents

Attachment 9. Citizen science flyer

7.2. Overview

The Committee will receive an overview of the Citizen Science Project and progress that has been made. The Council made appointments for this workshop in September. SSC representatives identified include Steve Cadrin and Luiz Barbieri. Marcel Reichert, Jeff Buckel and Carolyn Belcher were identified as state representatives.

7.3. Action

- No specific actions required.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC received an overview and update on the Citizen Science Project. Recommend contacting Ms. Mary Clark, MAFMC staff who is the staff lead for citizen science/cooperative research projects.

- *The Northeast region has considerable experience with and resources on cooperative research. Fred Serchuk distributed the latest NMFS guidance document on cooperative research to the SSC for future reference.*
- *The NMFS Northeast region has lots of experience with cooperative research. Fred Serchuk distributed to the SSC an August 2015 NOAA Tech Memo entitled “Cooperative Research and Cooperative Management: A Review with Recommendations” (which had been submitted to NOAA Fisheries Leadership by the Cooperative Research and Cooperative Management Working Group).*
- *New Zealand has extensive experience with citizen science/cooperative research projects. Tracy Yandle has contacts there who may be willing to provide input and guidance.*

8. SNAPPER GROUPER AMENDMENT 36

8.1. Documents

Attachment 10. Amendment 36 (Spawning SMZs) Document*

8.2. Overview

The Council is considering the following actions in Amendment 36:

- Specify a process for identifying spawning sites for snapper grouper species, including Speckled Hind and Warsaw Grouper, based on the characteristics of sites important for spawning (bottom topography, current systems, etc.).

- Purpose: Document spawning events in protected areas and characterize these protected areas in terms of bottom topography, habitat, fish occurrence, fish spawning, oceanography, etc.)
- How measure success/working? By documenting spawning events in the protected areas using a combination of citizen science and fishery independent sampling (e.g., MARMAP, SEAMAP, SEFIS)
- Currently Spawning SMZs would only consider prohibiting fishing for and/or possession of snapper grouper species (species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit). Transit would be allowed; anchoring would be prohibited (there may be an exception for Areas 51/53).
- The amendment specifies proposed Spawning SMZ sites and the Council has chosen preferreds.
- Action 7 proposes to move the Existing Charleston Deep Artificial Reef MPA 1.4 miles to the Northwest to match the boundary of the permitted site.
- Action 9 proposes a sunset provision for all new SMZs unless appropriate monitoring/research efforts document spawning prior to the end the sunset timing.

The Council has chosen preferreds for this amendment at their September 2015 meeting. This is the SSC's final opportunity to review Amendment 36 before the Council votes on final approval at their March 2016 meeting. The SSC is given the opportunity to review the document and provide comments.

8.3. Presentation

Amendment 36 Document: Gregg Waugh, SAMFC

8.4. Action

- Review and provide comments.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC received an overview and update on Snapper-Grouper Amendment 36:

- *Regarding the proposed 5-year timeline for sunset of this amendment, the SSC noted that a longer timeframe for sunset may be a better option because the main goal of Amendment 36 is to determine spawning in longer-lived, late-maturing species. Some grouper species may not reach spawning age within 5 years.*
- *Ocean circulation is expected to play an important part in achieving the goals of this amendment, which is to gain benefits from spawning area closures. . Therefore, the SSC recommends that ocean circulation be carefully considered during performance evaluations of these areas. The Committee recommends that a metric defining the strength of retentive circulation at sites (spawning product retention) be developed. Sites will require evaluation as there is likely considerable variability in spawning locations due to environmental conditions. Climate change may also add further variability and challenges to performance evaluations. .*
- *The SSC expressed concerns regarding the fact that a few of the proposed areas are very small.*

