

**SNAPPER GROUPER ADVISORY PANEL REPORT
NOVEMBER 7-8, 2012
CHARLESTON, SC**

I. Update on SSC meeting and Developing Amendments

Council staff briefed the AP on discussions relevant to snapper grouper held during the October 23-25, 2012, meeting of the Scientific and Statistical Committee. The SSC provided input on the recently completed vermilion snapper and red porgy stock assessment updates and recommended an ABC level for both species.

Vermilion snapper were found to be neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. For the vermilion snapper stock, the SSC recommended setting ABC based on projections at $P^* = 40\%$.

Red porgy are still overfished but no longer undergoing overfishing. The SSC recommended that the red porgy ABC remain at the yield at $75\% F_{MSY}$. The AP was informed that an increase in the vermilion ACL was likely whereas there was a possibility of a decrease in the red porgy ACL. The AP made the following motion pertaining to red porgy:

MOTION: SPECIFY THE ABC=ACL FOR RED PORGY

APPROVED (WITH 4 OPPOSED)

The SSC also discussed a new P^* (P-star) analysis for black sea bass. The P^* indicates the risk of overfishing and is the basis for determining an ABC based on the Council's approved ABC Control Rule. The SSC recommended a P^* of 37.5% and a P-rebuild of 62.5%. The AP made the following motion regarding black sea bass:

MOTION: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER GOING BACK TO A 50% PROBABILITY OF SUCCESS FOR BLACK SEA BASS

APPROVED (4 OPPOSED)

At its September 2012 meeting, the Council was informed that additional analyses would be forthcoming for the wreckfish population. The SSC received presentations on the newly conducted analyses but they did not recommend any changes to the current wreckfish ABC. The AP made the following motion pertaining to wreckfish:

MOTION: THE COUNCIL SHOULD REVISIT THE WRECKFISH ABC

APPROVED

The AP made the following motion regarding possible MPAs to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper:

MOTION: ANALYSIS ON MPAs FOR SPECKLED HIND AND WARSAW GROUPER SHOULD INCLUDE AN EVALUATION OF REGULATIONS, ESPECIALLY EFFECTS OF GEAR CHANGES

APPROVED

The AP made the following motion regarding the proposed action to require that all commercial snapper grouper vessels be equipped with a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS):

MOTION: IF THE COUNCIL DECIDES TO MOVE FORWARD WITH THE VMS REQUIREMENT FOR THE COMMERCIAL SG FISHERY, THEN THEY SHOULD CONSIDER MAKING IT A REQUIREMENT FOR ALL VESSELS FISHING FOR SNAPPER GROUPEER SPECIES IN FEDERAL WATERS

MOTION FAILS

The AP supported the development of Regulatory Amendment 16 in 2013 to modify management measures for the commercial golden tilefish longline fishery. The AP made the following motion:

MOTION: ESTABLISH FISHING ON A 2 WEEKS ON/2 WEEKS OFF SCHEDULE FOR THE GOLDEN TILEFISH LONGLINE FISHERY OR CONSIDER OTHER ALTERNATIVES (I.E., EVERY OTHER WEEK IS PREFERRED) THAT SLOW DOWN THE HARVEST AND PREVENT WASTE

APPROVED

The AP discussed the proposed development of Amendment 22, which would establish a recreational tag program for red snapper, snowy grouper, golden tilefish, and wreckfish. The AP made the following motions:

MOTION: THE RECREATIONAL (PRIVATE) SNAPPER GROUPEER FISHERY SHOULD BE UNDER A LOTTERY SYSTEM IN WHICH AN INDIVIDUAL CANNOT HOLD A PERMIT FOR MORE THAN 3 YEARS CONSECUTIVELY AND MUST BE REQUIRED TO REPORT ALL CATCHES

MOTION FAILS

MOTION: REQUEST THAT THE COUNCIL EXPLORE A SNAPPER GROUPEER STAMP/ENDORSEMENT FOR THE PRIVATE RECREATIONAL SECTOR TO PROVIDE DATA THAT EACH STATE COULD USE TO IMPROVE PRIVATE RECREATIONAL CATCH MONITORING

