

PREFERENCES OF PERMIT OWNERS AND VESSEL MANAGERS FOR LIMITED ACCESS PRIVILEGE PROGRAMS (LAPs) IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC GOLDEN TILEFISH FISHERY

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INTRODUCTION

At their meeting in Jekyll Island, GA in March 2008, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council directed staff to contact owners or managers (depending on what contact information NMFS had on file) of vessels (permits) that fish for golden tilefish in the South Atlantic region. The Council asked staff to contact golden tilefish fishermen to ascertain their preferences regarding a possible limited access privilege program for the golden tilefish fishery.

APPROACH

Council staff contacted vessels with an average of 500 pounds or greater of golden tilefish logbook landings over the period 1999-2006. Twenty-six people were contacted. These 26 people own or manage 33 snapper grouper unlimited permits. Council staff talked with three North Carolina fishermen (1 longline, 2 hook and line), 5 South Carolina fishermen (4 longline, 1 hook and line), 22 Florida fishermen (10 longline, 12 hook and line), 2 New York longline fishermen, and 1 New Jersey longline fisherman. Eighteen vessels fished longline predominantly during 1999-2006 for golden tilefish while 15 vessels fished hook and line. The 33 permits caught, on average, 92% of the total catch of golden tilefish over the period 1999-2006. The remainder of the fleet (those not contacted - approximately 200 vessels with 1 pound or greater golden tilefish landings recorded in their logbooks) was not contacted due to telephone disconnections, wrong telephone numbers, no answer, messages left but not returned, expired permit, or they did not land an average of 500 pounds/year or greater. To provide some perspective on the remainder of the fleet, 156 vessels landed on average less than 100 pounds each year. During the phone calls, staff provided fishermen with background on Council consideration of limited access privilege programs (LAPs) and characteristics of LAPs. Most of the fishermen were familiar with LAPs and had received previous mailings from the Sea Grant on LAPs and the work of the LAP Workgroup. They were asked if this type of program is something they would like to see implemented as part of management of the golden tilefish fishery.

RESULTS

Summary

Overall, 63.6% (21 vessels) of those called said they would like a LAP for the golden tilefish fishery, 21.2% (7 vessels) said they did not want a LAP, and 15.2% (5 vessels) said they were for LAPs only if a new stock assessment were done or were only interested in sector allocation programs (no LAPs) (Figure 1). When equated to the catch history those people have associated with their permits where 1 pound of catch history is equal to one vote, 61.6% were in favor, 21.9% opposed, and 16.5% say they are only in favor of LAPs if a new stock assessment was done (16%) or they expressed interest in sector allocation programs¹ only (0.5%) (Figure 1).

¹ “Sector allocation” programs have been implemented in New England. The programs are characterized by an allocation of a portion of the commercial quota of a particular species or set of species by the Council to a group (or sector) of fishermen based on the historical catches of the fishermen in the group (or sector). The sector then submits a management plan to NMFS for approval each year specifying how they will fish their allocation. Sectors participating in this type of program in New England are geographically located in the same area and use the same type of gear. However, sectors do not have to have these characteristics in common. The sector allocation program in New England is the only known example of “sector allocation”. The Pacific Whiting Cooperative and other cooperatives have similar programs but it is not labeled “sector allocation”.

