

# **Summary Report Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel**

Crowne Plaza Hotel  
4831 Tanger Outlet Boulevard  
North Charleston, SC

April 21, 2017

Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (AP), convened at the Crowne Plaza in North Charleston, SC to discuss topics supporting management of the dolphin wahoo fishery in the South Atlantic region. All briefing materials, presentations, and meeting handouts provided to the AP can be found on the Council's website at: <http://safmc.net/briefing-books/april-2017-dolphin-wahoo-advisory-panel-meeting/>. Below is a summary of the AP's discussions and recommendations. Please note that unless noted or in the form of a motion, the comments below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements but are viewpoints relevant to each motion or recommendation.

## **Meeting Initiation**

The AP meeting began with introductions from all that were present at the meeting. This was followed by approval of the agenda and March 2014 Meeting Minutes. Additionally, there was acknowledgement of an economic report that was distributed to all AP members at the request of AP member, Jonathan Reynolds, that focused on the economic impacts of recreational dolphin fishing in Florida. Council staff also updated the AP on the Citizen Science Program.

## **Presentation on Tagging Results From the Dolphin Research Program**

Don Hammond, Director of the Dolphin Research Program, provided a presentation on recent outcomes from the program's dolphin tagging research. This presentation detailed the findings of the program, including tag returns as well as satellite tagging data that contribute to better understanding dolphin behavior, potential delineation of stocks, and migration routes.

## **Advisory Panel Orientation and Refresher**

Council staff provided a presentation on the roles and responsibilities of advisory panels in the Council process.

## **Update on Recent Management Changes**

Council staff briefed the AP on the status of recently submitted amendments and the expected timeframe for new regulations to become effective. In addition, the AP received an overview of regulatory changes in the dolphin wahoo fishery since 2014, which was the last time that the AP met.

## **Discussion on Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 10**

Council staff briefed the AP on the status of Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 10 in regards to the temporary suspension of further development by the Council at the March 2017 meeting given the Council's concern over staff time as well as the anticipated revisions to recreational landings data resulting from a change in the methodology of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) survey that is used to estimate recreational catch and effort.

Council staff facilitated discussion on the actions and alternatives currently included in Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 10 and requested the AP's input on each action. The AP had the following comments and recommendations on the actions in the amendment:

*Action 1. Revise the optimum yield (OY) definition for dolphin.*

- Risky and difficult to make a recommendation to revise OY without better information on the health of the stock such as the information that would come out of a stock assessment.
- Reluctant to recommend any alternative that would take away fish that could be harvested unless better data becomes available. There is not a pressing issue forcing a change in management of the fishery.
- Hesitant to reduce OY to levels that may eventually restrict or negatively impact the dolphin fishery.
- Using a ten-year average may severely lower OY if there are several years of poor harvest that occur due to factors that are outside of the fishery such as high fuel prices that may reduce effort and landings.

MOTION: SUPPORT ALTERNATIVE 1 IN ACTION 1.

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** OY is equal to the total ACL.

9 IN FAVOR; 1 OPPOSED; MOTION PASSES

*Action 2. Modify the recreational annual catch target (ACT) for dolphin.*

- It is important to understand and keep in mind the enormous recreational benefits that occur from dolphin fishing and the sizable social and economic impacts of the species.
- Availability and abundance is one of the most important things for recreational fisheries. To set an annual catch target, especially without an accountability measure, is a very good idea so that we have a better understanding of where we want to be, but don't necessarily have to be.
- Concern that setting a relatively low ACT would create future restrictions if AM is set at the ACT.
- If there are changes made in the fishery, they should be small, incremental changes.
- Changes should be focused on management actions that maintain fishing access for all user groups year-round.
- A sensible way to make sure that everyone is fishing twelve months a year would be to set a benchmark, like in the commercial sector, where when a percentage of the ACL is reached, daily harvest limits are reduced.

MOTION: CONSIDER RECREATIONAL ACT OF 70% OF THE ACL. ALSO ADD A FUTURE AM THAT WOULD TRIGGER A RECREATIONAL REDUCTION IF THE RECREATIONAL ACT IS MET. SUGGEST 10 PER PERSON WITH A MAXIMUM OF 40 PER VESSEL.

9 IN FAVOR; 1 OPPOSED; MOTION PASSES

*Action 3. Establish a commercial annual catch target (ACT) for dolphin.*

- With a relatively small allocation of 10 percent of the ACL, it is unclear how adding potential further harvest restrictions is beneficial to the fishery.

MOTION: ADOPT ALTERNATIVE 1 IN ACTION 3.

