

Summary Report

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

Crowne Plaza
4831 Tanger Outlet Boulevard
North Charleston, SC

April 26-27, 2016

Status of Amendments under Development and Recently Implemented

Council staff presented an overview of recent amendments to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The overview included amendments that are still under development and those that have been recently implemented.

Black Sea Bass Pot Selectivity Study

Paul Rudershausen, North Carolina State University, presented results of a study to explore the selectivity of different mesh sizes in commercial black sea bass pot gear. The purpose of the study was to determine whether larger mesh traps would maximize escape of sub-legal fish while maintaining catch of legal fish. Traps with uniform mesh sizes of 2, 2.25, and 2.5 inches were tested. The study found that at the current minimum size limit of 11 inches, the 2.25-inch mesh trap would optimize selectivity. The research also showed that the current minimum trap mesh configuration retains a higher number of sub-legal fish than traps of larger mesh sizes.

The AP made the following motions pertaining to the black sea bass commercial pot fishery:

MOTION: RECOMMEND TO THE COUNCIL THAT BLACK SEA BASS POTS BE CONSTRUCTED OF UNIFORM MESH SIZE TO OPTIMIZE SELECTIVITY
APPROVED BY AP

MOTION: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER ALLOWING FISHERMEN WHO DID NOT QUALIFY FOR BSB POT ENDORSEMENT TO RE-ENTER THE FISHERY UNDER SOME TYPE OF A NON-TRANSFERABLE GEAR ENDORSEMENT
APPROVED BY AP (10 IN FAVOR, 5 OPPOSED)

MOTION: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER CHANGING THE MESH SIZE ON BSB POTS TO 2 1/4 INCHES
APPROVED BY AP

Amendment 37 (hogfish)

Hogfish in the South Atlantic can be split into two genetically distinct stocks: one off Georgia and the Carolinas (GA-NC) and one off the Florida Keys/East Florida (FLK/EFL). The stock status for the GA-NC stock is unknown due to insufficient data for a stock assessment to

be accepted. The FLK/EFL stock of hogfish is undergoing overfishing and is overfished based on a completed stock assessment in 2014 (SEDAR 37 2014). Since the FLK/EFL stock is overfished a rebuilding plan is needed. Amendment 37 would specify the boundary between the FLK/EFL hogfish stock and the Gulf of Mexico stock, specify Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limits (ACLs), and Optimum Yield (OY) for both stocks, establish a rebuilding plan for the FLK/EFL stock, and implement or modify management measures for both stocks to attain the desired level of harvest.

Council staff briefly explained the rationale and methodology for specifying fishing levels for the FLK/EFL stock in numbers of fish. Since the Council is proposing a size limit increase (from the current 12 inches to 16 inches) for the FLK/EFL stock, if fishing levels were to be specified in pounds there would be a risk of exceeding the ABC because larger fish are heavier and the ACLs derived from the stock assessment projections assume a minimum size of 12 inches. Instead, the ABC and total ACL were specified in pounds and the average weight of a commercially harvested hogfish was used to convert the commercial ACL from numbers of fish to pounds. This methodology was reviewed and recommended by the SSC.

Council staff also explained that the Decision Tools developed by the NMFS Southeast Regional Office to analyze the possible effects of the proposed management measures would be undergoing technical review by the SSC during their May 3-5, 2016 meeting. As a result, revisions may be needed to the analyses depending on the SSC's recommendation.

The AP discussed Amendment 37 at their fall 2015 meeting and had no further recommendations on the actions and alternatives in the amendment.

Amendment 41 (mutton snapper)

Actions in Amendment 41 would revise the biological parameters, catch levels, and management measures for mutton snapper in response to the latest stock assessment (completed in 2015 with data through 2013). Council staff presented preliminary analyses for each of the actions currently in the amendment. The AP made the following motions:

MOTION: RECOMMEND NO ACTION FOR ACTION 5

Action 5. Designate spawning season during which commercial and recreational management measures for mutton snapper should apply

Alternative 1 (No Action). The spawning season for mutton snapper is designated as May-June).

