

# Summary Report

## Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting

### October 10-12, 2023

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) convened in Charleston, SC on October 10-12, 2023.

The AP approved the minutes from the April 2023 meeting and the agenda for the October 2023 meeting.

#### **1. Committee Chair Remarks**

Jessica McCawley, Chair of the Snapper Grouper Committee for the Council, provided opening remarks along with a framework for what the Council was expecting from the AP at the meeting.

#### **2. Updates**

**Recent Amendments:** Council staff updated the AP on the status of recent and developing Council actions that were not scheduled for discussion in this AP meeting, including Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Amendments 44 (Yellowtail Snapper), 48 (Wreckfish Individual Transfer Quota Program Modernization), 49 (Greater Amberjack and Recreational Annual Catch Targets), 51 (Snowy Grouper), 52 (Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish), 53 (Gag and Black Grouper), 54 (Joint Comprehensive Electronic Logbook), and 56 (Black Sea Bass), as well as Regulatory Amendments 35 (Red Snapper and Release Mortality) and 36 (Gag, Black Grouper, and Black Sea Bass On-Demand Pots).

**Best Fishing Practices Outreach:** Council staff presented recent updates on the Best Fishing Practices Campaign, including details on "What It Means to Me," a recently approved outreach initiative, the Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program, and completed and future outreach activities. The AP provided conversation topics and platforms to share the "What It Means to Me" video project. For the upcoming Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program, the AP provided multiple locations to host the workshops around the region and shared their willingness to participate and spread the word about the program.

#### **3. Amendment 46 (Recreational Permitting)**

Amendment 46 to the Snapper Grouper FMP considers the development of a permit for the private component of the recreational fishery that may be paired with an education requirement. Council staff presented an overview of Amendment 46, currently under development by the Council. The amendment will be considered for approval of public hearings at the Council's December 2023 meeting. The AP provided the following comments and recommendations, and approved the following motions:

**Action 1. Establish a private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region**

**MOTION 1: REGARDLESS OF VESSEL OR ANGLER BASED PERMITTING, THE AP ADVISES THE COUNCIL TO INCLUDE REPORTING, PERMITTING, AND EDUCATION. APPROVED BY AP (14 IN FAVOR; 1 OPPOSED; 2 ABSTAIN)**

Comments:

- The AP noted that there was still unanimous support for creating a private recreational permit of some kind.
- AP members had a thorough discussion comparing the characteristics of a vessel-based and angler-based permit. There was a split opinion amongst AP members on which alternative to recommend as preferred with 11 members in favor of a vessel-based permit and 7 members in favor of an angler-based permit.
- Those in favor of a vessel-based permit noted that the logistics of issuing a vessel based permit would be easier since fewer permits would need to be issued, it would be consistent with how other federal permits are issued in the southeast, and would be easier to enforce than an angler-based permit.
- Those in favor of an angler-based permit noted that such a permit would more thoroughly identify the number of participants in the snapper grouper fishery and would broaden the reach of the education requirement.
- The AP noted support for including a reporting requirement for private recreational anglers in Amendment 46.

**Action 2. Specify the species that would be covered by a private recreational snapper grouper permit**

Comments:

- The AP reiterated its previous feedback on Action 2 from the April 2023 meeting as follows:.

**MOTION 2: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL SELECTS ALTERNATIVE 2 (ALL SPECIES WITHIN THE SNAPPER GROUPE COMPLEX). APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)**

- While it could help to match the Florida State Reef Fish Survey species for consistency, some important snapper grouper species are not included in that list so it would be advisable to go with all species within the complex to be comprehensive regionally.
- Choosing all species in the snapper grouper complex could make it easier for permit holders to comply with the permit requirement since they would not need to remember which of the species fall under the permit and which ones do not.

**Action 3. Establish a mechanism that would allow a state to opt out of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region**

Comments:

- Funding is going to be an issue for states. It would be beneficial for the states to receive federal funding in support of a state-issued private recreational snapper grouper permit.
- What would a federal permit requirement look like in the state of Florida given the existing State Reef Fish Angler designation? If the federal requirements do not align with the current state requirements, would anglers still need to get both a federal and state permit?

**Education requirement related actions:**

Comments:

- The AP reiterated support for establishing an education requirement as soon as possible.
- Development of the requirement should get underway soon, as the education materials need to be streamlined and working when the permit requirement goes into place.

**4. Amendment 55 Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper (*Attachment 4*)**

The amendment proposes to establish a Scamp Yellowmouth Grouper Complex in response to SEDAR 68 and establish the following for the complex: stock determination criteria, rebuilding plan, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limits (ACL), sector allocations, and accountability measures. In addition, the amendment would reorganize and update the Other South Atlantic Shallow Water Grouper Complex. In September, the Council reviewed a decision document that included an overview of the scoping webinars held in early August, updated actions and alternatives, and gave staff guidance on the preferred approach to update the Other South Atlantic Shallow Water Grouper Complex ACL. The Council sought input from the AP on whether additional management measures are needed for scamp and yellowmouth grouper. At the December meeting the Council will review a draft document, updated action and alternative language, and preliminary analysis.