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** There is no ACT for the commercial sector.  
10 IN FAVOR; 0 OPPOSED; MOTION PASSES

*Action 4. Allow adaptive management of sector annual catch limits (ACLs) for dolphin.*

- Have recently adjusted the allocation and ACLs for dolphin, so further transfer is unnecessary.
- Concern over increased commercial pressure negatively effecting recreational catches.
- Against permanent transfer of ACL, but carry-over of uncaught ACL seems reasonable and equitable.
- The carryover option would be the most long-term positive option to the commercial industry, as it would allow fishermen to rebound from a bad year.
- In favor of options that would allow NMFS flexibility in adjusting or transferring in-season quotas if necessary and reduce regulatory discards of fish.
- Opposed to any permanent transference of allocation.
- If chosen, temporary transfer of ACL should be small.

MOTION: SUPPORT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2B OF ACTION 4.

**Alternative 2.** Set aside a portion of the total ACL that can be used by either sector as a common pool allocation.

**Sub-alternative 2b:** 2.5% of the total ACL becomes a common pool allocation. The remaining total ACL is split between the recreational sector and the commercial sector according to the current allocation.

6 IN FAVOR; 4 OPPOSED; MOTION PASSES

MOTION: SUPPORT SUB-ALT 3A OF ACTION 4.

**Alternative 3.** If the commercial ACL is not met in a given fishing year, the unused ACL may be carried forward to the next fishing year only. The carried-forward balance shall not exceed a given percentage (Sub-alternatives 3a-3c) of the commercial sector ACL.

**Sub-alternative 3a:** The carried forward balance shall not exceed 5% of the total commercial sector ACL.

8 IN FAVOR; 2 OPPOSED; MOTION PASSES

MOTION: SUPPORT SUB-ALT 4A IN ACTION 4.

**Alternative 4.** If the recreational ACL is not met in a given fishing year, the unused ACL may be carried forward to the next fishing year only. The carried-forward balance shall not exceed a given percentage (Sub-alternatives 4a-4c) of the recreational sector ACL.

**Sub-alternative 4a:** The carried forward balance shall not exceed 1% of the total recreational sector ACL.

9 IN FAVOR; 1 OPPOSED; MOTION PASSES

*Action 5. Revise the accountability measures for dolphin.*

- The AP was made aware of this action. Since the action is accommodating previously discussed management options (Action 4), in the interest of time the AP went to the next action and did not provide comment.

*Action 6. Revise the acceptable biological catch (ABC) control rule for dolphin and wahoo.*

- The AP was made aware of this action. Since the action is accommodating previously discussed management options (Action 4), in the interest of time the AP went to the next action and did not provide comment.

*Action 7. Allow properly permitted vessels with gear onboard that are not authorized for use in the dolphin wahoo fishery to possess dolphin or wahoo.*

- Consider the golden crab fishery.
- If dolphin or wahoo harvest is limited to rod-and-reel only on trips pulling trap gear, then the additional amount landed will not likely be very large. No problem with allowing this.
- Will also help with enforcement and clarity of the regulations.
- Be specific on pot or trap gear being onboard rather than open up to all gears.

MOTION: ALLOW VESSELS WITH POT GEAR ONBOARD TO POSSESS DOLPHIN OR WAHOO AS LONG AS THEY ARE A PERMITTED VESSEL AND FISH ARE CAUGHT BY ROD AND REEL.

9 IN FAVOR; 0 OPPOSED; MOTION PASSES

*Action 8. Remove the requirement of vessel operators or crew to hold an Operator Card in the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery.*

- The concept makes sense if a penalty goes to the operator of a vessel committing an offense rather than the owner, but it is burdensome to obtain if it is not being used for the intended purpose.
- One more thing to apply for and if you forget it is expired, it can be costly. For identification purposes, there are other IDs or certifications that could be used that are already in place such as a captain's licenses, driver's license, or TWIC card.

MOTION: SUPPORT ALTERNATIVE 2 AND 3 IN ACTION 8.

**Alternative 2.** Neither a vessel operator nor any crewmember is required to have an Operator Card for an Atlantic Charter/Headboat for Dolphin/Wahoo Permit to be valid.

**Alternative 3.** Neither a vessel operator nor any crewmember is required to have an Operator Card for an Atlantic Dolphin/Wahoo Commercial Permit to be valid.

9 IN FAVOR; 0 OPPOSED; MOTION PASSES

### **Fishery Performance Report - Dolphin**

Council staff facilitated discussion on observations pertaining to the dolphin fishery. The AP's input was used to draft a Fishery Performance Report (FPR) that will be reviewed by the Socio-Economic Panel of the SSC and by the SSC, and also provided to the Council. The purpose of the FPR is to assemble information from AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPR for the dolphin fishery is attached to this summary report.