APPROVED

II. Regulatory Amendment 15 (yellowtail and shallow water grouper)

The AP received an overview of proposed actions and alternatives contained in Regulatory Amendment 15. This amendment would adjust the yellowtail ABC, ACLs, and ACT based on the latest stock assessment; modify the fishing year and establish a spawning season closure for yellowtail snapper for the commercial sector; and modify the accountability measure for gag grouper that prohibits harvest and possession of shallow-water groupers (red grouper, black grouper, scamp, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, red hind, rock hind, graysby, and coney) when the gag commercial ACL is met or projected to be met. The AP made the following motions under each of the actions proposed in the amendment:

Action 1. Revise Annual Catch Limit (ACL) and Optimum Yield (OY) for Yellowtail Snapper

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS THE COUNCIL CHOOSE ALTERNATIVE 2 AS PREFERRED

APPROVED (4 OPPOSED, 1 ABSTENTION)

Alternative 2. For yellowtail snapper, establish ACL = OY = ABC.

Commercial ACL = 1,596,510

Recreational ACL = 1,440,990

Recreational ACT = 1,253,661

(all values pounds whole weight and landings only)

Action 2. Yellowtail Snapper: Commercial and Recreational Fishing Year and Commercial Spawning Season Closure

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) FOR CHANGING THE FISHING YEAR AND ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) ON A COMMERCIAL SPAWNING SEASON CLOSURE

APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain the calendar year as the commercial and recreational fishing year for yellowtail snapper. Do not establish a spawning season closure for the commercial sector for yellowtail snapper.

MOTION: IF THE COUNCIL CONSIDERS IMPLEMENTING SPAWNING SEASON CLOSURES, THEY SHOULD APPLY TO BOTH SECTORS

APPROVED

Action 3. Gag and Shallow Water Groupers: Commercial Annual Catch Limit and Accountability Measures

MOTION: AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 3 AS THE PREFERRED

APPROVED (1 OPPOSED AND 1 ABSTENTION)

Alternative 3. Change the (1) AM as listed under the Alternative 1 (No Action) to the following:

If gag commercial landings, as estimated by the SRD, reach or are projected to reach the ACL, the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to close the commercial fishery for gag for the remainder of the fishing year. Retain (2) and (3) of the commercial AMs as stated under the Alternative 1 (No Action). Reduce the current gag commercial ACL from 352,940 to either 339,342 or 326,094 pounds gutted weight* to account for projected gag discard mortality from commercial trips that target co-occurring species (red grouper and scamp) following a projected gag closure.

*The revised gag ACL represents an estimation of gag discard mortality of between 13,598 to 26,846 pounds gw following a gag closure. The Council will choose a single value once the analyses are further refined

MOTION: REQUEST THAT THE COUNCIL ASK NMFS FOR EMERGENCY ACTION TO RE-OPEN GAG AND SHALLOW-WATER GROUPER FISHING WITH A 50-POUND BYCATCH ALLOWANCE OF GAG
APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)

MOTION: CONSIDER AN ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURE THAT THE TRIP LIMIT BE REDUCED TO 300 POUNDS WHEN 75% OF THE GAG COMMERCIAL QUOTA IS LANDED.
APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)

III. Regulatory Amendment 13 (MRIP adjustments for un-assessed snapper grouper species)

The AP received an overview of the action proposed in this amendment. The AP made no motions and had no recommendations.

I. Amendment 28 (regulations to allow limited harvest of red snapper)

The AP received an overview of the action and alternatives proposed in this amendment. The AP made the following motions:

Action 1. Red Snapper: ACLs, AMs, and Fishing Seasons

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2A AS PREFERRED

Sub-alternative 2a. Annually establish the total ACL (in numbers of fish) based on the formula used to determine the ACL in 2012 as done through the temporary rule through emergency action.

APPROVED

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS SUB-ALTERNATIVE 3C FOR THE COMMERCIAL RED SNAPPER SEASON

Sub-alternative 3c. The commercial season will begin at 12:01 A.M. on the second Monday in September.

APPROVED

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS SUB-ALTERNATIVE 4C FOR THE RECREATIONAL RED SNAPPER SEASON

Sub-alternative 4c. The recreational season will begin at 12:01 A.M. on the second Friday in September.