- *Need to make sure that the proposed areas are large enough to encompass the main habitat associated with spawning. If the actual spawning habitat is missed or is incomplete, most (if not all) of the benefits of closing the areas will be lost.*
- *Fishing will tend to take place along boundaries of closed areas. Areas that are too small are not likely to provide the spawning benefits envisioned.*
- *Small sites increase the likelihood that small errors in where a person fishes could disproportionally impact spawning activity in that area (i.e., not much of a buffer for occasional fishing impact due to fishers improperly identifying where they are). However, species-specific spawning behavior will influence the appropriate size of a particular SMZ (some are concentrated and some are very spread out when spawning) and this behavior is highly variable by species.*
- *Regarding the System Management Plan the SSC offered the following comments and suggestions:*
 - *Incorporate hydrophones to listen for courtship sounds of fish in spawning condition.*
 - *Consider the use of drones (aerial and water-based and equipped with hydrophones and other sensors) for enforcement as well as research.*
 - *Use acoustic telemetry and tags to track fish movements.*
 - *Monitor the size/age composition of spawners inside and outside of SMZs.*
 - *Many of the metrics for evaluating SMZ performance require collecting biological samples. However, such sampling may have an impact of the localized population in small SMZs. This is especially important in deeper areas with higher release mortality. Video data from ROVs may be useful to collect size information without having to bring fish to the surface.*
 - *Need to carefully define success and how it is determined. Some of the spawning performance metrics have thresholds (e.g., size or age at maturity) that may shift based on different factors.*
 - *The SSC strongly recommends collecting baseline data before closures occur.*
 - *Given the longevity of some of the target species, detecting changes in any proposed metrics of success may prove difficult over the short-term. Simulations studies should be considered to develop expected responses for metrics such as size or age frequency against which observed impacts can be evaluated.*
 - *Mapping available habitat in and around these sites is critical. The SSC suggests developing a Citizen Science project where fishermen pull multi-beam sonar and opportunistically map the bottom.*
 - *Finally, the SSC advises that much of this work will have to be adaptive to incorporate changes from experience and research. The Committee recommends that the Council sponsor a Research Planning Workshop to solicit input from experts and working groups in putting together an initial strategy for how to sample and monitor these sites.*

9. SNAPPER GROUPER AMENDMENT 37

9.1. Documents

- Attachment 11. Amendment 37 (Hogfish) Document
- Attachment 12. Hogfish assessment
- Attachment 13. Hogfish Projection Request from SAFMC
- Attachment 14. Hogfish projections
- Attachment 15. GA-NC Hogfish landings and intercepts*

9.2. Overview

The Council is considering the following actions in Amendment 37:

- Designate 2 stocks for Hogfish in the South Atlantic.
 - Florida Keys/East Florida Stock (FLK/EFL)
 - Georgia to North Carolina Stock (GA-NC)
- Set ABCs and ACLs for both stocks of Hogfish.
- Implement a rebuilding plan for the FLK/EFL stock.
- Implementing/modifying commercial trip limit and size limit for both stocks.
- Implementing/modifying recreational bag limit and size limit for both stocks.
- Implementing a recreational season for both stocks.
- Adopting Accountability Measures for both stocks.

The Council would particularly like the SSC to review and provide guidance on the recommended ABC values for each of the Hogfish stocks in Amendment 37 for the reasons detailed below.

The SSC reviewed assessments for the GA/NC and SE/FL Keys stocks of hogfish in October 2014, and concluded that the Southeastern Florida/Florida Keys stock was overfished. The Council requested rebuilding projections for the East Florida/Florida Keys stock of hogfish.

The original Hogfish projections for the FLK/EFL stock had management beginning in 2016, with commercial data through 2014 and recreational data through 2013. Due to timing of the amendment, management will not take effect until 2017. Also, 2014 recreational landings were significantly higher than what was assumed in the original projection scenarios. Therefore, an updated series of projections was run with updated interim landings. The SSC is asked to review these updated projections.

At the September meeting, the Council also had a lengthy discussion involving the GA-NC stock and the ABC for that stock. It was pointed out that the Hogfish in this stock are much larger, have a larger size at transition, and are found much further from shore than Hogfish in the FLK/EFL stock. This information may suggest that this stock is healthier than the FLK/EFL stock and perhaps less vulnerable to overfishing. Also, SAFMC staff has found some MRIP records that reported Hogfish, which may not be Hogfish. The non-hog snapper fish have much lower average weights than what is typically reported for Hogfish in the GA-NC stock and are skewing the calculations of ABC from ORCS.

