

OVERVIEW

SNAPPER GROUPEL ADVISORY PANEL NOVEMBER 7-8, 2012 CHARLESTON, SC

I. Update on October 23-25 SSC meeting

Council staff will brief the AP on discussions relevant to snapper grouper held during the October 23-25, 2012, meeting of the Scientific and Statistical Committee. The SSC will provide input on the recently completed vermilion snapper and red porgy stock assessment updates and any recommendations as a result of those updates. The original benchmark assessment for vermilion snapper was prepared in 2003 through SEDAR 2 and was last updated in 2007. The vermilion snapper stock in the South Atlantic was last determined to be neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The original red porgy benchmark assessment was prepared through SEDAR 1 in 2003 and updated in 2006. The stock is currently under a rebuilding plan.

The SSC will also discuss a new P* (P star) analysis for black sea bass. The P* indicates the percent probability of rebuilding success and is the basis for determining an ABC based on the Council's approved ABC Control Rule. The original rebuilding plan for black sea bass was based on a 50% probability of success (P*=0.5). In Snapper Grouper Amendment 18A, approved by the Council in December 2011, the Council specified that the rebuilding plan should have a 66% (P*=0.66) chance of success, a more conservative approach. Because the 66% chance of success was based on assessment evaluations of the existing rebuilding program (fixed harvest of 847,000 pounds), the Council requested that the SSC review the previous assessment and possibly provide a new P* recommendation.

At its September 2012 meeting, the Council was informed that additional analyses may be forthcoming for the wreckfish population. The SSC will review any information that may be submitted and discuss the implications, if any, for modifications to the ABC.

II. Recently Completed and Developing Snapper Grouper Amendments

Council staff will provide an update on the status of the following amendments:

Emergency Rule to Adjust Yellowtail Snapper ACL

At their September 2012 meeting, the Council approved a motion to request that NMFS issue an emergency rule to adjust the commercial yellowtail snapper ACL based on the 2012 stock assessment conducted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute.

In early September 2012, the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center projected that commercial harvest of yellowtail snapper would meet the commercial ACL (1,142,589 pounds) and issued a notice to close the fishery on September 11, 2012. Subsequently, a notification was issued that the fishery could remain open for additional time due to a miscalculation in the projections. Prior to this year, a closure of the yellowtail fishery had never occurred. The new stock assessment, however, indicated that the ACL could possibly increase. The Council wanted to move quickly to adjust the ACL for the commercial sector and thus minimize socio-economic impacts. The Council therefore requested that NMFS take action to adjust the commercial ACL for yellowtail via Emergency Rule.

Before NMFS could take action, however, the stock assessment had to be certified by both the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs) as best available science and suitable for management purposes. The SSCs met jointly on October 10, 2012 and recommended an ABC of 3,096,000 pounds ww for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic. Based on current sector allocations of 53% commercial and 47% recreational, the ACLs would be 1,640,880 pounds ww and 1,455,120 pounds ww, respectively.

Generic Dealer Amendment (SG Amendment 21)

In some cases, existing ACLs established by the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Councils have been exceeded due to shortcomings of the current reporting requirements for federally-permitted seafood dealers. Improvements are needed to the accuracy, completeness, consistency, and timeliness of data reported by federally-permitted seafood dealers to meet the requirements of the Magnuson Act. The actions proposed in this amendment will aid in achieving the optimum yield from each fishery while reducing (1) undue socioeconomic harm to dealers and fishermen and (2) administrative burdens to fishery agencies.

Basically, the preferred alternatives in the joint amendment would create 1 dealer permit for the GMFMC and SAFMC regions. Dealer reports would need to be submitted electronically every week. No Purchase forms would also need to be submitted weekly even if no purchases are made. A dealer would only be authorized to receive commercially-harvested species if the dealer's previous reports have been submitted by the dealer and received by NMFS in a timely manner. Any delinquent reports would need to be submitted and received by NOAA Fisheries before a dealer could receive commercially harvested species from a federally-permitted U.S. vessel.

Timing: Both Councils have approved the amendment for formal Secretarial review but the document has not yet been submitted to NMFS.

Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 3 (SG Amendment 26 - Improvements to data reporting)

The amendment, as modified by the Council in June and September 2012, currently includes actions to modify permits, data reporting (for-hire and commercial

sectors), improvements to bycatch monitoring, and consideration of a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) requirement for the commercial snapper grouper fishery. **Timing:** The Council will review the document at their December 2012 meeting and vote to approve it for submission to the Secretary of Commerce.

