

# **Summary Report**

## **Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting**

### **November 4-6, 2020**

The South Atlantic Council's Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) convened via webinar on November 4-6, 2020.

Jessica McCawley, Snapper Grouper Committee Chair, addressed the AP to provide updates on previous recommendations to the Council.

#### **1. Update on recent regulations and status of amendments**

Council staff updated the AP on the status of the following:

- Red Snapper Seasons (Regulatory Amendment 33)
- Special Management Zones in NC & SC (Regulatory Amendment 34)
- Wreckfish ITQ Modernization (Amendment 48)
- For-hire Electronic Reporting Amendment
- Upcoming amendments for Greater Amberjack, Yellowtail Snapper, and Snowy Grouper

#### **2. Fishery Performance Report for Red Snapper**

With input from the AP, Fishery Performance Reports (FPRs) have been developed for several snapper grouper species. The intent of the FPRs is to assemble information from AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPRs will be provided to the SSC, the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP), and the Council to assist in their discussions. Council staff provided an overview of landings trends and other background information (see <http://data.safmc.net/FPRAll/>) and the AP focused their input based on a series of discussion questions from which the FPR for Red Snapper will be developed. An operational assessment (SEDAR 73) will be underway for the Red Snapper stock in the South Atlantic and is scheduled for completion in Spring 2021.

#### **3. Recommendations on the need for conservation and management of Blackfin Snapper, Coney, Cubera Snapper, Margate, Misty Grouper, Silk Snapper, Saucereye Porgy, Yellowedge Grouper, and Yellowfin Grouper**

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) requires that a Council prepare a fishery management plan (FMP) for each fishery under its authority that requires conservation and management. However, not every fishery requires federal management. For stocks that are not predominately caught in federal waters and are not or are not likely to become overfished or be subject to overfishing, a Council may determine whether they require "conservation and management" by considering a list of 10 factors. If it is determined that a species does not require conservation and management, Councils can designate that species as an Ecosystem Component (EC). Such species are not required to have annual catch limits or accountability measures. Council staff provided an overview of the factors used to evaluate whether a species needs conservation and management at the federal level as well as landings and other information on the nine species to assist the AP in

developing a recommendation (see [data.safmc.net/MgmtNeedEval2020](https://data.safmc.net/MgmtNeedEval2020)). The AP had the following comments and recommendations:

- Some AP members expressed concern over removing Cubera Snapper and Yellowedge Grouper from federal management.
- Off North Carolina, commercial fishermen do interact with Margate. Yellowedge Grouper is a high value fish (\$6 to \$7 per pound) in the commercial fishery as well.
- Cubera are important to the dive industry in Florida and North Carolina.
- There may be some identification issues between Gray (Mangrove) Snapper and Cubera Snapper.
- Cubera Snapper is not included as a species in the commercial logbook.
- There seems to be increased interest in Cubera Snapper as a recreational species so retaining it in a management plan is important.
- There may be some identification issues with Silk Snapper (different species off North Carolina and Florida). After visual identification of the species in question as *Lutjanus vivanus*, the AP expressed concern about a potentially growing commercial fishery in some areas for this species.

Recommendations:

- Consider adjusting recreational possession limit for Cubera Snapper.
- Consider evaluating whether barrel fish need to be included in a management plan.
- If Cubera Snapper remains in the FMP, then it should be added to the logbook.

**MOTION 1: AP RECOMMENDS THAT MARGATE, YELLOWEDGE GROUPE, YELLOWFIN GROUPE (FIREBACK), SILK SNAPPER (YELLOW EYE), AND CUBERA SNAPPER BE RETAINED IN THE SG FMP.  
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#### **4. Management measures for Red Porgy**

Amendment 50 to the Snapper Grouper FMP will adjust catch levels of Red Porgy in response to SEDAR 60 (2020), the most recent stock assessment for the species. The assessment found the South Atlantic stock of Red Porgy is overfished and undergoing overfishing. To end overfishing and rebuild the stock, the Council must adjust the annual catch limit downward and modify management measures (trip limits, bag limits, seasons, size limits, etc.). Council staff provided an overview of the status of the stock, landings, current regulations, life history information, and a suite of discussion questions to assist the AP to formulate recommendations on possible changes to management measures. The AP had the following comments and recommendations:

- Consider conducting analyses with a closure (both sectors) that coincides with the Shallow Water Grouper closure and a reduction in trip and bag trip limits
- For the commercial sector, Red Porgy may need to be managed under a bycatch allowance.
- Abundance of Red Snapper could be impacting the Red Porgy population.
- Abundance of Red Porgy has declined inshore partly because of increase in effort. Commercial fishermen still find large fish in deep water when fishing for Vermilion Snapper.

