

MPAs & HAPCs for Speckled Hind & Warsaw Grouper

SAFMC Staff Recommendations
February 22, 2012

The Council will be reviewing CEBA-3 scoping comments and determining the appropriate approach to address bycatch mortality for speckled hind and Warsaw grouper at the March 5-9, 2012 Council meeting. All harvest or possession of speckled hind and Warsaw grouper is prohibited in Federal waters (3-200 miles, NC through the Atlantic side of the Florida Keys) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) & Annual Catch Limit (ACL) have been set at zero landings; Overfishing Level (OFL) is unknown. However, there is bycatch while targeting other species. The 240 foot closure provided some protection but the Council has proposed eliminating this closure through Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 11 (currently under review).

We are suggesting the Council provide direction to staff at the March meeting on the following:

DECISION #1. Type of Closures to be evaluated

DECISION #2. Approaches for developing potential permanent area closures (MPAs)

DECISION #3. Guidance on what percentage (of occurrence or habitat) is “appropriate” to be closed

DECISION #4. Who develops alternative sites?

DECISION #5. What type of help should NMFS be providing in this process?

TIMING/APPROACH (lumping versus splitting)

These decisions/issues are outlined on the following pages.

DECISION #1. Type of Closures to be evaluated:

Alternative 1. Seasonal closure to target spawning seasons.

Discussion

This would result in protection during the spawning season but would allow bycatch mortality during the rest of the year.

Alternative 2. Spawning closures to protect spawning aggregations.

Discussion

This would result in protection of spawning aggregations but would allow bycatch mortality while fishing in the open areas/times.

Alternative 3. Permanent area closures where all bottom fishing is prohibited (same type of MPAs currently in place).

Discussion

This would result in year-round protection and would eliminate all bycatch mortality from within the MPAs. There would still be some level of bycatch mortality from fishing in the open areas.

Alternative 4. Others??

DECISION #2. Approaches for developing potential permanent area closures (MPAs)
(Note: Assumes Alternative 3 from Decision #1 is chosen.):

Alternative 1. Use the known distribution (sites of occurrence) of speckled hind and Warsaw grouper as reflected in data from analyses in Regulatory Amendment 11 (this was also used for the Scoping Document) and additional known sites of occurrence provided by fishermen and from scoping during CEBA-3.

Discussion

This would result in protection based on where these two species were observed, sampled, or caught in the past.

Alternative 2. Use the known habitat distribution of speckled hind and Warsaw grouper similar to what was done for deepwater corals (areas of similar habitat would be expected to contain the species and once sampled, they are found).

Discussion

This would result in protection based on the habitat distribution of these two species.

Alternative 3. Others???

DECISION #3. Guidance on what percentage (of occurrence or habitat) is “appropriate” to be closed:

We have requested the NMFS SERO work with the NMFS SEFSC to provide guidance on what percentage (of occurrence or habitat) is “appropriate” to be closed. We are also asking the Council’s Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) to evaluate this and provide recommendations during their April 3-5, 2012 meeting in Savannah, GA.

One could suggest 10% or 20% and correlate it to 10% or 20% SPR as a MSY or overfishing target. If one wanted to be more conservative, one could suggest 30% and correlate it to 30% SPR or 40% and 40% SPR as an OY level.

Reasonable Range of Alternatives:

Alternative 1. No Action. Currently X% of the known distribution of speckled hind and Y% of Warsaw grouper are contained in the existing MPAs and Oculina Experimental Closed Area.

Discussion

The first step is to determine the % distribution or % habitat currently closed through the existing MPAs and Oculina Experimental Closed Area (No Action). We concluded it would be difficult to assign much, if any, benefit to the existing Coral HAPCs because vertical gear is still allowed in those areas and the depth is deeper than the majority of speckled hind and Warsaw grouper. The one exception to this would be the areas off Florida.

Alternative 2. Establish a goal of 10%.

Alternative 3. Establish a goal of 20%

Alternative 4. Establish a goal of 30%

Alternative 5. Establish a goal of 40%

Alternative 6. Other% ????