### **Discussion on Potential Items for a Future Dolphin Wahoo FMP Amendment**

Council staff reviewed items of interest that have been previously identified by Council or the AP as potential management changes that may be explored through an amendment the Dolphin Wahoo FMP. The AP had the following comments and recommendations:

- A previous meeting was held with Southeastern Fisheries Association where both recreational and commercial interests agreed on endorsing bag limit sales from for-hire trips as long as the landings went against the recreational quota and not the commercial quota. Also, vessels should be dually permitted (commercial and recreational) and all sales should be through a licensed dealer.
- Bag limit sales will not likely effect the fishery or stock.
- Often end up with multiple trips where customers do not want to take home all of the fish landed and it becomes difficult to deal with the extra fish that is left behind from multiple trips.
- Provides extra income for fishermen and good local product for local restaurants and seafood markets.
- Allowing sales to offset charter fees is bad for the charter business as it undercuts fair market rates.
- Customers are charged full rate regardless of whether sales are allowed.
- At times could be used as an incentive for crew to work harder and helps supplement income, especially for the crew.
- Consider a geographic component since it seems to be a popular idea in the Keys and South Florida but may not be well received in the Carolinas.
- Potentially allow Florida to be a pilot project before opening it up to the entire Atlantic region.
- Consider giving more ACL to the commercial sector if bag limit sales are allowed or make sure it comes directly out of the recreational ACL, since the commercial sector is already coming close to their allocation in recent years.
- Allowing bag limit sales does add incentive to keep more fish on a trip which may increase effort and landings.
- Allowing for-hire bag limit sales will decrease black market sales of dolphin.

**MOTION: IN FLORIDA ONLY, REINSTATE CHARTERBOAT FISH SALES FOR PROPERLY PERMITTED VESSELS TO BE ABLE TO SELL BAG LIMIT ONLY QUANTITIES OF DOLPHIN AND WAHOO TO A LICENSED DEALER. SOLD LANDINGS WOULD COME FROM THE RECREATIONAL ACL.  
8 IN FAVOR; 2 ABSTAIN; MOTION PASSES**

MOTION: REINSTATE CHARTERBOAT FISH SALES FOR PROPERLY PERMITTED VESSELS TO BE ABLE TO SELL BAG LIMIT ONLY QUANTITIES OF DOLPHIN AND WAHOO TO A LICENSED DEALER. SOLD LANDINGS WOULD COME FROM THE RECREATIONAL ACL.  
8 IN FAVOR; 2 OPPOSED; MOTION PASSES

**Elections & Other Business**

The AP discussed specifying term limits for chair and vice chair of the AP. It was agreed upon that the Chair and Vice-Chair would be for the full AP term of whoever is elected. Ray Rosher was elected as Chair and Chris Burrows was elected as Vice-Chair.

**South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel  
Dolphin Fishery Performance Report  
April 2017**

At their April 2017 meeting, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (AP) reviewed fishery information for Dolphin and developed a Fishery Performance Report (FPR). The purpose of the FPR is to assemble information from AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPR for Dolphin is the first Dolphin Wahoo FPR for the South Atlantic, and will be provided to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP). The format of future FPRs may change based on input from the AP, SSC, SEP, and the South Atlantic Council. Please note that the comments below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements, rather they are direct regional observations of advisory panel members.

**Advisory Panel members**

Robert Barnette (Charter/GA)\*  
Wendell Barnett (Commercial/SC)  
Christopher Burrows (Charter/NC)  
Kyle Christiansen (Recreational/GA)\*  
Ty C. Conti (NGO/NC)  
Robert Frevert (Recreational/FL)\*  
Richard Harris (Charter/NC)  
Glen Hopkins (Commercial/NC)  
Harris Huddle (Recreational/NC)\*  
Fred W. Kinard (Recreational/SC)  
H. Tim Nettles (Recreational/FL)  
Jonathon Reynolds (Charter/Commercial/FL)  
Ray Rosher (Charter/Commercial/FL)  
Tim Scalise (Charter/SC)

\*unable to attend

*Fishery Overview*

The Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Stocks indicates dolphin is not overfished, and is not undergoing overfishing

([http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/fisheries\\_eco/status\\_of\\_fisheries/](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/fisheries_eco/status_of_fisheries/)). Prager (2000) conducted an exploratory assessment of dolphin, but the results were not conclusive due to several issues including limitations on knowledge of the stock structure and lack of fishery independent indices. These issues have not been overcome, and a Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) stock assessment for dolphin is not expected within the next 5 years. The dolphin fishery occurs along the east coast of the United States when the species is available; however,

effort is primarily concentrated in the South Atlantic region (North Carolina to Florida). Landings of dolphin are variable from year to year, with the recreational sector accounting for the majority of harvest in the fishery. Detailed landings and economic information was provided to the Dolphin Wahoo AP prior to their discussion on the dolphin fishery.

