

Overview of SAFMC Actions to Address Overfishing of Red Snapper

December 2023

1. Council receives results of SEDAR 73 in **June 2021**

- a. Stock not yet rebuilt and experiencing overfishing
- b. No SSC catch level recommendations available

2. SSC meets in **July 2021** to develop catch level recommendations

3. **September 2021 Council meeting**

Short Term:

- a. Direction to develop an immediate framework action to reduce discards, considering gear modifications suggested by SG AP (single hook rigs, larger hooks, leader modifications, natural bait prohibition, slot limit)
 - i. develop a framework amendment that explores and considers changes to the following management measures for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery:
 - 1. gear modifications: single hook rigs, larger hooks, leader modifications, natural bait prohibition
 - 2. time/spatial closures of the snapper grouper fishery based on current data
 - 3. slot or maximum size limits
 - ii. in development of the framework amendment, reference commentary from the fishery through previous visioning efforts and characterize effects by sector and component (private/for-hire)
 - iii. if persistent difficulties prevent quick implementation of the framework amendment, fold changes into the plan amendment
 - iv. Council anticipated that this framework would be approved and implemented quickly

Long Term:

- a. Direction to support increased outreach and BFP activities – expand Release app to improve info on discards of Red Snapper for the next assessment
- b. Created a workgroup to lead an MSE approach to develop management strategies that reduce discards and increase landed yield across the entire SG fishery
- c. Initiate FMP amendment to revise catch levels and incorporate results of the MSE project and additional recommendations of the SG AP (time/area closures, alternative harvest season timing, recreational fishing license (permit))
- d. consider adjusting the SEDAR schedule for a research track assessment of Red Snapper to replace the scheduled assessment of White Grunt and adjust the timing such that the Red Snapper assessment would be after the expected completion of the South Atlantic Red Snapper Count (end of 2024)
- e. begin work on a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) of the snapper grouper fishery and a longer-term plan amendment that would use SSC recommendations, results of the MSE, and any information on effects of the framework amendment to adjust catch levels for Red Snapper and adjust management measures for the snapper grouper fishery.

4. December 2021 Council meeting

Short Term:

- a. Direction to compile information or analysis to inform whether a demonstrable change in recreational dead discards can be estimated. Include information on area closures (by depth, hot spots), gear modifications, weight limit per person, seasons, and considering sector and regional differences.
- b. Direction to add an action to revise the ABC, including options to adopt the SSC's recommended level and alternatives for other levels based on gear modification impacts or other potential actions.
 - a. The addition of an action to revise the ABC to the framework amendment was due to concerns that including it in the Plan Amendment, as discussed at the prior meeting, would take too long and not be consistent with MSA requirements to set ABC at or below the SSC's recommended level.
- c. Begin gathering general public input through informal scoping prior to the March 2022 Council meeting to solicit additional ideas.
- d. Request that the SSC review potential management changes in April 2022 and determine whether there is information to estimate reduced dead releases and an associated adjustment to the recommended Red Snapper ABC.

Long Term:

- a. Staff presented a proposed work plan for a project evaluating management strategies for the snapper grouper fishery (Management Strategy Evaluation). The work plan included a project description, potential timeline, participants, budget, and preliminary goals. The Committee supported the project, approved funding, and directed and directed staff to proceed.

5. March 2022 Council meeting

Short term:

- a. Initiate Regulatory Amendment 35 (formerly referred to as a "framework amendment") to incorporate catch levels for Red Snapper based on SEDAR 73
- b. Develop analyses of potential effects on snapper grouper species (prioritizing Red Snapper) based on time, area, and depth restrictions. Analyses should consider:
 - i. Depth zone definition and delineation options (shallow, middle, offshore), considering effects of barotrauma by depth on species that have information available.
 - ii. Estimates of commercial and recreational discards and discard mortalities for assessed stocks (annual estimates and regional or seasonal variability for Red Snapper and overfished stocks).
 - iii. Species that should be considered for exemption from seasonal regulations.
 - iv. Table of spawning seasons (focusing on Red Snapper and overfished stocks).
 - v. Annual, seasonal, and regional trips targeting or catching Red Snapper or overfished stocks.
 - vi. Pros/cons of impacts to commercial and for-hire sectors of potential management approaches.
 1. Impacts of changes to sectors/components.
 2. Fishery-independent surveys for spatial area analysis to identify hotspots.
 3. Qualitative scaling of benefits/challenges.

- vii. Compile previous discussions of social and economic impacts from the recent Commercial 2 for 1 Permit white paper, Commercial Visioning Blueprint, Buck (2018), and Amendment 17A.
- viii. Have SEP and SSC discuss information that could be considered in analyses for this amendment.