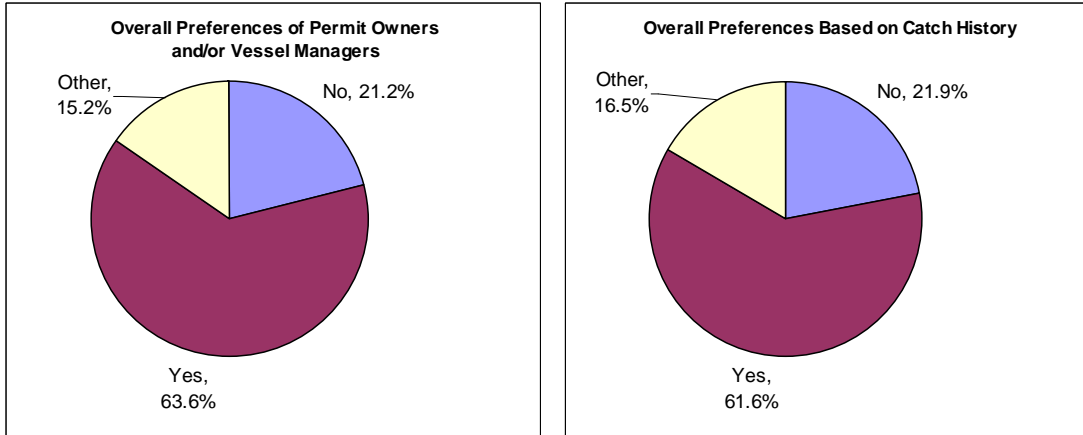


Figure 1. Preferences of permit owners and vessel managers based on one vote per vessel and based on catch history.

Longliners

When broken out by gear sector, 66.7% of longliners (12 vessels) want a LAP, 11.1% (2 vessels) do not, and 22.2% (5 vessels) want a new stock assessment first (Figure 2). When equated to the catch history associated with their permits, 61.8% want a LAP, 21.5% do not, and 16.7% want a new stock assessment before a LAP (Figure 2). Those longline fishermen in favor of a LAP noted the desire to lengthen the season, avoid a derby fishery (race to fish) that puts them out fishing in bad weather and creates market flooding that result in lower prices, and regulations that allow them to see their families more. Some noted that if tilefish were available year round, they could sell it to restaurants (something they can't do right now due to the race to fish which results in early season closure). Fishermen contacted from the Carolinas noted that a LAP is one of the only things that can ensure that they get to fish at all before the quota is met due to bad weather in their area until April. Some longline fishermen from South Carolina were considering traveling to Florida waters next year in order to fish earlier in the year but did not want to do so due to the increased cost of fishing and being away from family. Some fishermen spoke to the need to fish in September, October, and November when other fisheries are closed. Those fishermen against a LAP in the longline sector speak against the elimination of trip limits that benefit the hardest working fishermen and the fact that LAPs cap what they can catch without having to purchase more quota.

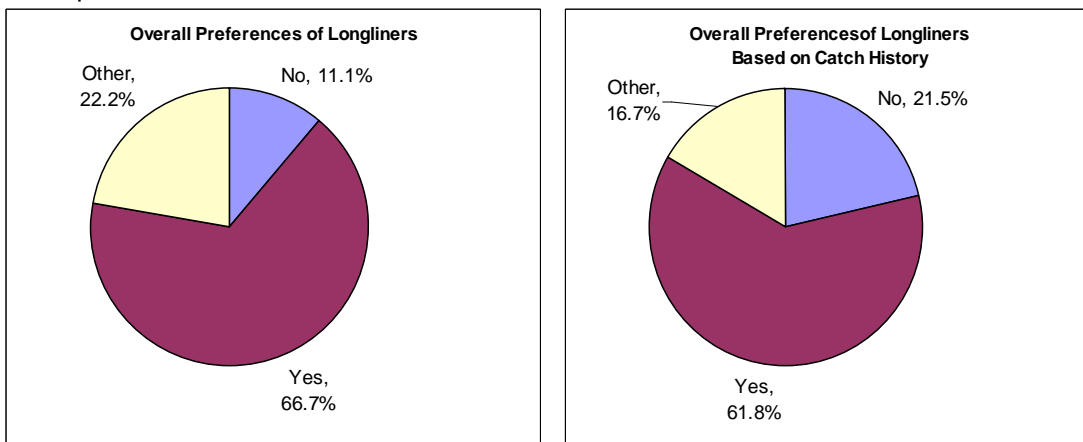


Figure 2. Preferences of longliners based on one vote per vessel and based on catch history.