#### *Recreational Demand and Market Observations*

##### North Carolina (specifically the Outer Banks)

Demand for for-hire dolphin trips often depends on the tuna fishery, as dolphin are often a secondary target on trips targeting tuna. If the tuna bite is not strong, a vessel will often change tactics to target dolphin. If the tuna bite is very good, many vessels may not target dolphin, even if the fish are regionally abundant. For smaller center consoles, dolphin are a more important target and have a higher demand since they can often be found closer to the inlets than tuna.

##### South Carolina

Many fish, especially the larger specimens, seem to be migrating further offshore towards the eastern edge of the Gulf Stream, affecting the ability for some charter boats to make a profitable trip targeting dolphin. Faster outboard driven vessels have an advantage by being able to reach the fish on day trips.

##### South Florida

There has been a general increase in recreational effort and demand for private trips, largely reflective of an increase in center console, outboard powered vessels and relatively low gas prices. It seems like there is a tournament every weekend during the season for dolphin, wahoo, and king mackerel. Anglers are often going further than they have previously gone on day trips. Demand for charter trips is relatively steady. Many clients want to target sailfish but dolphin is an important secondary target when booking charter trips.

##### Florida Keys

The recreational demand for dolphin is strong and an important driver for booking charter trips. It is a very economically important species for the Keys.

#### *Commercial Demand and Market Observations*

##### North Carolina

There seems to be an increasing demand for dolphin. Dolphin is very marketable and has a good shelf life. The CPUE seems to be relatively consistent, with about the same amount of effort needed to land fish, but the price has seen about a 30% increase over the past several years, with about a 10% increase annually.

##### South Carolina

The migration of fish further offshore coincides with the typical area where commercial fishing activity is present for dolphin. This is leading to some very good commercial catches. Large longline landings can depress ex-vessel prices until the market clears.

##### South Florida

Demand is increasing. The level of imports plays a large role in ex-vessel prices received. Imports seem to be lower in recent years, helping the price of domestically caught fish. Imports also tend to “dry up” at about the same time that dolphin become abundant locally and



pick back up later in the season, creating a steady 12-month supply of dolphin that helps keep it in on the menu year-round.

### Florida Keys

There is an increasing demand in local markets and the species is very important to provide locally caught fish for restaurants. Prices are rising as well in response to growing demand.

### *Dolphin Effort and Availability*

#### South Carolina

Some smaller fish area still available towards the western edge of the Gulf Stream and along the shelf break, but the larger fish mostly seem to now be on the eastern edge of the Gulf Stream, requiring a 70-80+ mile run one way. Commercial vessels typically fish this area, so it is not greatly impacting the commercial fishery, but is very far for many recreational or for-hire vessels to go on a day trip. This is negatively affecting recreational catches but gives an advantage to those with fast vessels.

#### South Florida

Recreational effort seems to be increasing, especially closer to shore largely due to low fuel prices and increases in the number of recreational vessels. It seems that more effort is required (longer length of time and distance from shore) to have similar success as seen in the past, but fish are still available.

### Overall South Atlantic Region

There have not been major, prolonged effort shifts observed towards or away from dolphin. Availability is often highly variable from year to year. One year can be very good, while the next year sees very poor fishing and dolphin availability. This was most recently reflected in the 2015 fishing year, in which dolphin were abundant, followed by poor abundance in 2016, especially in South Florida and the Keys. Availability of dolphin seems to be cyclical and can be highly dependent on variables such as wind speed, wind direction, and general weather conditions. This variability makes it impossible to determine how the fishing and availability will be from year to year.

### *Current Management*

The 20-inch size limit off of SC, GA, and FL is sufficient and is working. In South Florida, many fish are released and the size limit is very compatible with charter trips. There were differing opinions on whether the size limit should be expanded to the rest of the management zone, given the fast growth of the species and cap on maximum harvest recreationally via the vessel limit of 60 dolphin per trip.

The commercial trip limit of 4,000 pounds when 75% of the ACL is met is sufficient for now. However, a higher trip limit could potentially be considered in the future to prevent dead discards. Conversely, a reduced trip limit may be needed to further slowdown the commercial fishery and prevent a harvest closure.

### *Research Priorities*

The AP felt that satellite tagging should be a research priority to better determine migration patterns of the species and potential stock differentiation that effects annual

availability in different regions of the coast. There should be a specific focus on identifying ways to bring down the cost of satellite tags and possibly add incentives to tag and release larger fish that are typically kept on most trips.