- One member suggested a reduced trip limit, in line with gag and red grouper
  - Gag (AM 53): 300 lbs gw
  - Red Grouper currently: 200 lbs gw
- Another AP member said it may be hard to set a commercial trip limit before the new complex is established and catch levels are put in place.
- One member noted that scamp are hard to catch and are notoriously picky. He did not think that they are seeing less due to fishing pressure. It was also noted that from the commercial side, scamp and yellowmouth are often lumped together as a single species which supports combining the two into the new complex.

**5. Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation Input (*Attachment 5*)**

The Council is conducting a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to explore long-term management strategies for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. Dr. Tom Carruthers of Blue Matter Science reviewed the MSE process and discussed progress thus far. He then

requested the AP's input on management alternatives and robustness test of the model and conclusions.

Uncertainties to consider in terms of robustness of the snapper grouper management system:

- Weather – Especially with respect to short seasons, such as recreational red snapper; incorporate spatial variation in weather and fishing effort; also consider effect of hurricanes
- Economic variability – Account for how economic fluctuations impact fishing effort
- Spatial variability of fishing seasons within the region
- Influence of gear advances (hook type, rod type, GPS advancements, trolling motors, etc.)
- Future recreational capacity
- Future productivity changes due to climate, coastal development, etc.
- Increased allowance/resumption of red snapper harvest
- Intra-regional variability in the recruitment response to increased red snapper abundance (Carolinas would see it later than northern Florida-Georgia)

Management Options

- Hook type/number
- Different bag/retention limits (impact of a 1-fish bag limit)
- Effort controls through season or by area
- 1-month open season at either end of the spawning season (May and December)
- Different timing of the season

Alternative Runs

- Account for potential bias in recreational data observed in the MRIP FES pilot study (e.g. 40% overestimation)
- Dome-shaped selectivity
- Accounting for black sea bass predation by red snapper
- Adjusting weights of surveys and catch streams (upweighting commercial and for-hire data) in assessment models
- Evaluate potential effects of density-dependent growth and higher juvenile mortality with higher mature biomass

(Boat insurance data may be an avenue for estimating the number of boats by year, as an estimator of effort.)

## **6. Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish Fishery Performance Report (*Attachment 6*)**

With input from the AP, Fishery Performance Reports (FPRs) have been developed for several snapper grouper species, including golden tilefish in 2018 and blueline tilefish in 2019. 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. An operational assessment (SEDAR 89) for the South Atlantic golden tilefish stock

is scheduled for completion by mid-2024, and an operational assessment (SEDAR 92) for the Atlantic blueline tilefish stock is scheduled for completion by the end of 2024.

Council staff provided an overview of the previous FPRs, landings trends, and other background information. The AP focused their input based on a series of discussion questions, from which the FPRs for golden tilefish and blueline tilefish were updated. A copy of the full report as well as other FPRs, including the previously completed FPRs for golden tilefish and blueline tilefish will be uploaded to: <https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/FPRAll/>.

### **7. Offshore Wind Activities in the Southeast Region Presentation (*Attachment 7*)**

Representatives from Kitty Hawk Wind (Avangrid), Duke Energy, and TotalEnergies Carolina Long Bay presented information about ongoing offshore wind projects off North Carolina and responded to clarifying questions from the AP.

### **8. Discussion of Limited Entry into the For-Hire Component of the Snapper Grouper Fishery (*Attachment 8*)**

In June 2023, the Council requested that the AP discuss limited entry for the snapper grouper recreational for-hire component. The Council previously considered limited entry into the for-hire component through Snapper Grouper Amendment 47. This amendment was discontinued in 2018, following scoping. Council staff summarized previous discussions from Amendment 47. The AP provided the following comments in response to discussion questions and made the following motion:

Should the Council consider limited entry for the recreational for-hire component of the snapper grouper fishery?

- Overall, most of the AP expressed support for re-consideration of limiting entry for the recreational for-hire component of the snapper grouper fishery.
- Representatives from the Florida Keys and South Carolina noted large population growth in recent years and increases in the number of recreational for-hire participants.
- The AP discussed whether head boats and “6-pack” charters should both be included in limited entry considerations.
  - Head boats should have some separation from other for-hire.
  - 6-pack charters can fish for a wider variety of species using a wider variety of methods. Head boats have more limited methods and target species.
  - Head boats have a higher regulatory requirement to operate than charters.
  - Private boats can be insured to do similar things as charter, easing entry into this component of the fishery.
- During the Amendment 47 process, the Council set a control date of June 15, 2016. After that date, there is no guarantee of entry into the limited entry fishery.
  - This control date should be revisited. It was set during a previous amendment process and many changes have happened since then.
  - Consider setting control date to align with the beginning of electronic for-hire reporting.
- In October 2023, 1,899 permits were active. The Council should consider how many permits are wanted in the long-term future of this fishery.

