



## **Status of Council Activities and Accomplishments During 2015**

The Council has experienced a very active and productive 2015. It has been rewarding because we accomplished most of our ending overfishing and rebuilding goals. We have also continued to give more fish back to our fishermen that have sacrificed so much over the past several years. It has required a tremendous amount of work by our Council members and staff, our SSC and AP members, as well as the NMFS folks at the SERO and the SEFSC.

The Council efforts resulted in 30 major actions being either: (1) approved by the Secretary of Commerce, (2) transmitted to the Secretary for review and approval or (3) undergoing development this year. Seven amendments were completed and implemented by the Secretary of Commerce, six other amendments were approved by the Council and are undergoing Secretarial review and eighteen other actions are currently under development. It has been one the more active years in the history of the South Atlantic Council, almost equaling last year when there were a total of 32 majors actions.

Council members and staff also continued to spend a significant amount of time and effort developing the Vision Blueprint for the snapper grouper fishery. Staff has also been very much involved in the Council's Fishery Citizen Science Initiative.

The SEDAR component of the staff was also very active organizing and conducting 44 SEDAR workshops in support of the South Atlantic, Gulf and Caribbean Councils, the Atlantic and Gulf Fishery Commissions, as well as the NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division.

Administrative support for all of these activities has been exemplary, as well as innovative. Procedures have been developed and/or perfected (such as the use of webinars) to help the Council be more efficient and productive, while reducing costs.

### **Actions Approved by the Secretary and Implemented in 2015 (7)**

#### ***Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 20 (snowy grouper)***

Regulatory Amendment 20 adjusted the rebuilding strategy, acceptable biological catch (ABC), annual catch limit (ACL), maximum sustainable yield (MSY), minimum stock size threshold (MSST), and optimum yield (OY), and revised management measures for snowy grouper.

The proposed rule published on April 8, 2015, and the comment period closed on May 8, 2015. The final rule for Regulatory Amendment 20 published on July 21, 2015 and regulations became effective on August 20, 2015.

#### ***Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 22 (gag and wreckfish)***

At their June 2014 meeting, the Council approved development of Regulatory Amendment 22 to address adjustments to the ABC, ACLs, and OY for gag and wreckfish based on results of the stock

assessment for those two species. The amendment also included an action to consider modifying the bag limit for gag; however, the Council chose to take no action at the time.

The Council reviewed the amendment at their September 2014 meeting and approved it for public hearings, which were held via webinar in fall 2014. The Council reviewed public hearing comments at their December 2014 meeting and approved the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce. The amendment was submitted to NMFS for formal review on February 26, 2015 and was approved. The final rule published on August 12, 2015 and the regulations became effective on September 11, 2015.

### ***Snapper Grouper Amendment 29 (ORCS and ABC Control Rule)***

At the June 2013 Council meeting, the SSC presented to the Council their recommended changes to the ABC Control Rule. In addition, the SSC provided ABC recommendations for “Only Reliable Catch Stocks”. To implement these recommendations, the Council requested development of Amendment 29. A Decision Document/Options Paper was presented to the Council at their September 2013 meeting. At that time, the Council also added actions to implement management measures for gray triggerfish.

Public hearings on this amendment were held in January 2014 and the Council reviewed comments at their March 2014 meeting. The Council took public comment on the amendment at their September 2014 meeting and approved submission of the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce. The amendment was approved by the Secretary on February 20, 2015 and regulations became effective on July 1, 2015.

### ***Snapper Grouper Amendment 32 (blueline tilefish)***

The SSC reviewed the stock assessment for blueline tilefish (SEDAR 32) in October 2013 and found it to be suitable for management. The assessment indicated the stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing. The Council is required to take action to end overfishing and/or establish a rebuilding plan within two years of being notified that a stock is undergoing overfishing and/or is overfished. The Council received the notification on the status of the blueline tilefish stock on December 6, 2013. However, the Council adopted an alternate definition of MSST (through Regulatory Amendment 21) for snapper grouper species with low natural mortality. Under the new definition, the blueline tilefish stock is not overfished and, therefore, a rebuilding plan is not necessary. A scoping document was developed and a scoping webinar was held on November 7, 2013.

