SAFMC 2020-2022 Assessment Priorities

September 2017

This document provides a summary of SAFMC (Council) assessment priorities and current plans.

The Council reviewed assessment priorities and the NMFS stock assessment prioritization (SAP) tool application during the December 2016 and March 2017 meetings. At the March 2017 meeting, the list of assessment priority stocks was modified slightly to address SAP tool results. Current priorities including those changes are shown in Table 1.

Tables 2 and 3 provide background information. Table 2 is a list of stocks assessed through SEDAR or other means (e.g., Wreckfish). Table 3 provides the results of the SAP tool, with stocks divided into those that have been assessed and those that have not been assessed. The unassessed category in this table also includes stocks for which assessments have been attempted, such as Goliath Grouper and Gray Triggerfish, which were not accepted by peer review or were dropped from further consideration during a SEDAR project.

Table 4 addresses future assessment plans. The Council plans on receiving 4 assessments per year through the SEFSC when preparing future priorities. In some years, additional assessments are provided by the FL FWCC.

Table 5 shows a history of all SAFMC stocks assessed through SEDAR.

Table 1: SAFMC stock monitoring and assessment priorities, as modified in March 2017. Stocks in **BOLD** have not been assessed since SEDAR began in 2002, and are not currently listed as priorities through 2020.

Primary: 23 spp.	Secondary: 12 spp.	Special: 9 spp.
Vermilion Snapper	**Tomtate**	**Warsaw grouper**
Snowy Grouper	**Knobbed Porgy**	**Speckled Hind**
golden Tilefish	**Bar Jack**	Goliath grouper
Red Grouper	**Almaco Jack**	**Nassau grouper**
Black Grouper	**Lane Snapper**	Red Snapper
Scamp	**Banded Rudderfish**	Wreckfish
Black Sea Bass	**Rock Hind**	Spiny Lobster
Gag	**Red Hind**	**Golden Crab**
Red Snapper	**Wahoo**	**Dolphin**
Greater Amberjack	**Penaeid Shrimp**	
White Grunt	**Atlantic Spadefish**	
Yellowtail Snapper	**Silk Snapper**	
Gray Triggerfish		
Mutton Snapper		
Red Porgy		
Dolphin		
King Mackerel		
Spanish Mackerel		
Blueline Tilefish		
Cobia		
Hogfish (2 stocks)		
Gray Snapper		
Spiny Lobster		

Table 2. South Atlantic assessed stocks, sorted by assessment age. Assessment age is defined as the number of years elapsed between the terminal data year of the prior assessment and 2017.

Stock	Age in 2017	Status[1]	Terminal Data Year	Next Assessment Terminal Year	
				Terminal Yr	Completed
Gray Triggerfish	NA	4	NA		2021
Greater Amberjack	11	3	2006	2016	2018
Black Grouper	9	3	2008		
Spiny Lobster	8	3	2009		
Yellowtail Snapper	7	3	2010	TBD	2019
Wreckfish[2]	7	3	2010		
Vermilion Snapper	6	3	2011	2016	2018
Red Porgy	6	1	2011	2017	2018
Spanish Mackerel	6	3	2011		2020
Cobia	6	3	2011	2017	2019
Mutton Snapper	6	3	2011		2020
Black Sea Bass	5	3	2012	2016	2018
King Mackerel	5	3	2012	2017	2019
Snowy Grouper	5	1	2012	2017	2019
Gag	5	3	2012		2020
Hogfish (East FL)	5	1	2012		
Hogfish (NC-GA)	NA	4	2012		
Red Snapper	3	1	2014		2020
golden Tilefish	3	3	2014	2017	2019
Goliath Grouper	NA	4	2014		
Red Grouper	2	1	2015		2020
Blueline Tilefish	2	2	2015		

[1.] Status according to the prior assessment: 1 = overfished or in rebuilding, 2 = overfishing, 3 = neither overfished nor overfishing, 4 = assessments attempted but rejected by peer review.

[2.] Wreckfish was assessed by an outside contractor funded by fishery participants. It was reviewed by the SSC, per Council policies developed to accommodate assessments provided outside the SEDAR process.

Table 3. NMFS SAP tool results for SAFMC stocks. Rank priority is presented for assessed and unassessed stocks separately. "Rank" is the overall rank provided by the SAP.
  * denotes stocks where assessments have been attempted.

RANK	STOCK
	UNASSESSED STOCKS
4	White Grunt
5	Lane Snapper
6	Gray Triggerfish*
8	Scamp
9	Dolphin
11	Almaco Jack
13	Knobbed Porgy
14	GA-NC Hogfish*
15	Speckled Hind
16	Goliath Grouper*
18	Silk Snapper
19	Red Hind
21	Warsaw Grouper
	ASSESSED STOCKS
1	Red Snapper
2	FLK/EFL Hogfish
3	Red Porgy
7	Snowy Grouper
10	Red Grouper
12	Blueline Tilefish
17	King Mackerel
20	Spanish Mackerel
22	Black Sea Bass
23	Gag
24	Cobia
25	Tilefish
26	Vermilion Snapper
27	Greater Amberjack
28	Black Grouper
29	Mutton Snapper
30	Yellowtail Snapper
31	Wreckfish

Table 4. SAFMC assessment projects, 2018 – 2020. Upcoming assessments will follow the SEDAR Standard process unless otherwise noted.