SG Regulatory Amendment 12 (Adjustment of golden tilefish ACL)

Regulations to adjust the golden tilefish ACL based on the most recent SEDAR assessment went into effect on October 9, 2012. The assessment found the stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing. The adjusted commercial ACL increased from 289,819 pounds gw to 541,295 pounds gw and the recreational ACL increased from 1,578 fish to 3,019 fish. The amendment also implemented changes to the accountability measures to make them consistent with what the Council chose for species included in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment:

Commercial sector. If commercial landings, as estimated by the NMFS Southeast Regional Director, reach or are projected to reach the commercial ACL (commercial quota), NMFS will issue a notice to close the commercial sector for the remainder of the fishing year.

Recreational sector. If recreational landings for golden tilefish meet or are projected to meet the recreational ACL of 3,019 fish, NMFS will issue a notice to close the recreational sector for the remainder of the fishing year. If recreational landings for golden tilefish exceed the recreational ACL, then during the following fishing year, recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings and, if necessary, NMFS will reduce the length of the following recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to ensure recreational landings do not exceed the recreational ACL in the following fishing year.

SG Amendment 18B (endorsement program for golden tilefish longline fleet, gear-specific allocations and ACLs, modifications to trip limits)

The Council submitted this amendment to NMFS for Secretarial Review on August 28, 2012.

SG Regulatory Amendment 14 (Modification of management measures for black sea bass, mutton snapper, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish, vermilion snapper, hogfish, red porgy, and gag)

The amendment would address management measures for several snapper grouper species. Proposed actions may include:

- Amberjack – changes to the fishing year & reduced trip limit
- Mutton snapper – additional protection during spawning season
- Gray triggerfish – change size limit measurement from Total Length (TL) to Fork Length (FL)
- Black sea bass fishing year (recreational and commercial) changes and adjustments based on update assessment and new P* analyses
- Vermilion snapper – modify commercial trip limit and recreational bag limit; adjust start of 2nd commercial season; modify recreational closed season

- Hogfish – increase the minimum size limit
- Red porgy – modify recreational bag limit and commercial head count
- Modify aggregate grouper bag limit

Timing: Options will be presented to the Council at the March 2013 meeting.

SG Regulatory Amendment 16 (Modification of management measures for the commercial golden tilefish fishery)

At their September 2012 meeting, the Council discussed the need to develop an amendment that would put measures in place to slow down the harvest of the golden tilefish ACL for the longline fleet. This was brought up for consideration at the request of golden tilefish longline fishermen based on the number of longline vessels allowed under the qualification requirements. Options may include fishing 2 weeks on/2 weeks off.

Timing: To be developed in 2013

SG Regulatory Amendment 17 (Actions to reconfigure existing deepwater MPAs to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper)

The action to designate Marine Protected Areas for speckled hind and warsaw grouper was removed from CE-BA 3 in June 2012. The Council held four additional public workshops in August to gather input on possible areas for MPA designation. At their September 2012 meeting, the Council opted to begin development of a new amendment to consider re-orientation of existing deepwater MPAs to address needed protection for speckled hind and warsaw grouper.

Timing: The Council will receive a presentation from the Southeast Regional Office on options to re-orient MPAs and will discuss timing in December 2012 and provide further guidance.

SG Amendment 22 (Recreational tag program for red snapper, snowy grouper, golden tilefish, and wreckfish)

At the September 2012 meeting, the Council directed staff to begin development of an amendment to implement a recreational tag program for red snapper and deepwater snapper grouper species (golden tilefish, snowy grouper and wreckfish).

Timing: Options will be presented to the Council in June 2013 or September 2013

II. Regulatory Amendment 15 (yellowtail and shallow water grouper)

This amendment would adjust the yellowtail ABC, ACLs, and ACT based on the latest stock assessment; modify the fishing year and establish a spawning season closure for yellowtail snapper for the commercial sector; and modify the accountability measure for gag grouper that prohibits harvest and possession of shallow-water groupers (red grouper, black grouper, scamp, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, red hind, rock hind, graysby, and coney) when the gag commercial ACL is met or projected to be met.

As mentioned previously, action to adjust the commercial ACL for yellowtail snapper will be put in place through a Temporary Rule by Emergency Action. However, the emergency regulations will expire 180 days from its effective date.

