

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Overview

During their meeting on April 18-19, 2012, the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) will: (A) conduct elections for Chair and Vice-Chair; (B) receive an summary on relevant items discussed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) during their April 3-5, 2012 meeting; (C) receive an update on the status of Snapper Grouper amendments under review; (D) receive an overview on Snapper Grouper Amendment 18B (golden tilefish) and provide recommendations for the Council to consider at their June 2012 meeting; (E) receive an overview on the Comprehensive Ecosystem-based Amendment 3 (CE-BA 3); (F) receive a presentation from Dr. Chris Koenig on Snapper Grouper Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Gulf of Mexico; (G) discuss and provide recommendations on possible area closures to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper; and (H) discuss items under Other Business as appropriate.

A. Election of AP Chair and Vice-Chair

The AP will nominate candidates for Chair and Vice-Chair and elections will be conducted as determined by the current AP Chair. The newly elected Chair and Vice-chair will serve in their new capacity beginning with the subsequent AP meeting (the timing of which has not yet been determined).

B. Summary of SSC discussion and recommendations on Snapper Grouper items

The Council's SSC will have met in early April and discussed a number of items of interest to the AP. Council staff will provide an overview of the SSC's discussions and recommendations on the following: SEDAR activities update, ABC Control Rule modifications, current ABCs and landings, area closures for speckled hind and warsaw grouper, and allocations.

C. Update on Snapper Grouper amendments under review

Council staff will update the AP on the status of amendments undergoing review including comment periods and effective dates of new regulations, if applicable.

D. Amendment 18B (Golden Tilefish) – Attachment 1

Public hearings for Amendment 18B were held in January-February 2012. During their March 2012 meeting the Council reviewed Amendment 18B and input received from the public. The Council made several changes to the amendment including removing consideration of an endorsement for the hook and line component of the commercial fishery. The amendment now contains 8 actions that would: establish a longline endorsement and determine eligibility criteria, determine an appeals process, specify allocations of the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) for the longline and hook and line components of

the commercial sector, establish transferability criteria for longline endorsements, modify existing trip limits and establish new ones for those that do not receive endorsements, and modify the fishing year.

The AP should provide comments and recommendations on each of the actions. Amendment 18B is scheduled to be approved for submission to the Secretary of Commerce in June 2012.

E. Comprehensive Ecosystem-based Amendment 3 – Attachment 2

Items to be included in this amendment were taken out to public scoping in early 2012. The scoping process gives the public a chance to comment on actions *before* the Council decides to consider any changes in management. At their March 2012 meeting, the Council reviewed scoping comments and gave staff guidance on which actions should remain in the current document, which ones would be removed from further consideration, and which ones would be deferred to a future amendment. The AP can offer comments on any of the actions contained in the amendment at this time. Public hearings for this amendment are being scheduled for August with anticipated approval for submission in September or December 2012. Hence the AP will have further opportunity to provide recommendations.

F. Snapper Grouper MPAs in the Gulf of Mexico

Dr. Chris Koenig has dedicated his career to conducting research on the ecology of snapper and grouper populations. One aspect of his research has focused on the efficacy of MPAs in the Gulf of Mexico region. Dr. Koenig will give a presentation on the Gulf MPAs and provide his expert opinion for the establishment of closed areas to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper populations in the South Atlantic.

G. Area Closures for Speckled Hind and Warsaw Grouper – Attachments 3 & 4

At their March 2012 meeting the Council announced its intention to consider area closures to protect populations of speckled hind and warsaw grouper. These species are undergoing overfishing and their overfished status is currently unknown. With the implementation of Amendment 17B the Council established an ACL of zero landings for both species and prohibited fishing for 6 deepwater species seaward of 240 feet (40 fathoms) to reduce bycatch mortality on speckled hind and warsaw grouper. However, scientific data suggest that the deepwater closure may not be sufficient to curb mortality of these two species.

Petitions were submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in 2010 for designation of these two species as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. At that time, NMFS determined that there was insufficient information to assign such designations. However, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

(IUCN) has designated both species as Critically Endangered whereas the American Fisheries Society lists them as Endangered.

The Council wants to consider establishment of closed areas for these two species under CE-BA 3. However, data on occurrence, habitat and spawning sites are very limited. Hence the Council is reaching out to knowledgeable fishermen for information to assist in selection of strategic areas that will effectively protect these species. A series of workshops is being planned to elicit input from fishermen, scientists, and the public. The first such workshop will take place on April 18th starting at 6:00 P.M. following the conclusion of that day's AP meeting. Members of the AP are strongly encouraged to participate.

The AP should develop recommendations on possible area closures for the Council to consider at their June 2012 meeting.

H. Other Business – Attachments 5 & 6

AP members have expressed interest in discussing several items including comparisons of grouper landings to current ACLs, allocations, and state-by-state management of ACLs. Items for discussion will be at the discretion of the AP Chair.