APPROVED BY AP

MOTION: RECOMMEND SUB-ALTERNATIVE 4B AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 6:

Action 6. Modify Mutton Snapper Recreational Bag Limit in the South Atlantic region

Alternative 4. Retain mutton snapper within the recreational 10 snapper aggregate bag limit in the South Atlantic, but specify bag limits for mutton snapper within the aggregate bag limit year round.

Sub-alternative 4b. 3 fish/person/day.

APPROVED BY AP (1 OPPOSED)

MOTION: CONSIDER A RECREATIONAL BAG LIMIT YEAR-ROUND OF 3/PERSON /DAY OR 6/TRIP, WHICHEVER IS MORE RESTRICTIVE.

MOTION FAILS (7 IN FAVOR, 8 OPPOSED)

MOTION: AP RECOMMENDS TO THE COUNCIL TO RECOMMEND TO FWC AND SANCTUARY TO ADDRESS ISSUE OF HARVEST OF MUTTON SNAPPER FROM SPAWNING AGGREGATIONS AT WESTERN DRY ROCKS

APPROVED BY AP

MOTION: RECOMMEND ALTERNATIVE 1 AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 7

Action 7. Modify Mutton Snapper Commercial Trip Limit in the South Atlantic region

Alternative 1 (No Action). During May-June the commercial sector in the South Atlantic is restricted to 10 mutton snapper per day or 10 mutton snapper per trip, whichever is more restrictive, and sale is allowed. There is no trip limit for the commercial sector in the Gulf or South Atlantic from July through April.

APPROVED BY AP

MOTION: RECOMMEND ALTERNATIVE 3 AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 8

Action 8. Modify mutton snapper minimum size limit in the South Atlantic region

Alternative 3. Increase the minimum size limit for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic region to 18 inches TL.

APPROVED BY AP (1 OPPOSED)

Dolphin and Yellowtail Snapper Allocations

Council staff gave an overview of the White Paper that the Dolphin Wahoo and Snapper Grouper Committees discussed in March 2016. The White Paper outlines possible ways to accomplish in-season allocation shifts to prevent closures. Commercial harvest of both dolphin and yellowtail snapper was closed before the end of the fishing year in 2015 due to landings reaching the respective commercial ACL. The Council is interested in exploring ways to prevent such closures for species whose populations are not at risk and where the recreational sector is not harvesting the recreational ACL in its entirety

During discussions, it was stated that the Bluefish Fishery Management Plan (ASMFC) contains provisions for in-season allocation shifts that have worked very well for many years. In general, AP members were supportive of temporary allocations shifts but stated that permanent re-allocation would need to be examined more closely. Additionally, AP members mentioned that perception issues would be of concern; that is, one sector already has a certain perception/opinion of the other and this may influence stakeholder support.

Visioning Amendment – Fisheries Seasonality/Retention

Council staff presented a brief overview of the recently approved Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery, which constitutes the long-term (2016-2010) strategic plan for managing the fishery. The Council is now considering amendments to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan based on the priority objectives and actions included in the Vision

Blueprint. The AP discussed several possible actions that the Council could include in a Visioning Amendment:

- AP members supported a commercial split season for red porgy and indicated this should be of higher priority than re-evaluation of the Shallow Water Grouper closure
- The AP would like to see commercial split seasons that line up for small-mouthed species (vermilion snapper, red porgy, gray triggerfish) with trip limit step-downs to align closures, etc.
- AP members suggested lower trip limits for the second commercial season for vermilion snapper, when other species are available for harvest, to extend the season and the availability of product for consumers.
- AP members were interested in limiting commercial trips to a certain number per month or some other way to spread out effort and move towards more equitable access. This was discussed for vermilion snapper in particular.
- AP emphasized the importance of keeping fisheries open year-round with trip limits and fishing year adjustments.
- AP discussed separate bag limits (and other management measures) for deepwater species.
- AP suggests considering a commercial quota split that is not 50/50 to avoid market flooding and extend the season when other species are available.