The Council has requested that the SSC reevaluate the ORCS calculation of ABC for the GA-NC stock.

9.3. Presentation

Amendment 37 Document: Myra Brouwer, SAMFC

9.4. Action

- Review the hogfish projections and consider:
 - Do the new projections represent BSIA?
 - What are the projection uncertainties, and how might they affect rebuilding efforts and strategies?
 - Does the SSC have any other guidance for the Council on rebuilding strategies?
- Review the GA-NC stock ABC and consider:
 - Is a Moderately-High risk of overexploitation appropriate for this stock?
 - Is ORCS the appropriate methodology for determining ABC for this stock? If not, how should the ABC be determined?
 - If anything changes for this stock, recommend a new ABC level.
- Comment on the appropriate methodology for setting the recreational ACL in numbers.
 - Should the ABC be set in numbers and the commercial ACL be converted to pounds or should the ABC be set in pounds and the recreational ACL be converted to numbers?
 - Provide any guidance on how (or whether) to address sector allocations as a result of setting the ABC in numbers (if that methodology is chosen).
- Review the rest of the document and provide comments.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC reviewed the revised and updated hogfish projections provided by FWC-FWRI. The Committee consensus was that these projections represent the best scientific information available and can, therefore, be used for management advice.

Specific comments and discussion points brought up during the SSC meeting included:

- *The SSC recommends that the very low F rebuilding scenarios (i.e., situations where M is higher than F) be interpreted with caution. In those situations, the driver of population change will be M, not F, and this should be highlighted in these projections. Also, because many of the F values are very low, the actual differences among these low-F projected rebuilding scenarios may not be realized or be detectable statistically. In these cases, there might not be a good way for the Council to objectively choose the best scenario.*
- *It would also be very helpful if the probability distributions of projected parameters were provided to the SSC for technical review of projections.*

- *Regarding the ORCS ABC recommendation for the GA-NC hogfish stock, the SSC consensus is that:*
 - *This methodology is applicable and appropriate for this stock given that: (1) recreational landings (i.e., the main source of uncertainty) represent a very small proportion of total landings, and (2) the commercial landings are sampled consistently.*
 - *The designation of a Moderately-High risk of overexploitation is still appropriate for this stock. This decision was based mainly on hogfish life history characteristics and vulnerability.*
- *Regarding catch level recommendations in numbers vs. weight, the SSC recommended that the ABC be set in numbers and converted to weight for the commercial sector. This similar to what was done for the Florida hogfish stock.*
- *Finally, the SSC clarified that the OY basis described in the assessment report is not valid. The Council will specify OY in Amendment 37 to the Snapper-Grouper FMP.*

10. SNAPPER GROUPE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 16

10.1. Documents

Attachment 16. Regulatory Amendment 16 (BSB Pots) Document

10.2. Overview

Regulatory Amendment 16 includes two actions 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. The first action has alternatives that modify the closure based on variations of time, area, and depth. The second action modifies Black Sea Bass pot gear strength and marking requirements that could make the gear less likely to get entangled with northern right whales, as well as be able to identify gear as South Atlantic Black Sea Bass pot gear if it is recovered from a whale. This is the SSC's final opportunity to review Regulatory Amendment 16 before the Council votes on final approval at their December 2015 meeting.

10.3. Action

- Review and provide comments.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC appreciated the update and overview of the latest developments and results regarding Snapper-Grouper Amendment 16. The Committee did not have any specific recommendations or suggestions regarding this item.

11. SYSTEM MANAGEMENT PLAN

11.1. Documents

Attachment 17. Draft System Management Plan for the Deepwater MPAs

11.2. Overview

The Council is developing a System Management Plan (SMP) to specify the outreach, law enforcement, and monitoring/research projects (with cost estimates) necessary to effectively monitor and evaluate the deepwater MPAs. The Council is expected to approve the SMP for the deepwater MPAs at their December 2015 meeting.

11.3. Action

- Review and provide comments.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC received an overview and update on the Council's proposed System Management Plan (SMP) for the deepwater MPA's.