Hook and Line

With regard to hook and line vessels, 60% want a LAP (9 vessels), 33.3% (5 vessels) do not, and 6.7% (1 vessel) want sector allocation programs only (Figure 3). When equated to the catch

history associated with their permits, 63.7% are in favor of LAPs, 25.0% against, and 13.3% want sector allocation programs only (Figure 3). Hook and line fishermen in favor of a LAP note that it will allow them to fish before the quota is met by the longliners who can go out in rougher weather earlier in the year and take the majority of the fish. Those in favor of a LAP also saw the strong possibility of increased ex-vessel prices for tilefish. Some fishermen spoke to the need to fish in September, October, and November when other fisheries are closed and they felt a LAP would enable them to do this. Some of those fishermen against a LAP stated that the current trip limit is fine, that they don't like the effect they see LAPs having in the Gulf of Mexico, or that without increased enforcement, LAPs will not have conservation benefits. Other fishermen against LAPs were looking to re-enter the fishery in the future but didn't have good historical landings and therefore did not want LAPs which would involve an initial allocation possibly based on historical landings.

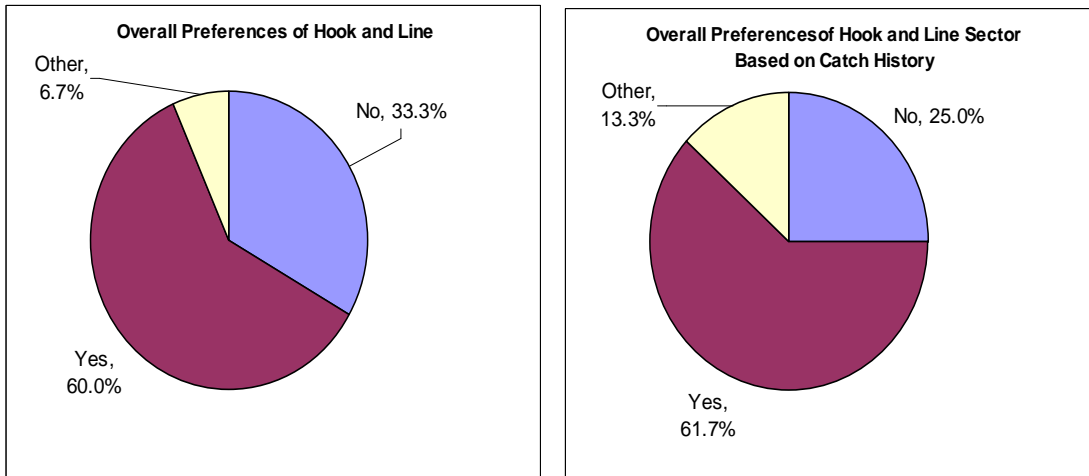


Figure 3. Preferences of hook and line based on one vote per vessel and based on catch history.

COMPARISON TO RESULTS FROM LAP EXPLORATORY WORKGROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

An informal survey was distributed to Workgroup voting members (12 people) at the last meeting of the LAP Workgroup. Eleven people handed in the survey. Fifty-five percent (6 people) agreed with the statement that they saw “a strong potential in adopting a LAP program for the snapper grouper fishery, provided it is enforced, there is money to pay for it, and that there are tangible economic and conservation benefits resulting from it”. Two people (18%) disagreed with this statement and 3 people (27%) were undecided (Figure 4). Five people (46%) agreed with the statement that “the Council should move forward with development of alternatives for a LAP program under an amendment to the Snapper Grouper FMP”. Four people (36%) were undecided and two people (18%) disagreed with regard to this statement (Figure 5). Three people who agreed with the statement that they saw strong potential for a LAP under the above conditions were undecided or disagreed with the statement that the Council should move forward with developing alternatives.

