

Discussion Document for Updating the Goals and Objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic

Dolphin Wahoo Committee
March 2021

Introduction

The Fisheries Allocation Review Policy (NMFS Policy Directive 01-119) issued in July 2016 encourages the use of adaptive management in respect to allocation revisions, which includes “*periodic re-evaluation and updating of the management goals and objectives to ensure they are relevant to current conditions and needs.*” As part of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s (Council) process for creating an Allocation Review Trigger Policy, the goals and objectives of all fishery management plans (FMPs) that include sector allocations will be reviewed and updated as appropriate.

The Council has discussed revisions to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP’s goals and objectives over several meetings. Once approved by the Council in a final form, the revised goals and objectives will be implemented as part of the next plan amendment which will presumably be Amendment 10. At this meeting, the Dolphin Wahoo Committee (Committee) will be asked to review the revised goals and objectives of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP and provide recommendations on edits or additional items that should be considered. The intent is to receive final edits to the goals and objectives in preparation for the Council’s potential vote to approve Amendment 10 for Secretarial review at the June 2021 meeting.

Background

The existing goals and objectives

The goals and objectives of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP were implemented in the original plan¹ that went into place in 2004² and have not been revised since then. At the time that the Council was developing the original Dolphin Wahoo FMP, there was concern over increased overall landings of dolphin and wahoo. The Council was also proactively attempting to address potential commercial long line effort shifts towards dolphin that could have occurred due to consolidation within the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) fleet.

¹ The original Dolphin Wahoo FMP can be accessed at:
https://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/s_atl/dw/archives/dolphinwahoo_fmp_jan_2003.pdf

² The Federal Register notice implementing the original Dolphin Wahoo FMP can be found at:
https://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/policy_branch/rules/sa/dw/2004/fmp_fr_052704.pdf

The existing goals of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP are as follows:

“The overall goal of the fishery management plan for the South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, and New England Councils’ areas of jurisdiction is to adopt a precautionary and risk-averse approach to management which in the first instance attempts to maintain the status quo. This will require that current catch levels not be exceeded and that recent conflict between sectors of the fishery (commercial longliners and recreational fishermen) be resolved. Status quo should reflect trends (average catch and effort levels) in the fishery over the last five years 1993 through 1997.”

Owing to the significant importance of the dolphin/wahoo fishery to the recreational fishing community in the Atlantic, the goal of this fishery management plan is to maintain the current harvest level of dolphin and ensure that no new fisheries develop. With the potential for effort shifts in the historical longline fisheries for sharks, tunas, and swordfish, these shifts or expansions into nearshore coastal waters to target dolphin could compromise the current allocation of the dolphin resource between recreational and commercial user groups. Further, these shifts in effort in the commercial fishery, dependent upon the magnitude (knowing that some dolphin trips may land over 25,000 pounds in a single trip) could result in user conflict and localized depletion in abundance.”

The existing objectives of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP are as follows:

“1. Address localized reduction in fish abundance. The Councils remain concerned over the potential shift of effort by longline vessels to traditional recreational fishing grounds and the resulting reduction in local availability if commercial harvest intensifies.

2. Minimize market disruption. Commercial markets (mainly local) may be disrupted if large quantities of dolphin are landed from intense commercial harvest or unregulated catch and landing by charter or other components of the recreational sector.

3. Minimize conflict and/or competition between recreational and commercial user groups. If commercial longlining effort increases, either directing on dolphin and wahoo or targeting these species as a significant bycatch, conflict and/or competition may arise if effort shifts to areas traditionally used by recreational fishermen.

4. Optimize the social and economic benefits of the dolphin and wahoo fishery. Given the significant importance of dolphin and wahoo to the recreational sector throughout the range of these species and management unit, manage the resources to achieve optimum yield on a continuing basis.

5. Reduce bycatch of the dolphin fishery. Bycatch is a problem in the pelagic longline fishery for highly migratory species. Any increase in overall effort, and more specifically shifts of effort into nearer shore, non-traditional fishing grounds by swordfish and tuna vessels, may result in increased bycatch of non-target species.

In addition, National Standard 9 requires that: “Conservation and management measures shall, to the extent practicable, (A) minimize bycatch and (B) to the extent bycatch cannot be avoided, minimize the mortality of such bycatch.” Therefore bycatch of the directed dolphin fishery must be addressed.

Appendix C (FSEIS for HMS Regulatory Amendment 1) contains data on dolphin-wahoo pelagic longline fishery analysis. The data presented on page C-66 and in Table C-4 indicate that pelagic longlines targeting dolphin do in fact result in a bycatch of HMS species.