APPROVED

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 5 AS PREFERRED FOR THE RED SNAPPER SIZE LIMIT

Alternative 5. Eliminate the red snapper commercial and recreational 20-inch TL minimum size limit.

APPROVED

MOTION: THE AP SUGGESTS ADOPTING SUB-ALTERNATIVE 6D FOR THE RED SNAPPER COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT

Sub-alternative 6d. Establish a red snapper commercial trip limit of 100 lbs gutted weight per trip.

APPROVED (3 OPPOSED)

MOTION: THE AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 7 FOR THE RECREATIONSL BAG LIMIT ON RED SNAPPER

Alternative 7. Establish a red snapper recreational bag limit of one fish per person per day.

APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE RED SNAPPER RECREATIONAL SEASON REMAIN OPEN UNTIL THE ACL IS PROJECTED TO BE MET

APPROVED (2 OPPOSED)

II. Amendment 27 (management measures for blue runner, yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper)

This amendment includes actions (1-5) to address management jurisdiction for yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and Nassau grouper. Both the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils manage these species in their respective jurisdictions. However, during the October 2012 meeting of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the Council chairman suggested that a joint steering committee be created and tasked with developing recommendations for joint management of yellowtail and mutton snapper. Therefore, the AP did not discuss actions 1-5 of Amendment 27. Action 6 is an administrative action that would complete the process of the South Atlantic Council taking over management of Nassau grouper throughout its range. The AP had no comments on this action.

The AP made the following motions pertaining to the remaining actions in the amendment:

Action 7. Modify Section I of the Snapper Grouper FMP Framework procedure

MOTION: AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 2 AS A PREFERRED

Alternative 2. Modify Section I of the Snapper Grouper FMP Framework Procedure for Specification of Annual Catch Limits, Annual Catch Targets, Overfishing Limits, Acceptable Biological Catch, and annual adjustments. The modification would add the following language:

Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) and Annual Catch Targets (ACTs) Adjustment Procedure

1. Stock assessments will continue to be conducted for snapper grouper species in the management area through the SEDAR process.
2. Following the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)'s review of the stock assessment and a public hearing, the Council will determine if changes are needed in the OFL, ABC, ACLs, and ACTs and so advise the Regional Director (RD).

3. Following a review for consistency with the FMP and applicable law, the RD may reject or may implement changes by notice in the Federal Register to be effective for the next fishing season.

APPROVED

Action 8. Modify placement of blue runner in a fishery management unit and/or modify management measures for blue runner

MOTION: THE AP SUPPORTS REMOVING BLUE RUNNER FROM THE SG FISHERY MANAGEMENT UNIT

APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)

III. Regulatory Amendment 14

The Snapper Grouper AP discussed possible changes to existing Accountability Measures that would diminish negative socio-economic impacts while having no negative impact of the status of snapper grouper stocks. The AP reasoned that, in recent years, commercial ACLs for several snapper grouper species have been met or exceeded before the end of the fishing year, resulting in closures that have severe impacts on fishermen and their communities. The recreational landings for the same species, however, have often only reached a portion of the recreational ACL. AP members would like the Council to consider a change in the Accountability Measures for all stocks to allow the commercial sector to continue fishing until the TOTAL ACL was projected to be met. They argue that this would be a more efficient way to utilize the resource and be consistent with the way the Gulf of Mexico Council has chosen to apply the use of ACLs. Moreover, this approach would reduce the number of closures and overages and result in more streamlined management and more accurate monitoring of fisheries data.

The AP reviewed a list of actions and alternatives that the Council may consider for inclusion in Regulatory Amendment 14 and made the following motions:

Action 1. Modify the commercial fishing year for greater amberjack

CORRECTION TO ALTERNATIVE 1: SEASON GOES THROUGH MARCH 31, NOT APRIL 30.

MOTION: AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) AS PREFERRED

APPROVED

Action 2. Reduce the trip limit for greater amberjack

MOTION: RECOMMEND ADJUSTING THE SIZE LIMIT OF GREATER AMBERJACK TO MAKE IT THE SAME FOR REC AND COMMERCIAL (36")

MOTION FAILS

MOTION: AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION)

APPROVED

Action 3. Implement additional regulations to protect mutton snapper during its spawning season

AP RECOMMENDATION: EYEGLASS BAR MAY NOT BE AN APPROPRIATE AREA FOR A SPAWNING CLOSURE.

