

Snapper Grouper Committee Chair – Regulatory Amendment 35 Overview

June 2022 SAFMC Meeting, Key West, FL

To bring everyone up to speed on the issues surrounding red snapper:

- The Council recognizes that the Red Snapper stock is at record abundance, driven largely by strong recruitment over the last decade. High recruitment has supported considerable stock rebuilding and age structure expansion, despite the assessment indicating that overfishing has continued.
- The Council recognizes that dead discards are the greatest source of mortality of the Red Snapper stock and that actions need to be taken to reduce interactions and discard mortalities.
- At the June and September 2021 meetings, we committed to addressing discards in the Regulatory Amendment and broader snapper grouper issues in a subsequent FMP amendment. The reports we received from the SSC and AP are in response to this immediate effort to complete the regulatory amendment and revise the ABC, and that is the topic of discussion here.
- The AP, similar to most of the fishermen we have heard from, strongly opposes actions such as seasons or large closed areas that will limit access to the Snapper Grouper fishery, particularly given the obvious abundance of Red Snapper and evidence of stock rebuilding.
- The SSC reiterated the need to reduce encounters with, and discards of, Red Snapper, and indicated that revising the ABC is not possible without “dramatic reductions in overall fishery effort” and a thorough analysis of regulations that would target effort reductions.
- The SSC also pointed out that (1) some of the actions in the Reg Amendment cannot likely be evaluated over the short time planned for development, and (2) the discard information remains highly uncertain.

Faced with these challenges, can the Council identify specific actions to consider in the Regulatory Amendment to address discards?

- The SSC recommended pursuing time or area closures, and in March we agreed that such measures were the most quantifiable. However, as noted, the fishermen and AP strongly oppose actions that reduce access to the fishery, such as seasons and area closures, and past experience has shown that area closures are highly controversial and thus time consuming to implement.
- This leaves the Council with considering actions that can reduce interactions with red snapper on a given trip and attempting to change angler behavior. Multiple approaches will be required to solve this challenge.
 - Quantitatively analyzing some of these actions will be difficult if not impossible, as noted in Regulatory Amendment 35 and discussed by the SSC, so

the Council will need to apply its judgement and experience in some instances to develop its rationale.

- It is also important to note that evaluating these actions based on existing data will be difficult if they actually achieve the intended outcome of changing angler behavior.