

# Summary Report

## **Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting Technical Advisory Panel**

Meeting 4: August 15, 2023

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting Technical Advisory Panel (AP) convened via webinar on August 15, 2023.

AP members approved the agenda for the meeting. There was no public comment offered.

### **1. Comment on potential Council actions in Snapper Grouper Amendment 46 (Private Recreational Permitting)**

After reviewing background information on recent Council actions related to Snapper Grouper Amendment 46, the AP reviewed actions in the amendment, providing the following comments and recommendations for the Council's consideration:

**\*AP recommendations are highlighted.**

#### **Action 1. Establish a private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess Snapper Grouper species in the South Atlantic region**

##### Integration into the MRIP survey and sampling framework

- **The AP reiterated support for a consistent approach to permitting throughout the region to maximize the utility of a private recreational permit.**
- Either an angler or vessel based permit can be integrated into the existing or potential new sampling and survey framework within the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP).
  - There is not much difference in the level of improvements that would occur between the two permit types. Both permit types offer a structure level gain in the precision of estimates. From there, additional design changes would determine whether one permit type is better than the other.
  - A vessel based permit does not create an impediment since MRIP utilizes a household based sampling framework. As long as address information is included in the permit information, either type of permit can be utilized.
- There are net advantages for a vessel based permit over an angler based permit.
  - Whether using the existing MRIP Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) or a potential new sampling framework, the vessel ID is readily available to identify the permit holder.
    - Easy to identify for the field sampler and easier for permit holder since each angler would not need to be asked for additional documentation (i.e. their permit information).
      - This could also be a touchy subject for both the sampler and the angler if the angler is not permitted but should be according to the requirement.

- If a census level reporting approach for some species were to be implemented in the future, a vessel based permit would be better.
- If a private recreational snapper grouper permit is implemented, consider a “hybrid approach” to create a new sampling framework.
  - While not within the Council’s set of responsibilities but related to the Council’s implementation of a permit, MRIP and states could work together to develop a standalone effort survey that focuses specifically on snapper grouper species that is integrated into APAIS.
  - A vessel based permit would make this approach more feasible and easier to implement.

Compatibility with existing state efforts

- A federal permit requirement would not be detrimental to the existing Florida State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS) efforts.
  - Although the FL State Reef Fish Angler designation is angler based, it is required for private anglers or divers fishing from a private vessel.
  - A vessel based permit would not be an impediment to SRFS.

Potential funding options

- The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has provided a notable amount of additional multi-year funding to NOAA Fisheries.
- IRA funding could be used over the next several years to support the development of a private recreational permitting system and snapper grouper-focused sampling framework.
  - These funds could be used to “bridge the gap” between developing the permitting program and securing re-occurring funds to maintain the program in the long-term.
  - Development of some revised reef fish sampling efforts on the Gulf coast were initially supported by funds from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill that bridged the gap between development and long-term implementation.
- Funding is an important aspect of developing a permitting system. The AP suggests that the Council consider recommending that NOAA Fisheries use IRA funds to support the development of a private recreational permitting system.

Likelihood of permit use by MRIP

- The permit will be used by MRIP and integrated into the existing framework. However, it is important to be mindful of expectations.
- As soon as the permit information is available, it can be used to supplement the Fishing Effort Survey (FES) framework to better stratify sampling.
- Supplementary use of the permit to increase its utility, including further improvements to the precision and accuracy of recreational data estimates, would be determined by additional efforts towards sampling revisions or new programs that could be developed. These potential efforts would be dependent on the resources (funding and staffing) that are made available.
- Creating the permit creates the option to make such improvements.

Recommendation on Action 1

- When weighing benefits and drawbacks of each permit type, “on net” a vessel-based permit is preferable.
- **The AP recommends Alternative 2 in Action 1.**  
**Alternative 2.** Require a federal permit for all vessels participating in the private recreational component of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

#### Additional comments

- There is some concern over enforcement of a permit requirement. Proper enforcement will be important to maximize the utility of a permit.
- The AP expressed interest in potential integration of state waters into future permitting and sampling efforts. This will depend on the development of a future “hybrid” approach to sampling as well as state interest in integrating a snapper grouper permit that would cover state waters.