- “Illegal charters” (charged trips by boat owners that do not have for-hire license) are becoming more of a problem through social media advertising.
- In considering how entry would be limited and who would be allowed entry, the Council should consider regional variations in fishing effort, as well as differences between part-time and full-time participants. Possibly consider more clearly defining “professional” charter captains.
- Captain and mate are being limited from inclusion in bag limit for some species.
- Many Snapper/Grouper management unit species are becoming a very limited resource.
  - Limited entry could be considered for South Atlantic fisheries outside snapper grouper, as well.
- Look at Gulf for-hire management & process for limited entry.
  - In the Gulf, different permits based on how many passengers can be carried.

**MOTION 3:** THE ADVISORY PANEL RECOMMENDS THE COUNCIL CONSIDER LIMITED ENTRY FOR THE RECREATIONAL FOR-HIRE COMPONENT OF THE SNAPPER GROUPEL FISHERY, WITH INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

- NUMBER OF PERMITS TO BE CONSIDERED
- WILL THERE BE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN 6 OR FEWER OR MORE THAN 6 PASSENGERS?
- CONTROL DATE ON OR AROUND THE TIME OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOR-HIRE REPORTING REQUIREMENT
- WILL THIS APPLY TO FISHERIES OUTSIDE OF SNAPPER GROUPEL?

**APPROVED BY AP (15-0-1ABS)**

How high of a priority should this consideration have?

- **The AP recommends that the Council consider both a private recreational permit (leading to reporting) and recreational for-hire limited entry to be of similar, high priority. Both of these should be implemented as soon as possible.**
- Management restrictions are under development and scheduled in the future. Additionally, reporting difficulties have been noted for the for-hire component. These factors necessitate consideration of limited for-hire entry in the near future.
- However, the AP also maintains that private recreational reporting is of the highest priority for snapper grouper management. Steps toward private recreational reporting (which starts with private recreational permitting through Amendment 46) should not be delayed.

## 9. Other Updates

**Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR):** SAFMC staff provided an update of recently finished, ongoing, and upcoming SEDAR projects and the recommendations of the SEDAR committee from the September 2023 Council meeting. Volunteers were requested to participate in the upcoming Florida Hogfish Benchmark and South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Track stock assessments. AP members Richard Gomez and Andrew Fish volunteered to participate in the Florida Hogfish Data Workshop, and Harry Morales volunteered to participate in the South Atlantic Red Snapper Data Workshop. Another opportunity for AP

members to volunteer for the Red Snapper stock assessment will occur at subsequent AP meetings as the start date for the assessment gets closer.

**Citizen Science (Attachment 9):** Council staff provided information on Citizen Science Program activities, including the Citizen Science Program advisory groups, the Citizen Science Program's Project Idea Portal, Program evaluation, and the SMILE project. Additionally, staff presented information on the efforts underway to collect additional historic fishing photos for the FISHstory project and provided an update on the SAFMC Release Project.

Some AP members provided historic photos for the FISHstory project and others indicated they will be able to provide photos in the future. The group provided specific suggestions on possible organizations/businesses (e.g. Carteret County Historical Society, Sanitary restaurant in Morehead City, Hurricane Hole restaurant on Stock Island, Reel Bar in Mount Pleasant) to contact about gathering historical fishing photos. They also suggested the International Game Fish Association, Facebook groups, fishing tournaments, fishing clubs, and fish houses as other avenues to explore for gathering photos.

## **10. Other Business**

### Vermilion Snapper Commercial Trip Limit

**MOTION 4:** RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL DISCUSS INCREASING THE COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT FOR VERMILION SNAPPER WITH OPTIONS UP TO 1500 POUNDS IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC.

#### **APPROVED BY AP (15-0-1ABS)**

- Commercial harvest has not approached ACL recently (since 2016); restrictions on other species have impacted commercial fishermen.
- Consider a step down.

### Commercial 2 for 1 Policy

- Define date or number of participants that would end the 2 for 1 policy.
- Clarification from the Council/NMFS on the long-term intent for allowing the leasing of commercial vessels.

### Spearfishing Commercial Endorsement

- Consideration of historical landings provision and possibly a control date to limit entry.

### 225-Pound Commercial Permit Transfers

- 225-Pound Commercial Permits are only transferable to a vessel owned or leased by the same permit holder. They:
  - Can not be sold to a new owner.
  - Can not be transferred to immediate family.
- Under current rules, permits can be transferred between individuals by permit ownership under a corporation and transfer of corporation ownership to another individual.
- One AP member proposed revising regulations to disallow this type of transfer.