- *Recommend that the term "spawning activity" be used instead of "spawning aggregations".*
- *The Committee expressed concern about the ability of the performance metrics proposed in the SMP to differentiate between effects due to the MPAs versus those due to random environmental variability.*
- *The SSC suggested prioritizing plan management goals due to the large amount of funding required to successfully accomplish the entire SMP.*
- *The Committee recommends evaluating how the MPAs have affected fishing effort (e.g., has effort been displaced to/concentrated near MPA boundaries?).*
- *The "spillover effect" might generate a significant, long-term socio-economic benefit for the industry, despite the short-term negative impact of displacing fishers from the MPAs.*

12. RECREATIONAL CATCH ESTIMATES FOR RARE SPECIES

12.1. Documents

None.

12.2. Presentation

Recreational Catch Estimates Overview: John Foster, NOAA Fisheries

12.3. Overview

When the 2006 MSA Reauthorization and the requirement for all federally managed fisheries to have ABCs and ACLs was implemented, it became clear that not all species' landings were tracked with the same level of precision. Rare event species (those that are

rarely encountered and/or rarely intercepted) are a particular issue when estimating recreational landings. Most years, the landings are estimated to be zero or at a very low, base level. However, occasionally an intercept will occur in an area that gets expanded to a very large catch estimate for that species and these estimates have large amounts of uncertainty associated with them (high PSEs).

The Council expressed concern over managing these rare species using estimates from the standard MRIP survey, so MRIP has devised several ways of addressing the issue of rare event species. The Committee will receive an overview of these proposed methods and is asked to review them and comment on their utility in providing more accurate and reliable estimates for these rarely encountered species.

12.4. Action

- Review the methodologies presented and comment on their utility in providing more accurate and reliable estimates of rarely encountered species.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC received an overview presentation on the Recreational Catch Estimates of Rare Species by Dr. John Foster, NOAA Fisheries, MRIP program:

- *The standard MRIP stratification method results in the lowest precision amongst the examples provided. Collapsing across strata increased precision by effectively increasing samples and decreasing variability within the collapsed strata.*
- *The SSC considered the alternative methods presented by Dr. Foster reasonable and appropriate.*
- *One concern regards difficulty separating true outliers from “noise” from poorly sampled events that may not be representative of the fishery. The Committee recommended exploring a more structured rule or process for outlier identification.*
- *SSC questions and discussion points also brought the fact that these methods are meant to be used for a particular species for all years, not on a year by year basis, based on instability in estimates in general for the time series.*
- *Keep in mind that the estimation methods are good at increasing precision, but are not proposed as replacements for better sampling methods and improved surveys. Although application of these estimation methods seems to increase precision, fundamentally they use the same overall number of samples; thus accuracy is still dependent on improvements in sample sizes and application of better sampling methodologies.*
- *Another important point of discussion had to do with the suggestion for the development of ‘MRIP Precision Standards’—minimum standards to provide a more structured way to evaluate when the data are sufficient to support robust estimates. Main discussion points included:*

- *Developing 'standards' would help prevent the use of estimates at small domains (usually very imprecise estimates) that require extrapolating to much larger areas or time periods.*
- *This would also help clarify when estimates are more precise at a given resolution and, therefore, more appropriate for use.*
- *It might be difficult to develop a single standard across stocks.*
- *Deciding not to provide catch estimates unless a particular precision standard is met will not negate the requirements for management specifications and monitoring. Imputing estimates from other values may be required to fulfill management needs. I Questions that arise:*
 - *How often/how much imputation is needed?*
 - *Having to impute values for most waves in a year or for several years in a row may not be a viable way of proceeding for management.*
- *An alternative would be to consider these 'standards' as targets rather than cut-off points. If estimates cannot be produced even at the annual level, this can be a threshold for using the estimation methods for rarely encountered species as discussed.*
- *From assessment purposes, standards could be based on the minimum precision necessary to properly detect changes in SSB. The SSC suggests using simulations to investigate how possible MRIP reporting standards may impact assessments and management.*

13. ABC CONTROL RULE REVISION GROUP REPORT

13.1. Documents

Attachment 18. ABC Control Rule

13.2. Presentation

Overview and Update: Luiz Barbieri/Steve Cadrin, SAFMC SSC

13.3. Overview

At their April 2015 meeting, the SSC discussed the results of the ABC Control Rule Workshop held in October 2014. There were difficulties producing results from that workshop, so the SSC decided to convene a sub-committee to develop a draft proposal to bring to the entire SSC for review.