### **Action 2. Specify the species that would be covered by a private recreational snapper grouper permit**

#### Compatibility with existing state efforts

- Florida SRFS efforts will not be compromised as long as all of the SRFS species are also covered by the federal permit. Including additional species would not be problematic.
- It was noted that the species originally covered by SRFS needed to be expanded after initial implementation, which caused some challenges.
  - Requires special treatment of baseline data for the new species that were not originally covered.

#### Species covered by the permit in relation to subsequent survey and sampling efforts

- Since reporting is no longer being considered, there is little downside to being more inclusive of species.
  - Being more inclusive of species increases the utility of the permit and the potential options that may be pursued in the future.
    - Also aligns with the AP’s task and the Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program’s “all species” approach to data collection.
  - Covering more species than may be used in subsequent targeted sampling efforts is not particularly problematic.
- There are some downsides to being less inclusive of species.
  - Narrows the utility of the permit.
  - It is difficult to add new species. The AP does not recommend starting with a smaller list with the intent of expanding in the future.

#### Recommendation on Action 2

- **The AP recommends Alternative 2 in Action 2.** There is little to no downside of being more inclusive of species but there is a cost if more species need to be added. **Suggest initially capturing all species that may be needed currently and in the future.**

**Alternative 2.** A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

### **Action 3. Specify the effective term of a private recreational snapper grouper permit**

#### General comments

- In Georgia, the saltwater angler designation was originally valid for the calendar year in which it was issued. This was unpopular among anglers and the preference was for the designation to remain valid for one year from issuance. The designation was later changed to match this preference.
- **Alternative 3** (valid for one year from issuance) is consistent with the Large Pelagics Survey. Allowing a rolling renewal does no harm and adds value by increasing the timeliness of the permit holder information.

#### Recommendation on Action 3

- Although it was noted that the action may be removed from the amendment, the AP offered general support for **Alternative 3** in **Action 3** for consideration by the Council if the action were to remain in the amendment or for NOAA Fisheries if the decision is deferred to the agency.
  - **Alternative 3.** A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would remain valid for one year from issuance.

### **Action 4. Establish a mechanism that would allow a state to opt out of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region**

#### Compatibility across the region

- There are no compatibility concerns since there is only a permitting requirement being considered without reporting and any permit would cover the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- The criteria for the state-based permits need to match the federal criteria.
  - Need to maintain a common design, ideally across all ocean areas.
  - Even if some states rely on the federal permit while others create their own permit, the common design will allow comparability of estimates across the EEZ since this area will be covered by all permits.
  - Other options where the state and federal requirements are not in alignment may create the need for additional calibrations.
- Having some states rely on the federal permit while others develop a state-based equivalent permit would create a potential issue if mandatory reporting is implemented in the future.
  - If mandatory reporting program is ever implemented, then there would not likely be compatibility issues if the focus is only on the EEZ.
    - If the focus is on the EEZ and state waters, then there could be some issue with compatibility of data between states and across the region.

#### Recommendation on Action 4

- The AP recommends **Alternative 2, Sub-alternatives 2a, 2b, and 2c in Action 4.**  
**Alternative 2.** A state could opt out of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit requirement provided that the state implements equivalent measures that at a minimum includes the following:
  - Sub-alternative 2a.** The same entities from the federal permit requirement.
  - Sub-alternative 2b.** The same snapper grouper species from the federal permit requirement.
  - Sub-alternative 2c.** The state permit would remain valid for the same period of time as the federal permit requirement.

The education related actions in Amendment 46 were not covered at this meeting due to time constraints.

#### **Other Business**

There were no items under other business.

#### **Advisory Panel Members**

Luiz Barbieri, FL FWC, Chair  
Amy Dukes, SC DNR, Vice-Chair  
John Foster, NMFS/S&T/MRIP  
Kathy Knowlton, GA DNR  
Kai Lorenzen, SSC and UF  
Jeffrey Moore, NC DMF  
Bev Sauls, FL FWC  
Geoff White, ACCSP