

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEE COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
March 2-3, 2021

The Committee approved the minutes from the December 2020 meeting and the agenda for the March 2021 meeting noting two items to be discussed under Other Business.

Status of Amendments under Formal Review

SERO staff update the Committee on the status of Regulatory Amendment 34 (SMZs in NC and SC). A final rule for this amendment is awaiting publication.

Snowy Grouper Stock Assessment

The update to SEDAR 36 conducted in 2020, using data through 2018, showed the stock remains overfished and is experiencing overfishing. A lower natural mortality at age was likely the primary driver of any differences between SEDAR 36 and the 2020 update. SEFSC staff delivered a presentation on the assessment's results to the Committee and the SSC Chair delivered the SSC's recommendations. The SSC accepted the base run of the assessment model as Best Available Information Available and suitable for management and presented OFL and ABC recommendations ([SSC Report](#)). In addition, Council staff provided an overview of available Snowy Grouper landings and other pertinent data using an [online application](#). The Committee made the following motion:

**MOTION 1: INSTRUCT STAFF TO INITIATE A FULL PLAN AMENDMENT FOR
SNOWY GROUPEE
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

Note: The IPT will develop a suite of possible actions for the Council's consideration at a subsequent meeting in 2021 and Council staff will obtain input from the Snapper Grouper AP regarding potential modifications to management measures.

Wreckfish ITQ Modernization (Amendment 48)

Council staff reviewed modifications to actions and alternatives and IPT and relevant LE AP recommendations. Scoping for this amendment was held during the Public Comment session on March 3. No scoping comments were received.

Staff explained there will likely be additional actions needed as a significant overhaul of the regulations will be required to move from a paper-based reporting system to an electronic reporting system. Hence, the timeline of development will need adjustment. Final approval of this amendment is now tentatively expected in June 2022. The Committee provide the following guidance:

- Remove *de minimis* allocation alternative from Action 1.

- Explore allocations that would match expected recreational landings, it might be possible to allocate between 1-2% to the recreational sector.
 - Consider number of fish associated with allocated poundage.
- Separate actions to consider a fishing year change and modification of the spawning season closure and obtain feedback from shareholders on the spawning season closure.
- It was reiterated that a Snapper Grouper Unlimited permit (SG1) should be the one required to obtain a wreckfish permit.
- Move action to modify the fishing year to follow implementation of the electronic system since fishing year is tied to those modifications.
- Continue to develop actions and alternatives related to a VMS requirement. Include consideration of current requirements in the Gulf of Mexico IFQ fisheries.
- Hold a shareholders meeting after the June 2021 Council meeting.

Greater Amberjack (Amendment 49)

Staff presented available data on Greater Amberjack landings and other relevant information on the online application (link above). Subsequently, staff provided an overview of the decision document with modifications since the December 2020 meeting and IPT recommendations. Staff indicated that revised projections had been recently received from the SEFSC and presented revised total annual catch limit (ACL) alternatives based on those projections. It was clarified that the poundages under other actions in the amendment currently do not reflect those revisions. The Committee also discussed revising the recreational Annual Catch Target (ACT) for this species (Action 3) and supported the IPT’s to consider more general removal of recreational ACTs from the Snapper Grouper FMP, as these levels are not currently being used in management. The Committee made the following motions and provided the guidance below:

- Include language under Action 2 that notes an alternative that maintained the current commercial ACL poundage and only varied the recreational ACL according to any increase in the total ACL was previously considered and removed, due to the long-term allocations (2026-2027+) being very similar (within 1%) to allocation percentages from Alternative 2, which applies the current allocation formula to landings that include recreational catch estimates calibrated to the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (FES).
- For Action 3, remove Alternative 2 and revise the language to consider removing recreational ACTs for all species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

MOTION 2: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 1 AS PREFERRED

Action 1. Revise the Greater Amberjack annual catch limit and annual optimum yield

Alternative 2. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for Greater Amberjack and set equal to the updated acceptable biological catch based on the results of the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 59 2020). The 2026-27 total annual catch limit would remain in place until modified.

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022-23	4,380,000
2023-2024	3,233,000
2024-2025	2,818,000
2025-2026	2,699,000
2026-2027+	2,669,000

NOTE: Proposed annual catch limits are based on recreational data calibrated to the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (FES). Future recreational catches under these limits would be monitored by the FES.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 3: APPROVE AMENDMENT 49 FOR SCOPING

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Red Porgy (Amendment 50)

During the December meeting, the Council reviewed preliminary analyses and recommendations from the Snapper Grouper AP, requested specific analyses for review at this meeting, and approved the amendment for scoping. Scoping hearings were held on February 3 and 4, 2021 via webinar. Staff reviewed scoping comments, actions and alternatives with available analyses, and IPT recommendations. The Committee reviewed, modified, and approved actions and the range of alternatives under each action. The Committee provided the following guidance to the IPT:

- Request the IPT discuss possibly adding an alternative for catch level that reflects rebuilding at T_{min} (ACL = 0). Add discussion to the amendment to explain the apparent disconnect between the projected catch levels under rebuilding projections and the recommended ABC (similar situation noted for snowy grouper) and the role of recruitment.
- Incorporate reference to “annual” OY to Action 2 and its alternatives. It was noted the language for a similar action in Amendment 49 (Greater Amberjack) includes this language and the Committee suggested being consistent.
- Remove Action 4 (revision of the recreational ACT) for Red Porgy (since an action was included in Amendment 49 to consider removing the recreational ACT for all species for which it has been specified under the Snapper Grouper FMP).
- Modify alternatives for a recreational vessel (Action 6) limit to include 6, 12, and 18 fish per vessel.
- Include an alternative that explores options for different vessel limits for headboats for analysis and discussion.
- Remove action to consider modification to commercial accountability measures.
- Direct the IPT to develop an alternative to modify recreational accountability measures to incorporate multi-year (3 years or longer) running averages.
- Direct IPT to explore use of geometric mean vs arithmetic mean for triggering recreational accountability measures

