

Discussion document for the Allocation Decision Tool Review

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council – March 2022

Introduction

Making sector allocation decisions is a difficult and complicated process. To help the Council incorporate sources of information in addition to landings when making sector allocations decisions, staff developed a [decision tree approach](#) and presented the most up-to-date draft to the Council in February 2022. Staff also presented an example of how to potentially apply the approach to a managed species (greater amberjack). At this meeting, the Council will have the opportunity to discuss how they envision using the approach moving forward and provide this guidance to staff.

Intended use of the approach

The main intent of the decision tree approach is to provide the Council a tool that will allow a systematic way to work through the decision tree process when review of allocations has been triggered by the Council's allocation policy or near the beginning of a potential fishery management plan amendment that may need to address sector allocations. This approach is meant to aid the Council in making decisions such as whether allocations need to be considered in an amendment, initial structuring of allocation alternatives, and to help build rationale.

Since this approach relies on readily available data and necessitates only limited time for analysis, the approach is intended as a tool to supplement the Council's decision making process. As a fishery management plan amendment is developed, additional biologic, economic, and social analyses will still be presented to the Council as they are conducted. The Allocation Decision Tool is not a replacement for such analyses, which will still be provided in every amendment as they are necessary to adhere to federal requirements such as those specified in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), Executive Order (EO) 12866, and others. Additionally, the Council is not bound by the information resulting from the decision tree process and Council members will continue to have the opportunity to provide supplemental information as well as use informed judgement when building rationale for allocation decisions.

Comments, concerns, and intended improvements

During Council's most discussion of the allocation decision tree, there were comments and concerns raised over the importance of abundance as well as catch and release opportunities for the recreational sector and recent changes in distribution of a species due to climate change or other factors that may affect allocation decisions. While data are often limited to directly address these considerations, additional questions can be added to the decision tree tool that will allow the Council to use informed judgement to indicate whether:

- The species appears to be exhibiting distribution shifts that could affect allocations in the near-term (i.e. the next 5-years).
- If there is an important catch and release aspect to the recreational fishery for a species.

In addition to the collective knowledge amongst Council members, supplemental input on these factors can be collected through Fishery Performance Reports (FPRs) and potentially other efforts similar to the [Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Fishermen Feedback](#) (formerly “Something’s Fishy”) tool. Also, during discussion of the social and economic decision tree questions it was noted that FPRs put together by the Council’s advisory panels (APs) could serve as a valuable source of information. Council members discussed the need to review the questions that are being asked of the APs to make sure that the proper information is being collected. As such, the Council is being asked to review the FPR questions in *Attachment 3b* for Full Council 1 briefing materials for updates that may be needed.

Next steps and questions for the Council

Now that the Council has reviewed the draft decision tree topics and questions in detail, guidance is needed on how to proceed. The following questions are intended to help provide that guidance:

- 1) Acknowledging that further changes can be made as the need arises, is the Council comfortable with moving forward with using the decision tree approach when making initial allocation decisions?
- 2) Does the Council feel that the decision tree approach or aspects of the approach need additional review from its advisors or from NMFS?
 - a. Previous drafts of the decision tree approach have been reviewed by the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP), Scientific and Statistical Committee, AP Chairs, NOAA Southeast Regional Office, and NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center to help modify and calibrate the methodology. While the current version has not undergone this level of extensive review again, this version is the result of this extensive review and incorporates input received thus far, where feasible.
 - b. Council staff recommendation: Request a “targeted” review of some social and economic questions from the SEP at their upcoming meeting in April 2022. While very helpful initially, an open ended review from multiple parties can lead to conflicting recommendations and an “open loop” review process where it is difficult to arrive at a final product.
- 3) Would the Council like to apply the decision tree approach to Spanish mackerel for review at the December 2022 meeting?