- It is important to the AP to keep the commercial fishery open, even at reduced level. Also important for data collection.
- Determine the peak spawning months for Red Porgy and adjust the spawning season closure accordingly.

**MOTION 2:** FOR THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR CONSIDER A RANGE OF TRIP LIMIT OPTIONS (25-60 FISH). CONSIDER CLOSURE ONLY DURING PEAK SPAWNING.

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**MOTION 3:** RECOMMEND CLOSING THE RECREATIONAL FISHERY FOR RED PORGY IN SYNCHRONY WITH THE SHALLOW WATER GROUPER SPAWNING SEASON CLOSURE. WHEN RED PORGY IS OPEN:

- 1 FISH PER ANGLER PER TRIP
- 2 FISH PER ANGLER PER TRIP

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## 5. Best Fishing Practices Discussion

Cameron Rhodes provided an update on the Council’s ongoing Best Fishing Practices campaign to promote the use of best fishing practices among fishermen following the implementation of new gear requirements in federal waters of the South Atlantic. AP members were asked to provide their perspective on the Council’s efforts to inform and educate fishermen on Best Fishing Practices, particularly on the use of descending devices (DD). AP members had the following comments:

- AP members felt that Council efforts are reaching fishermen.
- There is acknowledgement of the new requirement and DDs are available in tackle shops. People are aware and there is a lot of talk about DDs among anglers.
- There does not seem to be any confusion regarding the new requirements.
- In the beginning, DDs were expensive but that is improving. However, some tackle shops don’t have much knowledge on how to educate their customers on DDs.
- Overall positive response to DDs and many fishermen already had DDs prior to the new requirement. DDs in Beaufort and Hilton Head, South Carolina, are hard to get.
- Suggestion to add to campaign more education on ethical/smart practices (e.g., educate anglers about cutting managed species for bait). “Hot list” of ethical angling practices (including list of species that can’t be cut for bait).
- Suggestion to provide swag to commercial permit holders or increase outreach to the commercial sector.

## 6. Input for Recreational Management Topics Webinar

The Council held a meeting on November 9, 2020 to address recreational management issues including changes to accountability measures (Regulatory Amendment 31), reporting requirements and/or a permit for the private sector (Amendment 46), and the MyFishCount pilot project. The Council requested that the AP provide any input for them to consider at their meeting. Council staff provided a refresher on the content and status of the amendments

and other topics to initiate discussion and recap the AP's past recommendations. The AP had the following comments and recommendations on each topic:

**Recreational Accountability Measures:**

- Paybacks are appropriate at times and knowing the season ahead of time is beneficial. Ending a season prematurely brings on negative attitudes among fishermen.
- Uncertainty in recreational landings makes it more difficult to impose accountability measures tied to the entire ACL. This is of particular concern when one sector is consistently not catching their ACL and the other one is. AP members feel it is important to maintain the sector separation when it comes to accountability.
- Accountability measures should consider an index of abundance.
- Some AP members support in-season closures and feel that both sectors should be held to the same level of accountability.
- Other members maintained that in-season closures are acceptable *IF* the recreational landings estimates are credible and timely.
- In-season closures have large impact on for-hire industry.
- Advances in technology will continue to increase recreational fishing pressure.
- AP members generally agree that the recreational sector is catching more fish than are being attributed to it. However, there is also acknowledgement of potential reluctance among recreational fishermen to report accurately because that can potentially lead to less fish. There needs to be a fundamental shift in attitude and increased effort to provide more conservation education to anglers.
- Stepping up of enforcement will also be necessary to successfully improve management of recreational fisheries.
- Biggest hurdle to resolving accountability issues is to implement a permit/registry. Some AP members maintained that this needs to be done before any accountability measures that are put in place are effective.
- In-season closures can bring about “panic” fishing, which can increase effort.
- Some AP members support bag limit changes instead of in-season closures.
- Consistency is very important.