Updates

Red Snapper and Greater Amberjack Research Projects:

In 2020, the NMFS Sea Grant Consortium received funding to administer programs to solicit research on Red Snapper (South Atlantic) and Greater Amberjack (South Atlantic and Gulf). The goal is to support research that would generate absolute estimates of abundance, with accompanying measures of uncertainty, for these stocks. The intent is for this information to be used as an “anchor point” for future stock assessments. These are sister projects to the much larger “Great Red Snapper Count” that was conducted in the Gulf of Mexico. Council staffs serve on the Steering Committees for each project and provided updates on progress to date for each project.

South Atlantic Preliminary Recreational Landings and 2021 Red Snapper Season

SERO staff presented preliminary 2020 recreational landings for Red Snapper and other information that will be used to determine the duration of the 2021 recreational season. The Committee discussed several issues related to Red Snapper:

- The SSC is scheduled to review the assessment at their April meeting (scheduled for April 27-29 and May 3, 2021) and provide their recommendations to the Council in June.
- The Red Snapper assessment will be presented to the Council at the June meeting.
- Adjusting catch levels, if allowed, could be done via an abbreviated framework. However, adjusting sector allocations would have to be done through a plan amendment (which takes much longer to develop).
- An approach where the Red Snapper ACL is adjusted through a framework amendment and allocations are addressed through a separate amendment was offered (the Gulf Council is pursuing such an approach). *Clarification – Gulf Council’s action to change red snapper ACLs is related to an interim analysis and does not consider changes in allocation because the assessment does not incorporate MRIP FES data.*
- NOAA GC will be providing further advice to the Council regarding the approach above.

MOTION 4: REQUEST THE SSC PROVIDE SHORT-TERM MANAGEMENT (3 to 5 YEARS) ADVICE FOR RED SNAPPER ASSUMING RECENT HIGH RECRUITMENT APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 5: REQUEST THAT STAFF DETERMINE WHETHER AN ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK CAN BE USED TO ADJUST CATCH LEVELS OF RED SNAPPER AND, IF SO, PREPARE SUCH AN AMENDMENT FOR COUNCIL REVIEW IN JUNE 2021 APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Agenda topics for Spring 2021 Snapper Grouper AP Meeting

The Snapper Grouper AP is scheduled to convene via webinar on April 21-23, 2021. The Committee reviewed the list of topics below and approved it for staff to develop the AP’s agenda.

- Fishery overviews for Greater Amberjack, Yellowtail Snapper, and Snowy Grouper – recommendations on potential management measures
- Mutton Snapper FPR
- Amendment 49 (Greater Amberjack) – overview of proposed actions/alternatives and available analyses
- Amendment 50 (Red Porgy) – overview of proposed actions/alternatives and available analyses
- Amendment 48 (Wreckfish ITQ Modernization) – brief update and schedule shareholders meeting separately (include in T&T). Request input on recreational catch of wreckfish.
- SEDAR updates (Red Snapper, golden Tilefish, Gag, others)
- CitSci – the new ACCSP CitSci app (SciFish) combining Release and CatchULater. Demo of the app and short update on the general program
- Discussion on possible approaches to reduce recreational discards
- Feedback on Council’s research recommendations
- Request feedback on vermilion snapper trip limit

Other Business

The Committee discussed the two items below:

Golden Tilefish –

Projections indicate that the longline fishery for golden Tilefish may be reopened for an additional 11 days (this estimate subject to change). Fishermen indicated their preference for the fishery to be reopened in the days leading up to Easter (April 4), such as on or around March 20. NMFS staff stated that this can be done, and staff will prepare to announce the reopening as requested in late March.

Vermilion Snapper –

An emergency rule went into place in 2020 to increase the commercial trip limit for Vermilion Snapper to 1,500 pounds to help mitigate impacts of the pandemic on the commercial industry in the region. The emergency rule will expire on March 31, 2021. A Committee member requested discussion on whether the emergency rule could be extended. NOAA GC explained the emergency measures could not be extended without proper public notice and comment and without the Council actively working on an amendment to address the emergency. Neither of these criteria have been met. Additionally, the Council modified the commercial trip limit for Vermilion Snapper recently (in 2020)

The Committee made the motion below but did not vote on it.

MOTION: INCREASE THE VERMILION SNAPPER TRIP LIMIT TO 1,500 LBS

MOTION WITHDRAWN

The Council discussed looking for added flexibility to make adjustments to management measures as the need arises. The Council requested input from the Snapper Grouper AP on this topic.

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 6: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Request a presentation from the SEFSC on pilot longline surveys in the region to be provided to the Committee at the June meeting, if time allows.
- Prepare Amendment 49 (Greater Amberjack) for scoping and conduct scoping hearings before the June meeting.
- Schedule and facilitate a meeting of the Snapper Grouper AP with approved agenda topics in April.
- Schedule wreckfish shareholders meeting after the June 2021 meeting.
- Request that the SSC explore ABC recommendations based on recent high recruitment for Red Snapper
- Prepare an abbreviated framework to adjust catch levels for Red Snapper for review and approval in June 2021, if appropriate
- Initiate amendment to address snowy grouper and direct staff to ensure appropriate timeline for development

APPROVED BY COUNCIL