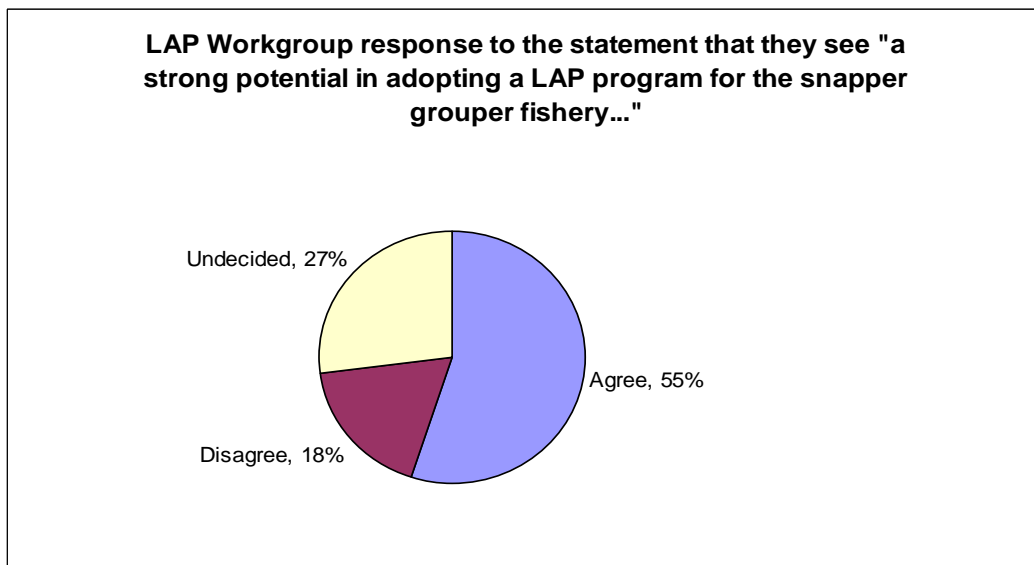


Figure 4. LAP Workgroup response to the statement that they see "a strong potential in adopting a LAP program for the snapper grouper fishery..."

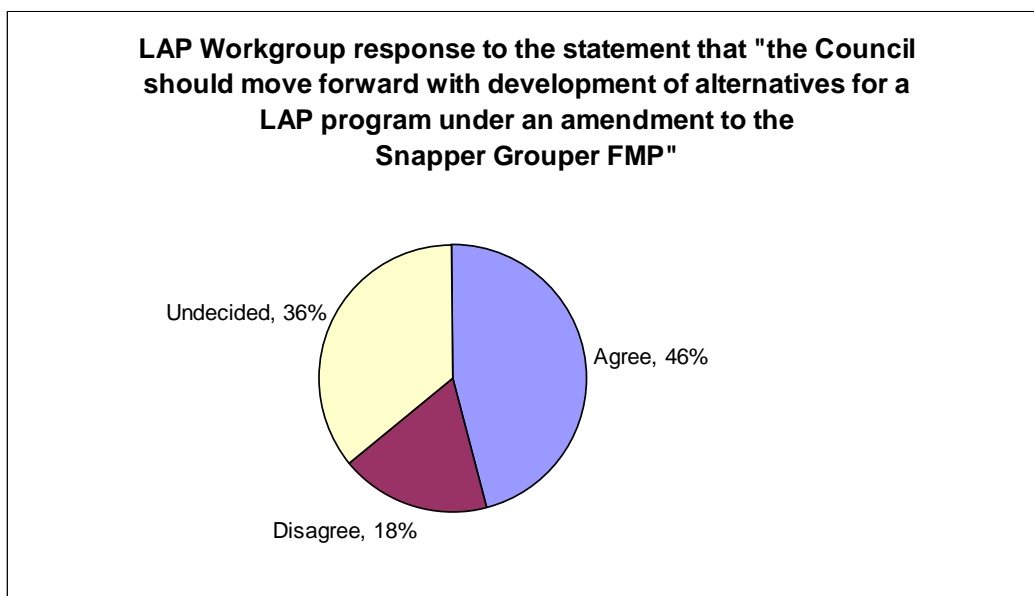


Figure 5. LAP Workgroup response to the statement that "the Council should move forward with development of alternatives for a LAP program under an amendment to the Snapper Grouper FMP".