**Amendment 46 (permit/reporting for private recreational sector):**

- There was general agreement among the AP that an endorsement/permit (for vessels) and mandatory reporting should be considered.
- Some members felt that reporting should be required, not voluntary, citing “too many issues” associated with voluntary programs. Anglers should be required to report every time they go out (as most probably don't go out more than twice a month).
- Some members suggested making a reporting program voluntary in the beginning to promote buy-in.
- AP encourages the Council to continue exploring ways to implement a reporting requirement for the recreational sector.
- Suggestion to require a stamp upon vessel registration in addition to existing programs such as use of phone apps.
- States would do a good job implementing stamp/license and reporting requirements.
- Suggestions on frequency of reporting: weekly, every two-weeks, every time an angler goes out fishing.

- Enforcement of reporting requirements will be important.
- Suggestion to explore ways to install reporting app in vessel electronics to facilitate reporting.
- Require a sticker for vessels targeting SG species to aid in enforcement of reporting requirement or to identify vessels participating in a reporting program.
- Reporting requirement will need strong stakeholder buy-in and an effort to promote trust.
- May need to look at shorter frequency of permit renewal, if one were to be required for the recreational sector, in order to be able to enforce a potential high-frequency reporting requirement (similar to how the commercial sector operates).
- SG species is federally managed so permit should be a federal permit.
- Consider including a hail-out requirement when designing a permit/reporting program to facilitate enforcement.
- Consider separating for-hire sector from recreational sector to provide the for-hire sector with a dedicated allotment of the recreational ACL.
- Consider a program where the initial permit would be of relatively high cost (“initiation fee”) and, upon annual renewal, the permit would be eligible for a lower renewal cost; a hail-out requirement to fish in federal waters; and a reporting requirement after a week or two (or a no-fishing report); some type of identification for the vessel (sticker/decal) to aid enforcement.
- Consider including incentives in designing a reporting program.

**Innovative Approaches to Recreational Management:**

- Utilize slot limits to address highgrading in recreational fisheries
- Need to have a way to inform annual abundance to inform annual catch specifications for most important species.
- Incentivize reporting

**7. Updates**

**MyFishCount** – MyFishCount (MFC) is a pilot project launched in partnership with the NMFS and the Angler Action Foundation (AAF) to develop a mobile application to allow private recreational anglers to report their trips and catches. The project is in its final year and will be transferred to AAF at the end of 2020. During its third and final year, the pilot has focused on user recruitment and retention and promoting the use of the app among recreational anglers. Council staff gave an overview of the project focusing on outreach efforts and results of a survey completed this year.

The AP had the following comments:

- MFC would be a great way to get a voluntary reporting system off the ground at the federal level.
- Interest in potential modifications to the MFC app to allow entry of a potential permit number, if one were to be required (app has data fields for license number currently).

**Citizen Science** – Council staff updated the AP on the Council’s Citizen Science Program and pilot projects highlighting activities that have occurred since the Fall 2019. One of the pilot projects, SAFMC Release, will be expanding to collect data on all shallow water grouper in 2021. AP members were asked to provide feedback and guidance on strategies to

promote and recruit new users once the SAFMC Release project expands. Additionally, the AP was briefed on efforts to plan for the development of a customizable citizen science mobile app. The AP had the following comments:

- Suggestion to add weather-related component to SAFMC Release app to appeal to more users.
- Apps can be intimidating for some users who are not comfortable/savvy with latest mobile technology. At the same time, new technology is here to stay, and fishermen may need to become comfortable with it.
- Consider the competition with other apps that people are familiar with and are constantly using.
- Consider whether a tagging component could one day be incorporated into the project. This would appeal to fishermen that are committed to contributing to the science (e.g., dolphin tagging program).
- Some AP members indicated they were either willing to participate or willing to help identify anglers to participate in the customizable app scoping meetings. Also, some were willing to help spread the word about the expansion of the SAFMC Release app when it gets underway.

**Management response to climate change** – At their September 2020 meeting, the Council requested that the AP be provided regular updates on efforts to address management challenges related to climate change. Myra Brouwer will brief the AP on potential upcoming initiatives. The AP had the following comments:

- When engaging participants, focus on clearly stating the objective of the initiative, namely addressing *effects* of climate change specifically for fisheries, to dispel any political attitudes that may arise when causes for climate change are discussed. Focus on the effects not the cause.
- Suggest including factors like effects to working waterfronts and shifts in species distribution that are directly affecting fishing communities. Focus should be narrow initially.
- Climate change effects seem to be speeding up in some areas.
- Fishermen want to and should be involved.

