

Summary Report

Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel Meeting

November 6-7, 2023

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (AP) convened in Charleston, SC from November 6-7, 2023. It was positive to see good attendance and a wide range of ages for the AP members present.

The AP approved minutes from the April 2022 meeting and the agenda for the November 2023 meeting.

There was no public comment given during the public comment session at the beginning of the meeting. A public comment session was not offered at the end of the meeting, but written comments were submitted by two constituents from North Carolina reflecting on the AP's discussion of commercial landings, "Council boats", and the use of pelagic longline gear in the dolphin fishery. These comments can be read [HERE](#).

Kerry Marhefka, Chair of the Dolphin Wahoo Committee for the Council, provided opening remarks. This helped the AP understand the background of recent Council actions and issues to focus on for the meeting.

1. Update on the SAFMC Citizen Science Program

Council staff provided an update of program activities and recent efforts of the Citizen Science Program including the Citizen Science Program advisory groups, the Citizen Science Program's Project Idea Portal, and the SMILE and SAFMC Release projects. Additionally, staff shared results from the FISHstory pilot project and efforts underway to expand the project by gathering additional historic fishing photos. The AP discussed the update and provided recommendations for potential sites to find historic fishing photos. There were also photos scanned from at least one AP member.

2. Update on recent regulation changes and status of amendments

Council staff updated the AP on the status of recent and developing Council actions and other Dolphin Wahoo related efforts including:

- Dolphin Wahoo Regulatory Amendment 3 (Modifications to the minimum size limit, recreational retention limits, and for-hire captain and crew bag limits for dolphin)
- Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 4 (Joint Comprehensive Commercial Electronic Logbook Amendment)
- Snapper Grouper Amendment 46 (Private Recreational Permitting and Education Requirements)
- Recent dolphin and wahoo fishery management actions of the Caribbean Fishery Management Council
- Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission Flyingfish-Dolphinfish Working Group
- Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council

This helped set the stage for later discussions on the management strategy evaluation for dolphin and potential future management actions that could be considered for dolphin and wahoo.

3. AP feedback on the Dolphin and Wahoo SAFE Reports (*Attachment 4*)

Council staff have developed draft Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) reports. These reports are required through National Standard 2 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Council staff reviewed the draft SAFE reports for [dolphin and wahoo](#) and requested feedback from the AP on additional information that should be added. The AP offered this feedback and suggested that the following information be added if available for both dolphin and wahoo:

- Landings by area or state
 - Include a longer time series of landings data (preferably 20 years)
 - Size distribution of fish landed
- Tournament catch data
- An extended time series for directed trips beyond 5 years
 - Include effort by area or state
- Estimates of natural mortality rates

4. Update to the Wahoo and Dolphin Fishery Performance Reports

With input from the APs, Fishery Performance Reports (FPRs) have been developed for several fish species managed by the Council. The intent of the FPRs is to assemble information from AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data.

Council staff provided an overview of landings trends as well as other background information and the AP focused their input based on a series of discussion questions from which the FPRs are developed. The FPR for wahoo was last updated in October 2020 and the FPR for dolphin was last updated in April 2022. The main focus of this discussion topic was to update the FPR for wahoo since it was more dated. The AP did not have time to complete a full update of the FPR for dolphin but did have a discussion on potential management items that could be considered in the dolphin fishery. A copy of the full reports as well as other FPRs, including the previously completed FPRs for dolphin and wahoo can be found at: <https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/FPRAll/>. A summary of potential future management topics that were identified to bring to the Council's attention is as follows:

Wahoo

There was general agreement that existing retention limits are sufficient in the hook and line fishery across the region. AP members were concerned over increasing targeted spearfishing effort and landings of wahoo in South Florida and the Florida Keys from both recreational and commercial participants. It was noted that more restrictive retention limits on spear-caught wahoo could be a regional management item to consider that would mitigate potential negative future impacts to wahoo stocks, particularly since this effort appears to be directed towards spawning fish.

Additionally, there was concern over an increase in recreational landings of very small wahoo in South Florida and the Florida Keys since these fish are likely sexually immature and have little food value/yield due to their size. AP members recommended the consideration of a minimum size limit for wahoo to reduce landings and targeted effort directed towards small fish. All AP members present indicated supporting such a measure. It was suggested that the size limit is relatively small since larger wahoo can be potentially dangerous to measure and release, and it would be helpful if this size limit were tied in with other commonly caught species to make it easier for anglers to remember. Potential size limit options mentioned were a 24 inch fork length that would match the minimum size limit for king mackerel or a 27 inch fork length that would match the minimum size limit for yellowfin, bigeye, and bluefin tuna.

Dolphin

AP members recommended considering measures to change the management of “Council boats” in the commercial dolphin fishery. “Council boats” refers to commercial vessels fishing pelagic longline (PLL) gear in the dolphin fishery that do not also have highly migratory species (HMS) permits that allow the use of PLL gear in HMS managed fisheries. The AP suggested consideration of a framework action that would implement a more restrictive trip limit for “Council boats”. AP members felt that “Council boats” recently active in the dolphin fishery were having a negative impact on other fishery participants and that the number of vessels active in this fishery was higher than the vessel counts that were previously presented to the Council.

The AP also noted that “Council boats” seemingly have an unfair advantage of not having to abide by the same regulations as HMS permitted vessels fishing PLL gear in the dolphin fishery. The AP suggested consideration of implementing changes to the “Council boat” PLL fishery for dolphin to better align with HMS requirements. Some AP members also suggested that the Council consider a commercial trip limit that is more restrictive than the current 4,000 pound whole weight trip limit that goes into place if 75 percent of the commercial annual catch limit is landed. It was also suggested that the Gulf Fishery Management Council be engaged and included in dolphin management.

5. Dolphin Management Strategy Evaluation Update and AP Input

The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) is conducting a management strategy evaluation (MSE) for the Atlantic dolphin fishery. The goal of this project is to develop an index-based management procedure that may provide catch level and management advice that best achieves the multiple operational management objectives of the fishery. SEFSC staff briefed the AP on summary feedback gathered during stakeholder workshops held for the MSE and provided an update on the MSE progress.

When asked about potential shifts in distribution and dolphin availability, the AP noted that faster vessels are becoming more common, leading to increased availability to dolphin during day trips. This is particularly the case in areas of the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions, with new participants likely continuing to enter the fishery for dolphin. It was also noted that tagging data should be examined to identify potential migration routes and the

extent of linkages between dolphin found off the Carolinas with other regions such as the Caribbean and South Florida.

The AP felt that the conceptual management objectives identified during the MSE stakeholder workshops well represented the dolphin fishery, but noted that recognizing regional and sector differences was very important and should be heavily weighted. AP members also felt that stability in regulations was acceptable from year to year but should not always mean “status quo” and that timely reactions to fishery and stock conditions are warranted.

6. Update on Best Fishing Practices Outreach

Council staff presented updates on Best Fishing Practices outreach, including details on “What It Means to Me,” a recently approved outreach initiative. The AP provided feedback on the initiative, noting that it was good to engage anglers but also maintain reasonable expectations on how outreach efforts may be received.

7. Other Business

There were no items under other business.

Members attending in-person

Chris Burrows, Chair (NC)

Jonathon Reynolds, Vice Chair (FL)

Chip Berry (SC)

Robert Frevert (FL)

Richard Harris (NC)

Timothy Scalise (SC)

Richard DeLizza (FL)

Jay Kavanaugh (NC)

Dan Owsley (FL)

Rom Whitaker III (NC)

Paul Pancake (SC)

Bill Richardson (VA)