Here is the summary from the April 2015 meeting:

The SSC discussed results of the ABC control rule workshop held in October 2014. The main comments, issues, and recommendations discussed by the Committee included:

- There is renewed interest by the SSC in adding flexibility to the control rule as to accommodate individual species situations as well as socio-economic information that may not have been properly taken into account during the assessment and catch level recommendation process.
- However, given the extent of the topics to be discussed and the difficulties associated with having a productive discussion with such a large group the SSC suggested that a smaller sub-committee or working group be established to develop a draft proposal for SSC review and discussion at its October 2015 meeting.

13.4. Action

- Consider the ABC Control Rule revisions presented by the sub-committee.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

Although this agenda item could not be addressed as previously envisioned (i.e., the sub-committee was unable to meet during the Oct 2015 SSC meeting to develop a draft proposal for full SSC review and discussion), the SSC discussed potential steps forward re. review and revisions to the SAFMC ABC Control Rule. The main points discussed at the meeting were:

- *Build in more flexibility while preventing application of the Control Rule from becoming ad-hoc. The current Control Rule is very prescriptive about what methodologies can be used or what fits into the current framework. For example, use of the MRAG PSA scores has been problematic for some stocks and the SSC felt that the current structure provided little or no flexibility for these issues to be properly addressed.*
- *There is confusion regarding terminology used for structuring the Control Rule (e.g., the difference between "Tiers" and "Dimensions"). It has been unclear and sometimes confusing for Council members and stakeholders what these terms mean, and there have been inconsistencies in how these terms are used in the SSC's Control Rule document versus the Council's Comprehensive ACL Amendment.*
- *While discussing the need to develop a new set of TOR's for review and revision of the ABC Control Rule, the SSC advised setting aside the TOR dealing with performance of the ABC Control Rule until enough assessments have been completed and more data are available to inform this discussion.*
- *Additional items the SSC identified as important to address during the ABC Control Rule review and discussion were:*
 - *Further attention is necessary for those Tiers below Tier 1 to adequately address the many unassessed, or data-poor assessed, stocks.*
 - *Look for instances of 'double counting' attributes that may have been accounted for in other parts of the Control Rule.*

- *Expand the scope of how uncertainty is handled with the Control Rule structure.*
- *The SSC requests that the ABC Control Rule sub-committee meet, in-person if at all possible, well before the next SSC meeting and that Council staff coordinate that scheduling. The subcommittee should develop a strawman for the full committee to review and discuss at the next meeting. The following SSC members have been selected to serve on the sub-committee:*
 - *Steve Cadrin (sub-committee Chair)*
 - *John Boreman*
 - *Amy Schueller*
 - *Tracy Yandle*
 - *Eric Johnson*
 - *Carolyn Belcher*
 - *Fred Serchuk*

14. REVISED RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1. Documents

Attachment 19. SAFMC Research Recommendations Document

14.2. Presentation

SAFMC Revised Research Recommendations: John Carmichael, SAFMC

14.3. Overview

At the Council's June 2015 meeting, the SEFSC pointed out that the current format of the Research Recommendations document is not conducive to implementing those research goals, nor does it give priorities for short-term versus long-term projects. Therefore, the Council made the following motion to direct staff to revise the Research Plan:

Move to direct staff to:

- Modify the research plan to include a list of specific short term and long term needs that will improve guidance for researchers considering projects as well as those developing requests for proposals, and offer a revised version for consideration at the September meeting. The revised version should separate research and monitoring topics and consider upcoming assessment projects and past assessment research recommendations.

The Plan was revised as directed and approved by the Council in September. The SSC will be asked to consider recommendations for the 2016 plan in April 2016.