MOTION: THE AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 2, SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2A:

Alternative 2. Designate area closures coinciding with known spawning aggregation sites and close them to fishing for mutton snapper during May and June.

Sub-alternative 2a. Designate Western Dry Rocks as a mutton snapper spawning aggregation area closure.

APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS SUB-ALTERNATIVE 6B:

Sub-alternative 6b. Reduce the bag limit of mutton snapper year-round to 5 per person per day (included in the aggregate 10-snapper bag limit).

APPROVED (3 OPPOSED)

Action 4. Change the measurement method for gray triggerfish to have consistency between state and federal waters

MOTION: THE AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 2 TO CHANGE THE MEASUREMENT FOR GRAY TRIGGERFISH TO FORK LENGTH

Alternative 2. Specify the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in inches fork length (FL) in federal waters off east Florida.

APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)

Action 5. Increase the minimum size limit for hogfish

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 3 FOR INCREASING THE SIZE LIMIT FOR HOGFISH

Alternative 3. Increase the minimum size limit for hogfish in federal waters to 14 inches fork length (FL).

APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)

Action 6. Modify the fishing year for the black sea bass recreational sector

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL REVISIT THE ACL FOR BLACK SEA BASS

APPROVED (2 OPPOSED)

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 1 FOR THE RECREATIONAL FISHING YEAR FOR BLACK SEA BASS

APPROVED (3 OPPOSED)

Action 7. Modify the fishing year for the black sea bass commercial sector

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER A RECREATIONAL SPLIT SEASON FOR BLACK SEA BASS

APPROVED (0 OPPOSED)

NOTE: This motion applies to the recreational sector only**

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS AN ALTERNATIVE THAT WOULD CONSIDER MODIFYING THE COMMERCIAL FISHING YEAR FOR BLACK SEA BASS TO BEGIN ON MARCH 1.

APPROVED (6 IN FAVOR; 5 OPPOSED)

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER GEAR ALLOCATIONS FOR THE BLACK SEA BASS FISHERY

APPROVED (0 OPPOSED)

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS INCREASING THE COMMERCIAL SIZE LIMIT FOR BLACK SEA BASS TO MATCH THE RECREATIONAL SIZE LIMIT OF 13"

APPROVED (1 OPPOSED)

Action 8. Modify the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER A TRIP LIMIT FOR VERMILION SNAPPER THAT IS BASED ON 50% OF THE VESSELS' HISTORICAL CAPACITY

MOTION FAILS

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 3 AND WHEN 75% OF THE ACL HAS BEEN MET, THEN REVERT TO ALERNATIVE 4.

Alternative 3. Reduce the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper to 1,000 pounds gw.

Alternative 4. Reduce the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper to 500 pounds gw.

APPROVED (0 OPPOSED)

Action 9. Modify the recreational bag limit for vermilion snapper

MOTION: THE AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) ON INCREASING THE BAG LIMIT ON VERMILION SNAPPER

APPROVED

Action 10. Modify the opening of the second commercial fishing season for vermilion snapper

MOTION: AP SUPPORTS ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) ON CHANGING THE START OF THE SECOND SEASON FOR VERMILION SNAPPER

APPROVED

Action 11. Modify the recreational closed season for vermilion snapper

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS ELIMINATING THE RECREATIONAL CLOSURE ON VERMILION SNAPPER AND KEEPING THE BAG LIMIT AT 5 PER PERSON

APPROVED

Action 12. Increase the recreational bag limit for red porgy

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS NO CHANGE TO THE RED PORGY RECREATIONAL BAG LIMIT

APPROVED

Action 13. Increase the commercial head count for red porgy

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS NO CHANGE TO THE COMMERCIAL LIMIT FOR RED PORGY

APPROVED (2 OPPOSED)

Action 14. Modify the aggregate grouper bag limit

MOTION: THE AP SUPPORTS SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2A:

Sub-alternative 2a. Increase the aggregate grouper bag limit from 3 to 4 fish.

Within this limit, two fish can be gag grouper.