DECISION #4. Who develops alternative sites?

We are providing the capability for the Council, Advisory Panels (APs), and public to modify existing MPAs (first) and then draw new MPAs (second) and in each case calculating the percentage of known distribution or known habitat included. We are proposing that this approach be used with the SSC during their April 3-5, 2012 meeting in Savannah, GA; with the Snapper Grouper AP during their April 18-19, 2012 meeting in Charleston, SC; and with the public during the 5 workshops to be held prior to the Council's June 11-15, 2012 meeting in Orlando, FL (should the Council approve these workshops).

Suggested alternative MPA sites from the APs, SSC (if any), and Workshops would be presented to the Council in June. The Council would then need to balance the recommendations from the SSC, NMFS SEFSC/SERO, and NGO's on what the correct percentage is to protect these two stocks with the resulting impacts on fishermen. This will be similar to what was done for our existing Coral HAPCs and allowable golden crab fishing areas and shrimp areas.

DECISION #5. What type of help should NMFS be providing in this process?

How do we measure impacts? We are still stuck with those large statistical grids for commercial and some finer resolution for the headboat and MRFSS/MRIP catch data. We have requested the SERO develop a way to model the distribution of catches within the statistical grids such that once the Council chooses an area, we could then determine the percent of catch of each sector (commercial, headboat, & charter/private) in the proposed area.

We propose having NMFS analyze the reduction in catches assuming a 10%, 20%, 30%, and 40% reduction in catches and provide this information to the Council for the June meeting to frame the level of impacts. The finer resolution of impacts could be done after the Council chooses alternatives for public hearings at the June meeting.

TIMING/APPROACH (lumping versus splitting)

Our current plan is to provide the capability for choosing sites to the Council (but no consideration of actual sites) at the March meeting, get SSC and AP input in April, conduct workshops (if approved) prior to June, and then at the June meeting have the Council review SSC/AP/Workshop recommendations and approve alternatives for public hearings. We have dates set for our public hearings in August (see table below) and then final approval in September for implementation on January 1, 2013. We don't see how this can move any faster and right now our SAFMC Staff recommendation is to have this included in CEBA 3 which will have three major items: (1) Potential Coral HAPC adjustments – Ecosystem-Based Management Committee will work on the specifics, (2) Potential MPAs for Speckled hind & Warsaw grouper – Snapper Grouper Committee will work on the specifics; and (3) Permits, Data (including bycatch), & Recreational Tag program – Data Collection Committee will work on the specifics. We don't see any time savings (only workload increases) by splitting into two or three separate amendments but this is a decision for the Council in March.

SAFMC	NMFS
1. Scoping – Jan/Feb 2012; done.	Scoping – Jan/Feb 2012; done by SAFMC.
2. Review scoping comments & provide direction to staff – March 5-9, 2012 in Savannah, GA.	
3. SSC review – April 3-5, 2012 in Savannah, GA.	
4. AP review – April 18-19, 2012 in Charleston, SC.	
5. Public Workshops (5) – prior to June 1 st (if approved by the Council in March).	
6. Council reviews recommendations and selects alternatives for public hearing; approves for public hearings – June 11-15, 2012 in Orlando, FL.	DEIS Comment Period – must begin on or before Friday, July 21, 2012 for the DEIS comment period to end by start of Council's September 10-14, 2012 meeting.
7. Public Hearings: (a) August 6 – Pooler, GA (b) August 7 – Jacksonville, FL (c) August 8 – Cocoa/Canaveral, FL (d) August 9 – Key Largo, FL (e) August 14 – Charleston, SC (f) August 16 – New Bern, NC	
8. Council reviews public hearing input and DEIS comments – September 10-14, 2012 in Charleston, SC.	
9. Council approves for formal review – September 10-14, 2012 in Charleston, SC.	
10. Council approves for formal review – December 3-7, 2012 in Atlantic Beach, NC.	
11. Send to SOC by September 27 th or December 13 th , 2012.	
12. Target implementation January 1 st or May 1 st , 2013.	