14.4. Action

- Recommendations should be as specific as possible
- Leave space for current status in order to encourage feedback and accountability

- Annual RFPs typically similar from year-to-year but encouraging to see some of these research goals and objectives show up in the current year's RFPs

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC received an overview from John Carmichael on the SAFMC Research Recommendations Document. The most relevant SSC comments, concerns, and discussion points on this item included:

- *Although the list of research recommendations is very thorough it also comes across as a bit overwhelming. The SSC recommends that the highest priorities be listed first in the document so they are easy to identify and track.*
- *List specific goals and objectives associated with each requested study or data collection program.*
- *Clearly distinguish and denote generic, across the board programs.*
- *Be more specific on the desired timing for implementation of studies or programs, as well as the specific priority fisheries.*
- *Finally, feedback on progress on achieving research priorities identified in the SAFMC Research Recommendations Document would help the SSC plan for how best to address the research needs as well as plan for implementation of future research programs.*

15. NMFS NATIONAL STOCK PRIORITIZATION TOOL

15.1. Documents

Attachment 20. Prioritization report

15.2. Presentation

National Stock Prioritization Tool Overview: Rick Methot, NMFS (via Webinar)

15.3. Overview

15.4. Action

- Review and comment on application and use for establishing South Atlantic Priorities.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC received an overview and update presentation on the NMFS Stock Prioritization Tool by Dr. Rick Methot, NOAA Fisheries, Office of Science and

Technology. The most relevant comments, concerns, and discussion points brought up by the SSC included:

- The SSC appreciated the update from NOAA Fisheries on this important topic. In general, the Committee felt that the Prioritization Tool is well-structured and will be very helpful to the Council. In particular, the Committee felt that the proposed approach creates a more rigorous, less ad-hoc process for prioritizing stock assessments. For example, the objective integration of technical, science-based factors with political, managerial components of how different fisheries are valued should help in allocating resources to improve assessments and generate better-informed management. However, because the Prioritization Tool is not yet completely developed, it is difficult for the SSC to evaluate how some of the components will perform. The Committee felt that it could provide more substantive comments on the proposed approach once the approach had been applied to a number of example stocks.*
- Relevant to the earlier SSC discussion of SAFMC Research Recommendations, the Committee noted that the stock prioritization tool and the Council's research and data needs are intrinsically linked in that they inform each other.*
- The SSC requested that it be kept informed of future developments regarding the National Stock Prioritization Tool.*

16. BLUELINE TILEFISH ASSESSMENT AND FISHING LEVELS

16.1. Documents

Attachment 21. Mid-Atlantic Blueline Tilefish Draft Action Plan

16.2. Overview

At the June 2015 webinar meeting, the Committee reviewed updated projections for Blueline Tilefish and determined them not to be best scientific information available. Several additional runs were requested exploring a range of alternative recruitment scenarios. The Committee reviewed the results of these runs at their September 2015 webinar meeting. The Committee was not provided the results of all their requested runs due to those runs being deemed scientifically unreasonable by the SEFSC. Therefore, based on the information available, the SSC recommended an ABC value at the Yield at 75% F_{MSY} . A caveat was added that this ABC was only to remain in effect for two years, until the Blueline Tilefish assessment could be updated.

Currently, there are efforts underway to collect more information on Blueline Tilefish and identify stock structure throughout the Atlantic. The SEFSC currently has additional survey efforts to collect information on Blueline Tilefish. Also, MARMAP and the MAFMC are working on genetic studies to identify the stock structure of Blueline Tilefish in Atlantic waters. Due to this new information being collected for Blueline Tilefish, the Council made a motion to request a standard assessment, rather than an update, be conducted in 2016. The Council passed the following motion:

Requesting a standard approach for Blueline Tilefish in 2016, to incorporate results of additional SEFSC survey efforts now underway and stock ID results

expected to be available later this year. The Committee directed that the SSC review the justification for a standard assessment in October, with participation by SEFSC staff.

The SSC is asked to review this request for a standard assessment in light of this new information being collected for Blueline Tilefish.