Long Term:

- a. Staff developed a Request for Proposals to conduct a multi-species MSE for the snapper grouper fishery (closing date: March 2022)
- b. Review Panel selected Blue Matter Science as the contractor (project start date: July 2022)

6. June 2022 Council meeting

Short Term:

- a. Council staff presented [compilation of information requested in March 2022](#)
- b. Direction to include in Reg 35:
 - i. Red Snapper catch levels
 - ii. Gear modifications
 - 1. prohibition of electric reels
 - 2. require single hook rigs
 - iii. Outreach and education
 - iv. Time/area restrictions (alternative timing of Red Snapper season, season with recreational maximum depth limit, wave closures)
- c. Some actions were not considered appropriate for the Regulatory Amendment
 - i. Council discussed and provided rationale for not considering changes in allocations for Red Snapper in this regulatory amendment
 - ii. The SSC recommended that analyzing spatial and time closures would take significant time and would not likely be completed within the intended timeline for Regulatory Amendment 35

Long term:

- a. Include spatial and time closures in the MSE so that the impact to the fishery could be analyzed if a spatial or seasonal closure occurred due to Red Snapper discards.

7. September 2022 Council meeting

Short term:

- a. NMFS SERO presents current information and potential strategies for addressing management of red snapper.
- b. Council staff presents options paper and a [data report](#) responding to the June 2022 requests
- c. Council approves motion to continue work on Reg 35 with the goal of taking final action by March 2023
- d. Direction to add appendix to Reg 35 to promote BFPs and expand BFP education and outreach
- e. Direction to add a mandatory education component on BFPs to another amendment (was added to SG Am 46)
- f. Requested additional sensitivity runs from SEFSC (reduce annual discard estimates by 50% and assume 100% compliance with descending devices)

8. October 2022 SG AP and SSC meetings

- a. MSE presentations and feedback

9. December 2022 Council meeting

Short Term:

- a. Direction to staff to add more discussion to Regulatory Amendment 35 about other ongoing Red Snapper and snapper grouper management and science activities that could impact dead discards, including the South Atlantic snapper grouper management strategy evaluation (MSE), Estimation of US Atlantic Red Snapper Abundance, and other studies being conducted in the region.
- b. Approved Reg 35 for public hearings

Long Term:

- a. Council requested that the MSE contractors provide an update the Council in March 2023

10. March 2023 Council meeting

Short Term:

- a. SERO briefed the Council on EFP proposals that will be focused on reducing discards of Red Snapper and testing of potential management strategies. A separate path for experimental commercial fishing opportunities is being developed through internal funding.
- b. Council finalized Reg 35 and approved it for formal review

Long Term:

- a. The SG Committee received a presentation on MSEs from Blue Matter Science. Blue Matter Science described preliminary information being included in the MSE, and discussions at the most recent Snapper Grouper AP and SSC meetings. The Committee recommended reviewing the Visioning Project and a report by Kari Buck on alternative recreational management approaches presented to the Council in March 2019 as potential sources of management approaches. The Committee provided guidance on conceptual management options and key uncertainties.
- b. Council provided input to the SEFSC on the FY2023 spend plan.
- c. Staff updated the Council on the Best Fishing Practice outreach expansion, including hiring of a Best Fishing Practices Outreach Specialist.
- d. Staff updated the Council on progression of the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program.
- e. The Council was notified of additional funding (\$1.8 million) to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to better understand discard rates and mortality in the snapper grouper fishery.
- f. SERO provided briefing on a Notice of Funding Opportunity/Exempted Fishing Permit for Red Snapper to test innovative ideas to reduce discards in the snapper grouper fishery.

11. September 2023 Council meeting

- a. Lunch with state reps and Council staff to discuss ideas for Notice of Funding Opportunity (proposals initially due November 6, 2023. Extended to Nov 20, 2023)
- b. Council requested adding discussion of Reg 35 to the December 2023 agenda:
In light of recent issues with the MRIP-FES, and the dependence of Red Snapper discard estimates on MRIP, the Council's intent is to reconsider whether to submit Reg 35 in

December 2023. If the decision is not to submit, then look at information that was compiled during development of Reg 35 and consider what additional information would be needed to consider a different “short-term” action (would need to conduct public meetings).

Additional considerations for red snapper management:

[South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program](#) – project is scheduled to be completed in fall 2025.

Red Snapper legislation – in October 2023 the House Natural Resources Committee voted to advance the Red Snapper Act.

This legislation is meant to delay implementation of area closures in the South Atlantic until the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program is complete and outputs from that project can be included in the stock assessment.