Therefore, Regulatory Amendment 15 would make the ABC, ACLs and ACT adjustments permanent until modified. The action to modify the fishing year and establish a commercial spawning season closure address recommendations from stakeholders.

The Comprehensive ACL Amendment established individual ACLs for black grouper and scamp and Amendment 24 did so for red grouper. In addition, the aggregate red grouper-black grouper-gag aggregate ACL was removed through Amendment 24. However, Amendment 16 had established an accountability measure to close the rest of the shallow-water groupers once the gag ACL was met or projected to be met in order to curb bycatch of gag. This regulation is still in effect and there is concern about significant socio-economic impacts. Since these species (and scamp) now have their own ACLs, the Council is proposing removing (or modifying) the AM that closes all shallow-water grouper when the gag commercial ACL is met. This accountability measure had not gone into effect prior to 2012.

Timing: The Council is scheduled to approve the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce at the December 2012 meeting.

AP ACTION: Provide recommendations for each action in the amendment

III. Regulatory Amendment 13 (MRIP adjustments for unassessed snapper grouper species)

This amendment updates ABCs, ACLs (including sector ACLs), ACTs, and allocations for unassessed snapper grouper species based on updated Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) numbers. The SSC will review the data for the updates and the methodology used for determining the update values. Brian Chevront, Council staff, will present an overview of the amendment.

Timing: The Council is scheduled to approve the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce at the December 2012 meeting.

AP ACTION: Provide recommendations for the action in the amendment

IV. Amendment 28 (regulations to allow limited harvest of red snapper)

This amendment would establish regulations to allow harvest of red snapper in the South Atlantic.

Red snapper harvest in 2012 was allowed for two consecutive weekends (Fri-Sun) in for the recreational sector and during a 7-day mini-season for the commercial sector. NMFS took action via an Emergency Rule to implement these measures, so no provisions for allowing harvest in 2013 (and beyond) are currently in place. This amendment would put those measures in place and an ACL would be set in 2013. The document contains alternatives to calculate the red snapper ACL and establish a process for allowing limited harvest of red snapper in the future.

Timing: The Council is scheduled to approve the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce at the December 2012 meeting.

AP ACTION: Provide recommendations for each action in the amendment

V. Amendment 27 (management measures for blue runner, yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper)

This amendment would address management jurisdiction for yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and Nassau grouper. Both the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils manage these species in their respective jurisdictions. However, in 2010, the Gulf Council expressed the desire to transfer management responsibility to the South Atlantic Council for these three species throughout their range in the southeast U.S. Actions in this amendment would transfer management authority and address permitting and management issues for yellowtail and mutton snapper. Also, because sector allocations for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper were specified only for the South Atlantic using South Atlantic landings, the allocations would have to be recalculated to include landings from the Gulf of Mexico to allow the South Atlantic Council to establish sector allocations that extend into the Gulf of Mexico.

The amendment would also include an action to modify the snapper grouper framework process. The intent is to add language to the framework to accomplish adjustments to ABCs, ACLs, and ACTs in a timelier manner.

Finally, the amendment includes an action to address issues with the harvest of blue runner in the mackerel gillnet fishery. The Council was recently made aware that blue runner are incidentally caught by fishermen targeting Spanish mackerel off northeast Florida. Fishermen have been selling their catch of blue runner to federally-permitted dealers. However, blue runner are included in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management unit and a snapper grouper unlimited permit or a 225 permit are required to harvest and sell them. Hence, mackerel fishermen have been harvesting and selling blue runner without possessing the required permit. According to public input, the sale of blue runner can make up to 30% of a fisherman's income. The Council is considering actions in this amendment that would continue to allow mackerel fishermen to harvest and sell blue runner.

Timing: Approve for public hearings in December; public hearings in January; and final approval in March 2013.

AP ACTION: Provide recommendations for each action in the amendment

VI. AP input on long-term planning and vision for the snapper grouper fishery

At their September 2012 meeting, the Council discussed their intent to develop a vision and long-term strategic plan for the snapper grouper fishery. To this end, the Council intends to hold a workshop on Monday morning of the Council meeting week in December 2012 to begin the process. The workshop participants will be Council members only (as usual, however, the meeting will be open to the public). The intent is to begin the discussions at the Council-member level and then branch out to engage stakeholders. The Council would welcome any input the AP would be willing to provide at any point in the process.