At the December 2013 meeting the Council requested that NMFS take emergency action to set the blueline tilefish ACL at 224,100 pounds whole weight and the equilibrium yield at 75% $F_{MSY}$ . The emergency rule became effective in April 2014. At their June 2014 meeting, the Council reviewed the actions and alternatives in the amendment and approved it for public hearings in August 2014. At their September 2014 meeting, the Council requested an extension of the emergency rule to allow completion of Amendment 32. The amendment removed blueline tilefish from the Deepwater Complex, adjusted the blueline tilefish acceptable biological catch, annual catch limits, optimum yield, recreational annual catch target and management measures. The Council approved the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce in September 2014 and the final rule became effective on March 30, 2015.

### ***Joint CMP Amendment 20B (zones and quotas)***

This joint amendment with the Gulf Council changed the hook-and-line trip limits and fishing year for some of the Gulf group king mackerel zones/subzones, and established a provision to allow transit through closed king mackerel areas. The amendment also included an action to establish regional allocations of the Atlantic group king mackerel commercial ACL and the Atlantic group Spanish

commercial ACL to a Northern Zone and Southern Zone (boundary at the NC/SC line). The amendment also updated language in the framework procedure. The last action updated the cobia ACLs based on the 2012 stock assessment, and allocated part of the Gulf group cobia ACL to the Florida East Coast because of the designation of the biological boundary between the Gulf and Atlantic stocks at the GA/FL line. The amendment was transmitted to NMFS on May 22, 2014. Joint Amendment 20B was approved by the Secretary of Commerce and the regulations became effective on March 1, 2015.

### ***CMP Framework Amendment 2 (Atlantic Spanish mackerel trip limits for Southern Zone)***

This amendment revised the quota and trip limit system for commercial harvest of Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the Southern Zone, which is proposed in Amendment 20B, and includes South Carolina, Georgia and Florida East Coast. The amendment was approved by the Secretary of Commerce and the regulations became effective on August 13, 2015.

### ***Coral Amendment 8 (modifications to coral HAPCs)***

Approved actions include expansion of the northern and western boundaries of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC); expansion of the Stetson-Miami Terrace and Cape Lookout Coral HAPCs; and establishment of a transit provision through the Oculina Bank HAPC for vessels with rock shrimp onboard. Within the expanded HAPCs, the use of bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot or trap is gear prohibited, and if aboard a fishing vessel, anchor, use of anchor and chain, and grapple and chain is prohibited. Mid-water trawl is also prohibited in the Coral HAPCs, including Stetson-Miami Terrace and the Cape Lookout Coral HAPCs. The Council approved the amendment at their September 2013 meeting and submitted the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce for review in November 2013. The proposed rule was published on June 3, 2014, and the comment period closed on July 3, 2014. Amendment 8 was approved by the Secretary on August 20, 2014; however, the final rule was not published until July 2015 with the regulations becoming effective on August 17, 2015.

## **Actions Approved by Council and Currently Under Secretarial Review (6)**

### ***Snapper Grouper Amendment 33 (transport of snapper grouper fillets from the Bahamas)***

This amendment modifies what is currently allowed by recreational fishermen to bring snapper grouper species fillets from the Bahamas into the US EEZ. Also included for consideration is leaving skin on the fillets, onboard documentation requirements, as well as determining how many Bahamian fillets may be aboard the vessel in the U.S. EEZ.

At the March 2014 Council meeting, the Council received input on the proposed actions and alternatives from the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel and the Law Enforcement Committee. The Council made revisions to the Purpose and Need and revised actions and alternatives. In June 2014, the Council approved the amendment for public hearings in August 2014. Approval for submission to the Secretary of Commerce took place in December 2014. The amendment was submitted for formal review on May 1, 2015. The proposed rule published on October 7, 2015, and the comment period closed on November 6, 2015.

***Snapper Grouper Amendment 34 (accountability measures for snapper grouper species)***

Snapper Grouper Amendment 34 is part of the Generic Accountability Measures and Dolphin Allocation Amendment. The amendment considers changes in accountability measures for snapper grouper species to determine when ACL overages need to be paid back and to bring consistency to accountability measures. A scoping webinar was held in February 2014 and the Council reviewed the amendment at their March 2014 meeting. In June 2014, the Council approved the amendment for public hearings in August 2014. The Council approved the amendment for formal review in December 2014. The amendment was submitted to NMFS for formal review on February 27, 2015. The proposed rule published on September 29, 2015, and the comment period closed on October 29, 2015.