The SSC should also be aware of the intentions of the MAFMC. Mr. Tony DiLernia of the MAFMC was present at the September 2015 SAFMC Council meeting and expressed that the MAFMC was moving forward with adding Blueline to the Golden Tilefish FMP and they also had funding to determine stock structure. Here is the excerpt from the Snapper Grouper Committee report:

Mr. Tony DiLernia, representative of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) on the Snapper Grouper Committee, indicated the MAFMC is in the process of adding Blueline Tilefish to their existing Golden Tilefish Fishery Management Plan and has committee funding to conduct genetic studies to determine stock structure. Mr. DiLernia indicated that the MAFMC intends to manage Blueline Tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic region primarily as a recreational fishery. Temporary management measures are in place in the Mid-Atlantic region until the current emergency rule expires.

16.3.Action

- Comment on the appropriate type of assessment to be conducted for Blueline Tilefish.

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC discussed the appropriate type of assessment to be conducted for Blueline Tilefish. The Committee also discussed a letter from NOAA Fisheries (signed by Sam Rauch) sent to the Council regarding the most recent Blueline Tilefish catch level recommendations.

- *The SSC discussed the NMFS letter of October 15, 2005, to the Chairs of the SAFMC and MAFMC regarding Blueline Tilefish. Comments noted the uncertainty and interim nature of the ABC recommendation from the prior meeting, and the prior discussions were acknowledged. It was noted that the MAFMC is considering applying data limited methods to Blueline Tilefish within its area of jurisdiction during a meeting in March 2016. SAFMC SSC representation is desired at that meeting, along with MAFMC SSC representation at future SAFMC SSC meetings where Blueline will be discussed.*
- *The SSC discussed concerns regarding its ABC recommendations for 2016 and 2017 given that the terminal year in the stock assessment model is 2011. In other words, a large gap exists between the time period covered in the assessment and the implementation period of the catch level recommendations. Although the projections were deemed not to represent the BSIA and the current ABC recommendation is equilibrium yield at 75% F_{MSY} , the SSC felt that it had adequately emphasized the uncertainty in the ABC recommendations when these*

were communicated to the Council. Comments from Mr. Ben Hartig (Council SSC Liaison) and Dr. Michelle Duval (Council Chair) helped clarify that the Council felt that it had been fully informed by the SSC regarding the high uncertainty associated with the Committee's ABC recommendations for Blueline Tilefish.

- The SSC stressed that the ABC recommendations not be in place for more than two years (i.e., beyond 2017). The Committee expects that the upcoming Blueline Tilefish assessment will better account for stock productivity, spatial structure, and recruitment, and thereby provide more robust guidance on how to manage this stock.
- The SSC felt that the upcoming Blueline assessment should be at least a Standard, and perhaps a Benchmark would be most appropriate. With regard to the latter view, it was noted that (1) the results of ongoing stock structure studies may necessitate that a benchmark assessment be conducted; and (2) setting out to start with a Standard and then realizing that a Benchmark is required may cause further delays and postpone implementation of management measures that may be needed. It is far less problematic and time consuming to start with a Benchmark and change later to a Standard if subsequently that is deemed the most appropriate assessment approach.
- The Committee recommended that a dedicated SSC meeting be scheduled for Spring 2016, after the genetic data/studies are available. This will allow the SSC to consider whether (and, if so, how) these findings should be used in the Blueline Tilefish assessment.
- However, the SSC recognized that genetic studies are not likely to provide useful results in a fishery management context. Genetic stock id studies are essentially a one way test; if genetic differences are detected, these differences imply that stocks are distinct with little or no gene flow. If genetic differences are not detected, important differences in vital biological rates can still exist among populations because a minor amount of mixing will cause genetic results to indicate homogeneity. There is ample observational evidence of larval transport of Blueline Tilefish to the north around Cape Hatteras. During summer, juvenile fishes originating from south of Cape Hatteras are common on suitable substrates in Mid-Atlantic and New England waters. Given these patterns, it is highly likely that Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Blueline Tilefish exhibit genetic homogeneity.
- Because the data available for a new Blueline Tilefish assessment may be limited, the SSC recommended that data sparse methods be investigated in case the assessment is rejected or is not useful for catch advice.
- After much discussion, the SSC recommended a Blueline Tilefish benchmark assessment that would be run in parallel with the scamp and gray snapper assessments, delaying the vermilion snapper assessment if necessary. The Committee also emphasized that the new Blueline Tilefish assessment must be conducted in collaboration with the MAFMC SSC. To this end, the Committee agreed that SAFMC SSC representatives should attend the March 2016 MAFMC SSC meeting to discuss Blueline Tilefish issues. Drs. Alexi Sharov and Amy Schueller volunteered to attend the Mid-Atlantic SSC meeting and represent the SAFMC SSC.
- The SSC also discussed potential management recommendations for Blueline Tilefish that could be considered in the future. If there is residency of some sort at the regional scale (whether or not separate Blueline Tilefish stocks exist), then localized exploitation rates could be considered and regional ABCs developed.