Update on SEDAR stock assessments (red snapper, gray triggerfish, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, red grouper)

SEDAR staff updated the AP on progress to date on stock assessments for red snapper, gray triggerfish, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and red grouper:

The AP was asked to suggest participants for SEDAR 50 (blueline tilefish) and two AP members volunteered to participate.

SEDAR staff indicated that the stock assessment for red grouper could switch from an update to a standard assessment in order to incorporate the SEFIS video index as an additional dataset. If that is the case, SEDAR will request fishermen participation and follow-up with the AP.

An update assessment was recently completed for golden tilefish with data through 2014. The SSC will review the assessment at their May 3-5, 2016 meeting and make fishing level recommendations to the Council. The assessment report (as well as other reports for other assessed species) is available on the SEDAR website <http://sedarweb.org>. During discussions an AP member expressed frustration at the discrepancies in golden tilefish commercial landings reported on the NMFS SERO website. It was explained that the SERO has to project the level of landings to estimate when the commercial ACL will be caught and, therefore, the numbers tend to change. It was pointed out that commercial dealers are now required to report weekly, yet late reporting is still the main cause of discrepancies.

The red snapper assessment (SEDAR 41) was completed and will undergo review during the SSC's May 3-5, 2016 meeting. The assessment indicated red snapper remain overfished and overfishing is occurring. SEDAR staff indicated the assessment report is available online and

suggested that AP members focus on Section III (Review Panel Report) and the Addendum that contains final recommendations. The level of red snapper discards in 2014 was very high. In addition, there is indication of a strong year class that has resulted in high abundance of young fish. Therefore, high levels of discards remain a concern for the future.

The SEDAR Review Panel did not accept the gray triggerfish assessment, conducted jointly with red snapper. As such, the SSC will discuss whether to revise fishing level recommendations for that species or forego any changes until a new assessment can be completed.

For-Hire Reporting Amendment

This amendment addresses reporting in the for-hire segment, including actions for mandatory, trip level reporting in the charter segment; modification of the timing of reporting in the headboat segment; and location-reporting requirements for the charter segment. The AP received a brief update on the status of this amendment. It was discussed that depth fished should be included as a core variable to allow for more accurate estimates of dead discards.

Update on Citizen Science Program

In 2015 the Council expressed interest in a Citizen Science program to address the many outstanding data needs and take advantage of repeated offers by constituents to contribute to data collection efforts. An organizing committee of Council members, staff and interested parties was assembled to address the challenge of starting such a program. As a first major step, to judge interest and obtain broad feedback on a possible citizen science program, a workshop was held January 19-22 in Charleston, SC. Following the workshop, and relying heavily upon the discussion and recommendations provided, the Organizing Committee developed a program blueprint for the Council to consider. Council staff presented a brief overview of the blueprint. Development of the program is moving forward, albeit slowly to ensure that data that are collected can be effectively used in management. AP members were enthusiastic and supportive and the discussion focused on obtaining long-term funding for the program. Council members attending the meeting updated the AP on efforts to secure such funding and assured the AP of the Council's commitment to developing a strong citizen science program. AP members were informed that Council staff would be holding a webinar titled *Efforts to Develop a South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Citizen Science Program* through NOAA's Quantitative Ecology and Socioeconomics Training (QUEST) program on May 25th. To register for the webinar and to learn more go to: <https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/quest/quest-webinars>.

The AP made the following motions:

MOTION: SNAPPER GROUPER ADVISORY PANEL EXPRESSES THEIR STRONG SUPPORT FOR CITIZEN SCIENCE AND THE PROCUREMENT OF NEW FUNDS TO FUND CITIZEN SCIENCE
APPROVED BY AP

MOTION: SNAPPER GROUPER ADVISORY PANEL RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL MAKE A FORMAL RECOMMENDATION IN SUPPORT OF PROCURING NEW FUNDS FOR CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAM TO THE NMFS
APPROVED BY AP

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

The AP conducted elections for Chair and Vice Chair. Kenny Fex was elected Chair and David Moss became Vice Chair. They will both serve a two-year term.