***Snapper Grouper Amendment 35 (removal of species from the FMU)***

This amendment would remove 4 species from the Snapper Grouper FMU: black snapper, dog snapper, mahogany snapper, and schoolmaster. Representatives from the State of Florida requested the South Atlantic Council remove the above 4 species from the Snapper Grouper FMU as well as Nassau grouper. At their June 2014 meeting, however, the Council opted to retain Nassau grouper in the FMU given its ESA status. Florida regulations would be extended into federal waters off Florida to manage the remaining 4 species.

Scoping for Amendment 35 took place in August 2014. At their September meeting, the Council reviewed the scoping comments and provided guidance to continue development of the amendment. Additionally, the Council added an action to the amendment to clarify requirements for golden tilefish longline endorsements. The Council reviewed the amendment at their December 2014 meeting and approved it for public hearings in January 2015. The Council considered public comment during the March 2015 meeting and approved all actions. In June 2015, the Council approved the amendment for Secretarial review. The amendment was transmitted to NMFS on September 10, 2015.

***Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 7 (bringing dolphin and wahoo fillets from the Bahamas into the US EEZ)***

This amendment considers allowing recreational fishermen to bring dolphin and wahoo fillets from the Bahamas into the US EEZ as is currently allowed with snapper grouper species. Also included for consideration is leaving skin on the fillets, onboard documentation requirements, as well as determining how many Bahamian fillets may be aboard the vessel in the U.S. EEZ.

At the March 2014 Council meeting, the Council received input on the proposed actions and alternatives from the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel and the Law Enforcement Committee. The Council made revisions to the Purpose and Need and revised actions and alternatives. In June 2014, the Council approved the amendment for public hearings in August 2014. The Council approved the amendment for formal review in December 2014. The amendment was submitted for formal review on May 1, 2015. The proposed rule published on October 7, 2015, and the comment period closed on November 6, 2015.

***Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 8 (sector allocations for dolphin)***

Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 8 is part of the Generic Accountability Measures and Dolphin Allocation Amendment considers changes in how dolphin is allocated between commercial and recreational sectors. In June 2014, the Council approved the amendment for public hearings in August 2014. The Council approved the amendment for formal review in December 2014. The amendment was

submitted to NMFS for formal review on February 27, 2015. The proposed rule published on September 29, 2015, and the comment period closed on October 29, 2015

### ***Golden Crab Amendment 9 (ABCs/ACLs/ACTs/AMs, trip limits)***

Golden Crab Amendment 9 is part of the Generic Accountability Measures and Dolphin Allocation Amendment considers changes in accountability measures for golden crab to determine when ACL overages need to be paid back and to bring consistency to accountability measures. In June 2014, the Council approved the amendment for public hearings in August 2014. The Council approved the amendment for formal review in December 2014. The amendment was submitted to NMFS for formal review on February 26, 2015. The proposed rule published on September 29, 2015, and the comment period closed on October 29 2015.

### **Actions Under Council Development (18)**

#### ***Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 16 (black sea bass pot closure and gear markings)***

The amendment contains two actions: the first addresses 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 second action specifies potential new black sea bass pot gear modifications that reduce the required breaking strength for buoy lines and weak links, and changes to aid in gear identification in the event of a whale entanglement. The Council reviewed the analyses for this amendment at their December 2014 meeting, made modifications to the amendment, and revised the timeline for development. The Council approved the amendment for public hearings at their June 2015 meeting, deselected the preferred alternative, and added two new alternatives. Public hearings were held in August 2015. The Council reviewed public hearing comments and made final decisions for the document at their September 2015 meeting. The Council is scheduled to approve the document to send to the Secretary at the December 2015 meeting.

#### ***Snapper Grouper Amendment 22 (recreational tag program)***

Amendment 22 was being developed to closely control annual harvest levels of snapper grouper species with exceptionally low recreational annual catch limits (ACLs).

The Council reviewed a revised Options Paper at their December 2013 meeting but suspended further development of the amendment pending NOAA General Counsel input on several issues, including whether a recreational harvest tag program would be considered a Limited Access Privilege Program (LAPP) and thus be subject to specific requirements. NOAA General Counsel provided further guidance to the Council at the September 2014 meeting. However, the Council decided to postpone further development of the amendment and instead requested a presentation from the NC Division of Marine Fisheries on the state's Catch Card Program for highly migratory species. At the December 2014 meeting, the Council received a presentation from the NC Division of Marine Fisheries on the state's Catch Card Program for highly migratory species. The Council discussed whether to continue development of this amendment during the March 2015 meeting and voted to postpone further development.

***Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 23 (golden tilefish H&L, jacks complex)***

Prior to June 2015, this regulatory amendment contained an action to lengthen the golden tilefish fishing season for the longline sector but that was removed in June 2015, and an action to modify the fishing year for the hook-and-line sector remained. Additionally, two actions (addressing black sea bass and the Jacks Complex) that had been included in Regulatory Amendment 24 were moved to Regulatory Amendment 23 in June 2015. A scoping webinar was held in August 2015. In September 2015, the Council reviewed comments and moved the black sea bass bag limit action to another amendment (Regulatory Amendment 25). Work on Regulatory Amendment 23 will resume in 2016.

***Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 24 (jacks complex, Almaco jack, deepwater species, shallow water grouper, red grouper)***

In June 2015, the IPT recommended that the Council move several actions from Amendment 37 to Regulatory Amendment 24. Additionally, the Council decided to delay development of Regulatory Amendment 24 until after the Visioning Project was completed. Actions that may be included in this amendment include: revision to the composition of the Jacks Complex and commercial management measures for almaco jack; removal of size limits for deepwater species (silk snapper, queen snapper, and blackfin snapper); adjustment to spawning season closure for shallow water grouper; adjustment of size limit for red grouper, and commercial split season for red porgy. The Council will review potential actions for this amendment at a later date in 2016.

***Regulatory Amendment 25 (blueline tilefish, yellowtail snapper, black sea bass)***

At their September 2015 meeting, the Council approved development of Regulatory Amendment 25 to address revisions to blueline tilefish fishing levels and management measures in response to a new ABC recommendation. Alternatives to specify the blueline tilefish ACL and OY set aside a portion to account for landings in the area north of the Council's jurisdiction. In addition, the Council opted to add actions to modify the fishing year for yellowtail snapper and modify the bag limit for black sea bass. Public hearing webinars were held in November 2015 and the Council intends to approve the amendment for Secretarial review at the December 2015 meeting.

***Snapper Grouper Amendment 36 (Spawning Special Management Zones)***

Amendment 36 would specify a process for identifying spawning sites/aggregations for snapper grouper species, including speckled hind and warsaw grouper, based on the characteristics of sites important for spawning (bottom topography, current systems, etc.). Spawning SMZs would only consider prohibiting fishing for and/or possession of snapper grouper species (species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit); fishing for all other species would be allowed. The amendment would also revise the boundary of the Charleston Deep Reef MPA, and includes an action to address transit and anchoring provisions within newly designated Spawning SMZs. Note: The Spawning SMZ approach would not make any changes to the existing MPAs. Alternatives to prohibit anchoring and allow transit are included. The Council added a sunset provision whereby the Spawning SMZs would automatically go away unless spawning is documented and the Council approves a framework action to reauthorize the Spawning SMZs.

The Council is developing a System Management Plan to specify the outreach, law enforcement, and monitoring/research projects necessary to effectively monitor and evaluate the existing MPAs. The necessary System Management Plan items for the Spawning SMZs will be added as an appendix to the amendment.

Scoping for this amendment took place in August 2014 and development continued in 2014. The Council reviewed the amendment at their March 2015 meeting and approved it for the first round of public hearings. Public hearings were held via webinar in April 2015 and during the June 2015 Council meeting. The Council reviewed public input and approved the amendment for more public hearings at the June 2015 meeting. A second round of hearings was held August 10-25, 2015. The Council reviewed public comments at their September 2015 meeting and approved all actions with preferred alternatives. DEIS comments will be reviewed and the Council is scheduled to approve the amendment for formal Secretarial review in March 2016.

### ***Snapper Grouper Amendment 37 (hogfish)***

This amendment previously included actions pertaining to multiple species but in June 2015, the Council revised the actions to include only actions for hogfish. Actions in Amendment 37 include modifying the FMU for hogfish (genetic evidence indicates three distinct stocks); revising MSY, MSST, ABC, ACLs, AMs and recreational ACT, as appropriate, for the two stocks in the SAFMC jurisdiction; establish a rebuilding plan for the Florida Keys/East Florida stock, and commercial and recreational management measures for each stock. The amendment was approved for scoping in June 2015. Scoping was held via webinar in August 2015. In September 2015, the Council reviewed scoping comments and reviewed actions/alternatives in the document. The Council requested revised projections from FWRI in September due to high recreational landings (recreational sector closed on August 24, 2015). Projections apply to the Florida Keys/East Florida stock as the GA-NC stock's ABC is being set using the ORCS approach. The Council will review the revised projections and provide guidance to staff at the December 2015 meeting. At their September 2015 meeting the Council requested that the SSC reconsider their ABC recommendation for the GA-NC stock and that a letter be sent to MRIP requesting an evaluation of hogfish landings in 2015. A letter expressing the SSC's and Council's concerns was sent to Dr. Van Voorhees at NMFS on October 21, 2015.

### ***Snapper Grouper Amendment 41 (mutton snapper)***

In June 2015, the Council directed staff to begin development of a new amendment that will include actions to revise the biological parameters, catch levels, and management measures for mutton snapper. The Council intended to approve the amendment for scoping at their September 2015 meeting but opted to delay work on the amendment to allow for higher priority items to be completed. The Council intends to approve this amendment for scoping at their December 2015 meeting.

### ***System Management Plan (Amendment 14 MPAs)***

The Council is developing a System Management Plan (SMP) to specify the outreach, law enforcement, and monitoring/research projects necessary to effectively monitor and evaluate the existing MPAs. Eventually, the SMP will be expanded to encompass all the Council's managed areas, with sections for MPAs, Spawning SMZs, SMZs, and Coral HAPCs. The Council reviewed a draft at the June meeting and directed staff to continue work with the goal of having a document ready for the December 2015 meeting.

### ***Joint Amendment 26 (king mackerel ACLs, re-designation of KM boundaries and mixing zone, and other king mackerel actions)***

This amendment contains actions to update the Gulf and Atlantic king mackerel ACLs based on the results of SEDAR 38; modify the stock boundary to be consistent with the stock boundary used in SEDAR 38; updated zone/subzone commercial quotas for Gulf king mackerel; revised sector allocations

for Gulf king mackerel; provision to allow bag limit sales of Atlantic king mackerel in the small coastal shark gillnet fishery; potential changes in management measures for the Florida East Coast subzone. South Atlantic scoping was held January/February 2015 and Gulf scoping was held in April 2015. At the joint meeting in June 2015, both Councils reviewed public input and provided direction to staff on actions and alternative for analysis. The Gulf Council will review the amendment in August 2015. The South Atlantic Council reviewed the amendment in September 2015. Approval for holding public hearings is expected at the December 2015 Council meeting. Public hearings would be in January 2016.

### ***Joint Amendment 28 (modification of king mackerel and Spanish mackerel commercial permits)***

This amendment considers ways to separate the commercial permits for king and Spanish mackerel into designated permits for each region. Currently there is one commercial king mackerel permit and one Spanish mackerel permit that allow harvest in the Gulf and South Atlantic regions. South Atlantic scoping was held in January 2014. The Gulf Council decided to postpone further development until after the results of SEDAR 38 were final. The South Atlantic Council directed staff presented a white paper at the September 2014 meetings on methods to separate permits for the regions. In March 2015 NOAA GC presented considerations for separating the FMP, but the South Atlantic Council approved a motion to stop development of Amendment 28. The Gulf Council scoped Amendment 28 actions in April 2015. At the joint meeting in June 2015, the Councils discussed Amendment 28 and the Gulf Council directed staff to continue development, but the South Atlantic Council decided not to move forward with the amendment. Subsequent to the joint June Council meeting, the Gulf Council at their August 2015 meeting decided to not to continue with Joint Amendment 28.

### ***Joint Commercial Logbook Amendment***

During the December 2012 meeting, the South Atlantic Council approved a motion moving the commercial logbook reporting action out of CE-BA 3 and indicated their wish to work with the Gulf Council on a joint amendment to address commercial logbook issues in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.

The amendment includes an action to consider modifying the timing of reporting requirements for commercial logbooks in fisheries for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagic resources, dolphin/wahoo, and golden crab fisheries, and providing an option for logbooks to be submitted electronically. Currently, logbook reports from commercial fishermen targeting snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagic, and dolphin/wahoo must be submitted to the Science and Research Director postmarked no later than 7 days after the end of each fishing trip. Logbook reporting forms for golden crab must be submitted to the Science and Research Director postmarked no later than 30 days after sale of the golden crab offloaded from a trip. The amendment also considers requiring that the components of the commercial logbooks (landings, economic, and bycatch) be submitted within 21 days after the end of each trip. This would increase the timeline for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagic, and dolphin/wahoo fishermen to complete logbooks, and decrease the timeline for golden crab fishermen. Commercial electronic logbooks, as proposed in this amendment, would not be used to monitor annual catch limits; however, they could serve as a means to verify dealer reports and comply with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program standards that require two sources for verification of quota-monitored species. It is the Council's intent that NMFS use the commercial logbook landings, with the new timing and compliance requirements specified in this amendment, to compare with commercial trip ticket landings to help ensure the commercial ACLs are not exceeded.



At their June 2013 meeting, the Council approved scheduling a NMFS SEFSC presentation on the details of the commercial electronic logbook pilot study at the September 2013 meeting. The Council receives updates at each Council meeting. SA Council staff has been working with Gulf Council and NMFS staff to plan for completion of the amendment incorporating results from year 1 of the pilot study and target regulations being effective on January 1, 2016.

Note: The Council directed staff to work with the SERO, SEFSC, and ACCSP staff to provide a mechanism whereby commercial fishermen could voluntarily provide their commercial logbook data electronically rather than using the paper logbook. The Council has been receiving updates at each meeting and the plan is to have this option available in the fall.

### ***Joint Charterboat Logbook Amendment***

During the March 2015 meeting, the South Atlantic Council approved draft actions/alternatives that would require weekly electronic reporting by charter vessels. The actions/alternatives are patterned after the recently implemented headboat electronic reporting requirements. The Councils reviewed the amendment at the Joint Council meeting in Key West in June 2015. In September 2015, the South Atlantic Council directed the IPT to revise the amendment to be for South Atlantic charter vessels only. In December 2015, the South Atlantic Council will review the amendment and approve for public hearings to be held in January 2016.

### ***Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 3 (bycatch)***

The action in CE-BA 3 considers improvements in bycatch/discard data collection methods to better quantify all sources of fishing mortality in South Atlantic fisheries. Alternatives consider expanding aspects of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program's Release, Discard and Protected Species Module to coastal migratory pelagic (SA Council area only) and dolphin and wahoo fisheries; and also implementing a commercial observer program at 2-5% coverage levels for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagic (SA Council area only), dolphin and wahoo, and golden crab vessels.

Based on discussions at the September 2014 Council meeting, the SEFSC/SERO agreed to draft a comprehensive bycatch reporting system for the southeast. The SEFSC and SERO will provide an update on their efforts at each Council meeting. The Council's intent is that the bycatch reporting system would be specified and implemented through this amendment. The Council reviewed the measures in CE-BA 3 in September 2015.

### ***Joint South Florida Amendment***

The Joint Council Committee on South Florida Management Issues (Joint Council Committee) was formed in response to a South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) motion in June 2011. The group was first convened in January of 2014 to begin discussing management needs of south Florida species, which roughly refers to those areas adjacent to the Floridian peninsula and south of 28° North latitude. The South Atlantic Council appointed their Executive Committee to represent the Council during development of this amendment with recommendations going from the Executive Committee to the South Atlantic Council. The Gulf Council appointed an Ad Hoc Committee to represent the Gulf Council with recommendations going first to the Reef Fish Committee and then the Gulf Council.

Prior to the Joint Council Committee meetings, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FL FWC) held a series of South Florida workshops in August of 2013. The results of these workshops were discussed at the January 2014 Joint Council Committee meeting and the full summaries are in Appendix

A. These workshops and the public input at the Committee meetings represent scoping as required by MSA and NEPA.

The Commission and Councils are responding to various suggestions for addressing the inconsistencies in management across the three jurisdictions (Gulf Council, South Atlantic Council, and State of Florida) in south Florida that arose prior to and during the scoping workshops and Committee meetings.

During the Joint Council Session in June 2015, the Councils made changes to the amendment and directed staff to modify the document and bring it back to the Gulf Council in August and the South Atlantic in September. The Council addressed the amendment at the September 2015 meeting and directed staff to work on a separate South Atlantic/Gulf amendment to address Actions 2 (consolidate yellowtail ABC/ACL) and 13 (accountability measures for yellowtail) from the Joint South Florida Amendment and have the South Atlantic be administrative lead.

### ***Dolphin Wahoo Regulatory Amendment 1 (commercial trip limit for dolphin)***

In September 2015, the Council directed staff to begin development of a regulatory amendment to consider trip limits for dolphin. Public hearings were held via webinar in November 2015 and the Council intends to approve the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce at their December 2015 meeting.

### ***New Coral Amendment (rock shrimp allowable areas)***

In June 2015, the Council directed staff to start work on an amendment to change the eastern boundary of the northern extension and to develop allowable fishing areas for rock shrimp.

### ***Oculina 5-Year Evaluation***

The Council and staff completed the Oculina 5-year evaluation during 2015. The final report will be approved at the Council's March 2016 meeting.

### ***Habitat/Ecosystem Management***

The Council and staff continued to work on issues related to habitat including policy statements and commenting on projects that may impact EFH and EFH/HAPCs. Council staff continued to coordinate with partners to move closer to development of an ecosystem model and ecosystem management for the Council's area of management.

## **SAFMC Visioning Project**

Since December 2012, the Council has been working on a Visioning Project to develop a long-term plan for the snapper grouper fishery. Below is list of some of the Council's accomplishments during 2015.

- Continued Visioning workshops at each Council meeting in 2015 (4 total) to further refine the strategies and actions proposed in the draft Vision Blueprint.
- Organized and facilitated 22 public input meetings and webinars throughout North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida between July and August 2015 to collect direct feedback from fishery stakeholders on the draft Vision Blueprint. Webinars were held on each strategic goal area – Science, Management, Communication, and Governance. Council members and staff also facilitated webinars in conjunction with comment station meetings to collect specific input from stakeholders on actions they support and do not support in the draft Vision Blueprint. Over 360 stakeholders participated in the webinars and comment station meetings.

Over 130 written comments were also received. Results from the public input meetings were summarized for each state and for each goal in the draft Vision Blueprint and presented to the Council in September 2015.

- Developed promotional flyers for the public input meetings that were distributed electronically to over 2,500 fishery stakeholders and by mail to over 1,900 federal commercial snapper grouper permit holders (225-lb limited and unlimited), for-hire snapper grouper permit holders, and federal snapper grouper dealers. See:  
[http://safmc.net/sites/default/files/Visioning%20Project/2015DraftVisionBlueprint/SAFMC\\_VisionBlueprintFlyer\\_Jun2015.pdf](http://safmc.net/sites/default/files/Visioning%20Project/2015DraftVisionBlueprint/SAFMC_VisionBlueprintFlyer_Jun2015.pdf)
- Updated the Visioning Project web page on the Council's website with information on the public input meetings and draft Vision Blueprint documents. (See:  
<http://www.safmc.net/resource-library/council-visioning-project>
- Developed a web-based public input comment form and posted it on the Council's website to collect additional comments and ideas from fishery stakeholders. The web comment form lists the same discussion items that were discussed at the in-person port meetings and asked for additional ideas. See <http://www.safmc.net/resource-library/comment-form-vision-blueprint-snapper-grouper-fishery>
- In October 2015, Council staff organized and facilitated a 2-day Council Visioning Workshop for Council members. The goal of the workshop was to finalize and prioritize action items in the draft Vision Blueprint based on 2015 public input and Council deliberation. The workshop used breakout group sessions to discuss and prioritize strategies under each of the four goal areas. Additionally, the Council developed example ideas for amendment approaches that will take priority actions from the Vision Blueprint and put them into action through the amendment development process. Council also developed an evaluation plan to periodically review the Vision Blueprint.
- At the December 2015 meeting, the Council will have a final visioning workshop during the Council meeting and will adopt the Vision Blueprint and discuss approaches for implementing priority actions from the Blueprint for 2016-2020.

## **SAFMC Fishery Citizen Science Initiative**

In March 2015, based on the growing interest and need to collect more data to better manage South Atlantic fisheries, the Council formed a citizen science organizing committee to explore the possibility of developing a citizen science program in the region. The organizing committee is made up of Council members, Council staff, NOAA Fisheries staff and Pew Charitable Trust partners. The committee was tasked with developing a vision for a fishery citizen science program and identifying steps to initiate a program in the region. To help identify the components and scope of a program of this nature, the committee is organizing a workshop on January 19-21, 2016 to bring together fishermen and scientists to develop the framework for what a fishery citizen science program may entail and bring forward recommendations to the Council on how to implement a program.