Otherwise, a coast-wide ABC could be divided with a portion for the South Atlantic based on the magnitude of landings in the region over a specified time period. .

17. COUNCIL WORKPLAN UPDATE

17.1. Documents

Attachment 22. SAFMC Work Plan, September 2015

Attachment 23. SAFMC Amendments Overview, September 2015

17.2. Overview

The Committee is provided these documents at each meeting to stay informed of Council activities. Regular detailed reviews of each amendment are no longer requested of the SSC as amendments are developed; instead the Committee is asked to comment on specific technical items that may arise. However, members are welcome to review any ongoing amendments and to provide comments and suggestions directly to staff. Current versions of each amendment are included in the Council Briefing Books distributed to SSC members. Questions or comments about specific items should be addressed to the staff assigned to each FMP, as summarized below.

- Coastal Migratory Pelagic - Kari MacLauchlin
- Corals – Chip Collier
- Fishery Ecosystem Plan - Roger Pugliese
- Snapper Grouper - Myra Brouwer
- Snapper Grouper Amendment 36 (Spawning SMZs) - Gregg Waugh
- Spiny Lobster - Kari MacLauchlin
- Golden Crab - Brian Cheuvront
- Dolphin-Wahoo - Brian Cheuvront

17.3. Action

- No specific actions required

SSC RECOMMENDATION:

The SSC appreciated the update and overview of the latest developments on the Council's Workplan. The Committee did not have any specific recommendations or suggestions regarding this item.

18. OTHER BUSINESS

The SSC discussed a few items under Other business:

- *Due to the large number of documents within the SSC Briefing Book, the SSC requested that Council staff be more specific on what specific actions, input, or feedback the SSC is expected to provide on these documents. Many agenda items list only "Review and Discussion" and the Committee would benefit from more specific direction on any actions needed.*
- *The SSC also expressed concern that many of the briefing book materials were being distributed only a few days before the meeting. The Committee requests that meeting documentation be transmitted to the SSC in a timely manner so that sufficient time is available for review prior to the Committee meeting.*
- *The SSC requested that the next meeting include an agenda item to discuss the issue of rounding catch level recommendations rather than providing them to the pound. The SSC is concerned that providing catch level recommendations to the exact pound gives the impression that the ABC recommendations have a much higher degree of certainty and precision than is actually the case.*

19. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is provided an additional opportunity to comment on SSC recommendations and agenda items.

- *At this point in the meeting the SSC Chair opened the floor for the second and final opportunity for public comments. Public comments were provided by Mr. Ben Hartig and Mr. Mark Brown.*

20. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS REVIEW

The Committee is provided an opportunity to review its report and final recommendations.

The Final SSC report should be provided to the Council by 9 am on Tuesday, Nov 17, 2015 for inclusion in the first briefing book for the December Council meeting.

~~21. CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR ELECTIONS~~

This agenda item was mistakenly scheduled. Elections for SSC Chair and Vice Chair are supposed to take place at the May 2016 SSC meeting.

22. NEXT MEETINGS

22.1.SAFMC SSC MEETINGS

2016 Meeting Dates (Tentative)

May 3 - 5 in Charleston, SC.

October 18 – 20 in Charleston, SC

22.2.SAFMC Meetings

2015-2016 Council Meetings

December 7 - 11, 2015 in Atlantic Beach, NC
March 7 - 11, 2016 in Jekyll Island, GA
June 13 - 17, 2016 in Cocoa Beach, FL
September 12-16, 2016 in North Myrtle Beach, SC
December 5-9, 2016 in Atlantic Beach, NC

23. ADJOURN