MOTION: ELECT KENNY FEX AS CHAIR OF THE SNAPPER GROUPER AP
APPROVED BY AP

MOTION: NOMINATE DAVID MOSS AS VICE-CHAIR OF THE SNAPPER GROUPER AP
APPROVED BY AP

Other Business

The AP discussed items suggested in a paper titled *Framework for the Future of South Atlantic Fisheries (Appendix A)* submitted by AP member Robert Johnson. The AP discussed each of the items listed and made the following motions:

MOTION: AP REQUESTS THAT THE COUNCIL EXPLORE WAYS TO ESTABLISH A FEDERAL RECREATIONAL SNAPPER GROUPER STAMP
APPROVED BY AP

MOTION: AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER LIMITED-ENTRY FOR THE FOR-HIRE SECTOR
APPROVED BY AP (1 OPPOSED, 2 ABSTENTIONS)

MOTION: REQUEST THAT THE COUNCIL REQUEST TO STAFF TO CONDUCT A CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SNAPPER GROUPER FISHERY. ADD AN AGENDA ITEM ON FUTURE AP MEETINGS TO RECEIVE UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF THIS ANALYSIS.
APPROVED BY AP

(*** INTENT IS FOR COMMERCIAL FISHERY ONLY. GUIDANCE TO UPDATE GROWTH POTENTIAL INFO, SOCIO-ECON INFO, LATENT PERMITS & LEASING ISSUE, ETC. ***)

Appendix A

Framework For The Future Of SA Fisheries:

Experience in Fisheries Management:

- 1) Fisheries independent data monitoring workshop participant
- 2) SGAP member and past chairman
- 3) SEDAR participant
- 4) ORCS workshop participant
- 5) Dolphin Wahoo AP
- 6) Electronic monitoring workshop participant

After numerous SEDAR's including 17, 24 and 41 for Red Snapper it is apparent what we are doing is not working.

The inability to collect data and accurately assess stocks especially those that are closed is an ongoing problem.

The inability of MRIP to accurately capture effort and discards for the recreational sector is an issue that will never be resolved under the current management plan. My proposal may seem extreme but what we are doing isn't working.

Step 1) - South FL needs to be its own management area: The fisheries habitat and species of concern are vastly different than the rest of the SA. On the Atlantic side, from Jupiter to the Gulf, to Ft. Myers should have its own management plan. Commercial and for-hire fisherman in this region would change their federal permit from SA to SF (South FL). *This also takes care of permit problems.*

Step 2) - Limited entry for the for-hire sector: **SGAP recommendation:** Unanimously supported by all members. With electronic reporting becoming a reality this sector will be monitored and managed effectively. This sector needs to be removed from MRIP.

Step 3) - Sector separation: With the different needs and goals of each sector this makes sense. Allocation could be based on landings and participation. This would allow Charter operators to determine how to manage their ACLs.

Step 4) - Federal Reef fish stamp - SGAP recommendation: We must identify which salt water anglers are fishing or intend to fish for reef fish.

Step 4a) - Federal deep water complex stamp: **SGAP recommendation:** We must identify which salt water anglers are fishing or intend to fish for deep water species.

Step 5) - Federal recreational reef fish season: This is tough; but, what we are doing is *not working*. A season would allow (in addition to the changes listed above) much better coverage and monitoring of

recreational effort. The result would give the managers the ability to turn some of the dead discard numbers into landings. It would seem this is a no brainer. I believe recreational anglers would support this if the benefits were explained.

After sitting through SEDAR 41 at all stages (DW workshop through RW) it is apparent some of the assessment issues are unresolvable under the current framework. People do their best at all stages but the end result is a product that very few have confidence in. The above suggestions, while not perfect, would put us on a better path making sure we have re-built *sustainable* fisheries for the future.

Sincerely

Captain Robert Johnson

Owner/Operator Federally Permitted For-Hire and Commercial Vessels: 1980 Present