**Shark Depredation** – Karyl Brewster-Geisz, of NOAA’s Office of Sustainable Fisheries’ Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Division, delivered a presentation touching on the issue of shark depredation, status of shark populations, and management.

The AP had the following comments:

- NOAA has been promoting domestic shark product as sustainable and this has been helpful for local fish markets and restaurants. Suggestion for HMS to increase efforts to promote sustainably harvested shark products in the U.S.
- There is indication that sharks are changing their behavior, and this may be contributing to the increased depredation events. However, there are also many more boats on the water than there used to be.
- Abundance of sharks on reefs in both shallow and deep water has increased based on fishermen (diver) observations over the past 10 years.

- Messaging (“peer pressure”) can be a powerful tool in educating the public and shifting attitudes.
- Consider offering incentive for fishermen to provide additional information to identify species that are most frequently involved in depredation events.
- Consider opportunities for fishermen to be able to report their observations to HMS (cooperative research? Mobile apps?).
- Some AP members don’t think depredation events have increased, but they certainly have not decreased either.
- Depredation by sandbar sharks has been going on since the 1960s off Florida.
- If sharks are concentrated where there is easy access to food, then where are they absent from? There is evidence that some species (e.g., white sharks) are inhabiting areas where they didn’t used to be, including in the South Atlantic. AP members agreed they are encountering great white sharks more frequently.
- Shark landings for this year are well below the quotas.

## 8. Other Business

### *Restructuring of 2-for-1 commercial permit:*

- Some AP members have recommended in the past that the 2-for-1 program be removed.
- Some AP members feel that the program should be evaluated to determine if it has indeed met the intent and possibly set up a permit pool to allow new entrants.
- Some AP members feel that the fishery may not yet be ready to remove the 2-for-1 program citing concern over the decline of species such as Red Grouper and Red Porgy).
- Life history and movement patterns of reef species may complicate management in some areas of the South Atlantic (i.e., local depletion issues, etc.)
- Permits for sale are hard to come by and are expensive. Leasing is often the only way for fishermen to enter the fishery. On the other hand, leasing may be contributing to high price of permits.
- Request presentation from SERO Permits Office for next AP meeting.
- Concern that removal of the current program would devalue existing permits. Corporate permits will eventually naturally “phase out” the 2-for-1 and it will eventually become a one-for-one system.
- Permit is tied to the vessel. It is easier to sell the permit along with the vessel. Sometimes a vessel must be purchased just to obtain the permit attached to it.
- NMFS does not lease permits. Brokering of permits occurs mainly by word-of-mouth.
- Permits lease between \$7,000 and \$8,000 dollars.
- Value of corporate SG permits is from \$80,000 to \$100,000.
- An AP member indicated that he sold a SG1 Corporate Permit last year for \$65,000. He offered that full-time commercial fishermen are grossing over \$200,000/year and snapper grouper fishing capitalism is setting the market price on permits.
- Fleet owners use the leasing to move their corporate permits from boat to boat.
- Corporate permits and leasing are necessary.

*Status of Gray Triggerfish:*

- AP members acknowledged the importance of the species to the snapper grouper fishery and expressed concern over its status.
- An AP member observed that Gag Grouper and Gray Triggerfish are declining in conjunction with the Red Grouper and Red Porgy stocks.

*Modification to regulations for shallow water groupers in the Florida Keys:*

- An AP member maintains that large groupers are slowly coming back to the area and requests that the Council consider allowing the harvest of one grouper (excluding Gag), per person during at least part of the spawning season closure with a limit of four fish and consider a slot size to help protect breeders.
- In addition, consider changing the grouper bag limit to allow harvest of any combination of legal-sized grouper (currently, only one can be a Gag or Black Grouper).

*Recreational reporting:*

**MOTION 4:** AP RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONTINUE TO EXPLORE THE NEED FOR BETTER AND MORE TIMELY RECREATIONAL REPORTING AND CONSIDER A PERMIT/LICENSE/REGISTRY FOR THE PRIVATE RECREATIONAL SECTOR

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