YEAR	STOCK
2018	Cobia (Benchmark)
	Greater Amberjack
	Red Porgy
	MRIP Revisions
2019	Scamp (RT/Benchmark)
	Snowy Grouper
	golden Tilefish
	(Cobia cont.)
	Yellowtail Snapper (FWC)
2020	Scamp (RT/B cont., Q1-2)
	Red Snapper (Benchmark)
	Spanish Mackerel
	Red Grouper (Update)
	Gag
	Mutton (FWC)
2021	White Grunt (Benchmark)
	Gray Triggerfish (Benchmark)
	OPEN
	OPEN
2022	**OPEN**
	OPEN
	OPEN
	OPEN
FUTURE	

Benchmark or Research Track

> Future first time assessments are indicated as "Benchmark" for simplicity in Table 4 and in the recommendations below, due to the ongoing uncertainty in the Research Track process. The intent is to follow the SEDAR practices in place at the time the assessment is completed.

Recommendations and Considerations: 2019-2022

2019: The available SAFMC assessment slots are fully allotted in 2019 with the continuing Cobia benchmark, beginning of the Scamp research track, and standard assessments for Snowy Grouper and golden Tilefish.

2020: Red Snapper will likely require a Benchmark due to concerns with the existing assessment and data input changes. The assessment start date may be determined by the Scamp schedule. Council may also want to consider refining this timing based on when any new management or data changes take effect, and after considering the outcome of index-based methods which are now in development.

Consider shifting red grouper to 2021, with a 2020 TY, based on revised ACLs going into effect for 2018. This would allow the update to include 3 years of data under the revised ACL.

2021: The two stocks now prioritized in the SAFMC request will require Benchmark assessments.

Gray Triggerfish has been considered twice previously through SEDAR projects, so the primary assessment impediments should already be identified and documented. In addition, scheduling the assessment this far in the future should provide an opportunity to resolve those issues.

White Grunt is less well understood, but is ranked as a top priority among unassessed stocks by the SAP tool. Because earlier discussions with the SEFSC suggested there could be multiple stocks of White Grunt along the Atlantic Coast, attempting to assess these 2 species in one SEDAR project may be inappropriate.

Scheduling two benchmarks in a single year may limit the ability to support other projects, based on current resources. Therefore, the Council may wish to consider moving White Grunt to 2022, to allow full use of the 2021 slots.

By 2021, recently assessed stocks (in 2017) will be due for updates. Some to consider include Black Sea Bass (2016 TY), Red Grouper (2015 TY), and East Florida Hogfish (2012 TY; FL FWCC led). As noted above, management changes are anticipated for Red Grouper, and also Hogfish, in 2018, allowing 3 years of data if these are assessed in 2021 with 2020 terminal years.

2022: This would be a good time to consider addressing one of the remaining unassessed priority stocks (Dolphin and Gray Snapper) in one slot, as there is time for research projects to be funded and completed.

Dolphin is particularly challenging due to its life history and Atlantic-wide distribution. During discussion at the September 2016 Steering Committee, it was suggested that a cooperative effort, through an international body such as ICCAT, may be necessary to develop an acceptable assessment. In addition, dolphin are short-lived, potentially functioning as an annual crop, thereby posing challenges to obtaining useful and timely management information through current assessment processes that can take several years to develop estimates. Therefore, the Council is asked to consider whether Dolphin should remain in the SEDAR que or if there are other, more appropriate venues through which to assess the stock.

Remaining 2022 slots should be devoted to updates of existing assessments. Stocks with terminal years of 2016-2017, as shown in Table 2, could be considered as preliminary requests.

Future Considerations

- Develop data limited assessments for multiple secondary stocks in a benchmark slot.
- Develop data limited assessments for other managed stocks, with possible priorities based on the SAP tool.

Proposal for an alternative scheduling approach to provide timely information for key stocks:

- Identify 12-15 key stocks, defined as those that drive the management program. The focus should be on stocks with the leverage to influence decisions on when or how to fish, such as Red Snapper, Black Sea Bass, Vermilion Snapper, and Cobia. Consult with SEFSC, the SSC, and APs to develop the key stocks list.
- Develop a regular long-term assessment schedule for the key stocks.
  - For example, if 12 stocks assessed by the Beaufort/SEFSC team are identified as key stocks requiring regular, timely updates, 3 could be assessed per year while leaving at least one of the 4 SAFMC planning slots available for benchmarks and other assessment needs.
- Develop data indicators or "rumble strips" for each of these stocks to use in evaluating stock and fishery performance through annual fishery report cards. The indicators would be built around metrics that are available on a timely basis, to facilitate their use in guiding management actions.
- Provide a fishery report card for each key stock during years when the stock is not assessed.
- Consider a pilot project, focusing on up to 4 stocks, to test the approach.

Table 5. Assessment timeline for SAFMC priority stocks. X = completed assessment, A=attempted assessment, P=planned assessment.

SPECIES	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
BLACK GROUPER									X							A			
BLACK SEA BASS		X		X						X			X					P	
BLUELINE TILEFISH												X				P			
COBIA												X						P	
DOLPHIN																			
GAG						X							X						P
GR AMBERJACK							X											P	
GRAY TRIGGER												A		A					
HOGFISH FL/KEYS													X						
HOGFISH GA/NC													A						
HOGFISH SE				X															
KING MACKEREL			X					X					X					P	
MUTTON							X							X					
RED GROUPER									X							X			
RED PORGY	X				X						X							P	
RED SNAPPER							X		X						X				
SCAMP																			P
SNOWY GROUPER			X										X					P	
SPANISH							X						X						
SPINY LOBSTER				X					X										
TILEFISH			X							X					X			P	
VERMILION		X				X	X				X						P		
WHITE GRUNT																			
YELLOWTAIL		X											X						P
GOLIATH			A							A					A				