6. Direct research to evaluate the role of dolphin and wahoo as predator and prey in the pelagic ecosystem.

7. Direct research to enhance collection of biological, habitat, social, and economic data on dolphin and wahoo stocks and fisheries.”

Draft Updated Dolphin Wahoo FMP Goals and Objectives

At the December 2019 meeting, the Committee reviewed the goals and objectives of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP and provided guidance on revisions that should be made. The updated version was included in the December 2019 Dolphin Wahoo Committee summary report. The interdisciplinary plan team (IPT) used this version of the goals and objectives when providing the following suggested minor edit in Goal 5, Objective 4:

Preamble: The original and ongoing intent of the Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic is to sustainably manage the stocks of dolphin and wahoo for the long-term benefit of all participants. Owing to the substantial importance of the fisheries for dolphin and wahoo, particularly to the recreational sector, this fishery management plan seeks to manage these fisheries using a precautionary approach that maintains access, minimizes competition, preserves the social and economic importance of the fisheries, as well as promotes research and incorporation of ecosystem considerations where practicable.

Goal 1 (Precautionary Approach): Management of the dolphin and wahoo fisheries is precautionary, risk-averse, and maintains historic catch levels while preventing overfishing.	
<i>Objective 1</i>	Maintain catch levels that do not exceed catch level recommendations for dolphin or wahoo and do not directly change the balance of landings in comparison to the historic fishery to the extent that conflict is created between the recreational and commercial sectors.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Minimize bycatch of dolphin and wahoo in non-directed fisheries.
Goal 2 (Access): The recreational and commercial sectors retain access to the dolphin and wahoo resource.	

<i>Objective 1</i>	For the recreational sector, adopt management measures that ensure consistent and predictable access to dolphin and wahoo when they are regionally available as well as maintain abundant stock levels that lead to high encounter rates and elevated trip satisfaction.
<i>Objective 2</i>	For the commercial sector, adopt management measures that ensure consistent and predictable access to dolphin and wahoo when they are regionally available.
<i>Objective 3</i>	Address concerns as practicable over localized reduction in fish abundance and the resulting perceived decline in local availability of dolphin and wahoo.
Goal 3 (Minimize Competition Between User Groups): Competition between user groups is minimized.	
<i>Objective 1</i>	Ensure effort and catch levels of dolphin and wahoo by distinct user groups does not notably expand beyond their traditional share of the fishery.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Exercise caution in allowing development of new fisheries or expansion of existing fisheries that may increase competition between user groups.
Goal 4 (Economic and Social Importance): Management of the dolphin and wahoo fisheries recognizes and preserves their economic and social importance to both the recreational and commercial sectors.	
<i>Objective 1</i>	Manage the dolphin and wahoo resources to achieve optimum yield on a continuing basis in order to maximize the economic and social net benefits of the fishery.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Minimize market disruption. In the short-term, commercial markets (mainly local) may be disrupted if large quantities of dolphin are landed from intense commercial harvest or unregulated catch.
<i>Objective 3</i>	Encourage research that improves knowledge about the social and economic elements of the dolphin and wahoo fishery.
<i>Objective 4</i>	Improve awareness and understanding of how social and economic issues are linked to dolphin and wahoo fishery management measures.
Goal 5 (Ecosystem Based Management and Research Priorities): Management of the dolphin and wahoo fisheries recognizes the importance of biologic information and incorporating ecosystem considerations.	
<i>Objective 1</i>	Support improved and expanded monitoring and reporting programs for the dolphin and wahoo fishery. Promote collection of quality data to support management plans and programs considered by the Council.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Support measures that incorporate ecosystem considerations for the management of dolphin and wahoo where practicable.
<i>Objective 3</i>	Promote research aimed at developing ecosystem based management of dolphin and wahoo.
<i>Objective 4</i>	Promote research that enhances collection of biological and habitat data on dolphin and wahoo stocks and fisheries.

Discussion Questions for the Committee:

- 1) Does the Committee have any suggested additional changes or edits to the updated goals and objectives?
- 2) Are there topics that should be covered in the goals and objectives, but are currently left out?
- 3) Do the Committee feel comfortable with implementing the updated goals and objectives with Amendment 10, which is scheduled for a final vote for Secretarial review at the June 2021 meeting?

Committee Action:

- ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDIT TO THE REVISED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FMP. DIRECT STAFF TO INCLUDE THE REVISED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES IN AMENDMENT 10 TO THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FMP.
- DO NOT ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS TO THE REVISED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FMP.
- PROVIDE ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE ON MODIFICATIONS TO THE REVISED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FMP.