MOTION FAILS (8 IN FAVOR; 10 OPPOSED)

MOTION: KEEP THE BAG LIMIT FOR GAG AT 1 FISH (STATUS QUO)

APPROVED (9 IN FAVOR; 6 OPPOSED)

IV. AP input on long-term planning and vision for the snapper grouper fishery

At their September 2012 meeting, the Council discussed their intent to develop a vision and long-term strategic plan for the snapper grouper fishery. The AP provide the following input:

MOTION: THE COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER AN ANALYSIS OF THE SG UNLIMITED PERMIT-HOLDERS SIMILAR TO WHAT WAS DONE IN AMENDMENT 8 OF JUNE 1996 WITH A POSSIBLE CHANGE IN THE CONTROL DATE TO BE DETERMINED BY THE COUNCIL

Intent is to reduce latent permits*

MOTION FAILS

MOTION: THE COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER ESTABLISHING A SYSTEM OF WELL-THOUGHT OUT AND STRATEGICALLY LOCATED MARINE RESERVES (ON EXISTING HABITAT OR ARTIFICIAL REEFS) WHERE ALL SNAPPER GROUPE FISHING WOULD BE PROHIBITED. TROLLING FOR PELAGIC SPECIES WOULD STILL BE ALLOWED INSIDE RESERVES. ONCE ESTABLISHED, FISHING OUTSIDE RESERVES, FOR ALL LEGAL SPECIES, WOULD BE ALLOWED YEAR-ROUND WITH "REASONABLE RESTRICTIONS" (I.E., BAG AND SIZE LIMITS, BEST-PRACTICES, ETC.), EXCEPT FOR ESTABLISHED SPAWNING CLOSURES.

APPROVED (0 OPPOSED)

In addition, the AP offered the following regarding a vision for the snapper grouper fishery and long-term considerations for its sustainable management:

- Reducing uncertainty in stock assessments and all data used in management of the fishery

- Reducing uncertainty stemming from inadequate quota monitoring
- Striving for a year-round fishery
- Promoting Best Fishing Practices for the recreational fishery
- Establishing a system on well-thought out Marine Reserves where all fishing for snapper grouper species is prohibited so that year-round fishing outside the reserves would be possible with reasonable restrictions
- Striving to achieve MSY for all managed snapper grouper species
- Encouraging more participation from recreational anglers for data collection and monitoring
- Establishing reporting requirements for the recreational sector
- Obtaining more data and create charts on life histories/biological parameters of managed species (spawning seasons, minimum spawning sizes -50%, 75%, & 90 %, current size limits, discard mortality rates, susceptibility to barotrauma, typical depths when caught, other fish typically caught with this species(groupings), etc.)
- Striving to implement ecosystem-based management that affects the system as a whole
- Considering increased use of artificial reefs
- Considering a single season for a suite of snapper grouper species to minimize discards

V. Other Business

The AP discussed a number of issues under Other Business and made the following motions and recommendations:

MOTION: THE COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER A MORATORIUM ON ALL SNAPPER GROUPE PERMIT-HOLDERS IN THE FOR-HIRE SECTOR (CHARTER AND HEADBOAT) IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

*****INTENT IS TO STOP ISSUING NEW PERMITS IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC******

APPROVED (1 OPPOSED, 6 IN FAVOR)

MOTION: THE COUNCIL SHOULD RE-VISIT THE REQUIREMENT FOR CIRCLE HOOKS NORTH OF 28 DEGREES

APPROVED (2 OPPOSED, 9 IN FAVOR)

MOTION: THE COUNCIL SHOULD REMOVE THE CORPORATE PERMITS FROM THE EXEMPTION FROM THE 2 FOR 1 REQUIREMENT

MOTION FAILS

MOTION: THE AP RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER ABOLISHING ITQs IN THE WRECKFISH FISHERY

APPROVED

MOTION: THE COUNCIL SHOULD CONSIDER MANDATORY REPORTING FOR FOR-HIRE VESSELS IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

APPROVED

THE COUNCIL SHOULD REQUEST THAT NMFS THOROUGHLY RESEARCH THE HISTORICAL DISTRIBUTION OF NASSAU GROUPE AND KNOWN SPAWNING AGGREGATIONS IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC.