

4.4 Allow NMFS Regional Administrator (RA) to Make Adjustments to Vermilion Snapper Management Measures

Alternative 1. No Action. Do not allow the NMFS Regional Administrator (RA) to make adjustments to the management measures based on outcome of new vermilion snapper benchmark assessment.

Alternative 2 (Preferred). Allow the NMFS Regional Administrator (RA) to make adjustments to the management measures as specified in Table 4-79 based on the outcome of new vermilion snapper SEDAR benchmark assessment.

Discussion

In order to meet the Magnuson-Stevens Act one-year requirement to prepare an amendment to end overfishing (the Council was notified about overfishing of vermilion snapper in June 2007), the Council has specified management measures based on the existing assessment (SEDAR Update #3 2007). The updated assessment was based on length data. The Council requested a new stock assessment based on ages rather than lengths. The new, age-based, benchmark assessment will be completed in late 2008, too late for the Council to include in Snapper Grouper Amendment 16. Therefore, the Council has specified a measure that allows the NMFS Regional Administrator (RA) to determine the actual vermilion snapper regulations that will be implemented in the final rule for Snapper Grouper Amendment 16 in response to the new benchmark assessment. The following two tables (Tables 4-79 and 4-80) provide the specific guidance to be used by the NMFS RA in determining the actual regulations.

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) will review the SEDAR Benchmark Assessment (available in late 2008) to determine whether it is based on the best available science. The SSC will then provide management advice regarding vermilion snapper to the Council at the December 2008 Council meeting, including the final TAC which will be used to determine the commercial quota.

The SEDAR Benchmark Assessment and SSC review will result in a new numerical estimate of OY that has been specified by the Council as the yield at 75% F_{MSY} . That is, the new value for OY replaces the current value which is 628,459 pounds whole weight (566,179 pounds gutted weight) shown in Table 4-52a. (Note: The values for 65% and 85% of F_{MSY} will also change based on the new F_{MSY} from the new age-based benchmark assessment/SSC review.) The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) (Table 4-53) would be respecified as the new value of yield at F_{OY} . The TAC would be allocated 68% to the commercial sector and 32% to the recreational sector and the new values will replace those found in Table 4-54a.

For the commercial sector, the new quota would be divided 50% to the period January 1st through June 30th and 50% to the period July 1st through December 31st. Then post quota bycatch mortality (PQBM) would be estimated and deducted, to provide new values for the directed commercial quotas shown in Table 4-61. Examples based on 10% - 60% are shown in Table 4-80. However, the actual values will be calculated from the new commercial quota as described above.

For the recreational sector, the new recreational allocation that replaces the value in Table 4-54a would be compared to the average 2004-2006 recreational landings (Table 4-54b) to determine the percentage reduction needed and this value will replace the value specified in Table 4-55. The following two examples explain what would be implemented for the recreational sector in the final rule for Snapper Grouper Amendment 16:

Example 1. If the recreational percentage reduction required is 23% that is in the range (15.0%-24.9%) specified for Alternative 2B. in Table 4-79. Therefore, the recreational measures would remain at 12" TL minimum size limit, 10 fish bag limit, and no closure. Amendment 13C increased the size limit of vermilion snapper taken by recreational fishermen from 11 inches TL to 12 inches TL. Combined with the reduction provided by excluding the captain and crew from retaining vermilion snapper, the increased minimum size limit in Snapper Grouper Amendment 13C is estimated to provide a 27.5% reduction in harvest, assuming 25% of the fish released do not survive. Therefore, the RA would not make any changes to management measures beyond those imposed though Amendment 13C if the new, age-based SEDAR benchmark assessment indicated needed reductions were less than 30%.

Example 2. If the recreational percentage reduction required is 36% that is in the range (35.0%-44.9%) specified for Alternative 2D. in Table 4-79. Therefore, the recreational measures to be implemented in the final rule for Snapper Grouper Amendment 16 would remain at 12" TL minimum size limit but the bag limit would decrease from 10 to 9 vermilion snapper and there would be a recreational closure from November through March.

To make the recreational season closure as effective as possible, the Council also specified that for a person on board a vessel or for which a valid federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper grouper has been issued, the provisions of the vermilion snapper closure apply in the South Atlantic, regardless of where such fish are harvested, that is, in State or Federal waters.

Table 4-79. Commercial and recreational management measures to be employed by NMFS RA based on reduction harvest needed to achieve the yield at F_{OY}.

Commercial quota to be divided into two seasons – January-June and July-December. Recreational measures would eliminate captain and crew from retaining the bag limit.

%REDUCTION	COMMERCIAL	RECREATONAL
Alternative 2A. 10% (5.0 – 14.9%)	QUOTA ALLOCATED BY SEASON	12”, 10 FISH & NO CLOSURE
Alternative 2B. 20% (15.0 – 24.9%)	QUOTA ALLOCATED BY SEASON	12”, 10 FISH & NO CLOSURE
Alternative 2C. 30% (25.0 – 34.9%)	QUOTA ALLOCATED BY SEASON	12”, 9 FISH & NO CLOSURE
Alternative 2D. 40% (35.0 – 44.9%)	QUOTA ALLOCATED BY SEASON	12”, 9 FISH & NOV- MARCH CLOSURE
Alternative 2E. 50% (45.0 – 54.9%)	QUOTA ALLOCATED BY SEASON	12”, 5 FISH & NOV- MARCH CLOSURE
Alternative 2F. 60% (55.0 – 64.9%)	QUOTA ALLOCATED BY SEASON	12”, 5 FISH & OCT – APRIL CLOSURE

Table 4-80. Directed quota associated with reduction in harvest required from new vermilion snapper assessment.

Reduction	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	58%*	60%
Commercial quota	832,744	740,217	647,690	555,163	462,636	385,002	370,108
Jan-June 50%	416,372	370,108	323,845	277,581	231,318	192,501	185,054
PQBM	6,000	9,000	11,000	16,000	19,000	24,000	24,000
Directed quota Jan- June	410,372	361,108	312,845	261,581	212,318	168,501	161,054
July-Dec 50%	416,372	370,108	323,845	277,581	231,318	192,501	185,054
PQBM	19,000	21,000	24,000	29,000	34,000	37,000	37,000
Directed quota July- Dec	397,372	349,108	299,845	248,581	197,318	155,501	148,054

Rebuilding projections from new assessment could have different values for quotas associated with required reduction. These values are estimates until new assessment becomes available. Reduction is based on average landings from 2004-2006 (925,271 lbs gutted weight).

* Values from Alternative 3a in Section 4.2.4.