

Overview

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

Crowne Plaza
4831 Tanger Outlet Boulevard
North Charleston, SC

April 17-19, 2017

1. Status of Amendments Recently Submitted and Overview of Recent Management Actions (*Attachment 1*)

The Advisory Panel (AP) will receive a status report on the following amendments to the Snapper Grouper FMP:

- Amendment 36 (Spawning SMZs) – sent to NMFS on 8/30/16
- Amendment 37 (hogfish) – sent to NMFS on 9/23/16
- Amendment 41 (Mutton Snapper) – sent to NMFS on 2/28/17
- For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment – sent to NMFS on 3/4/17

In addition, staff will review regulatory actions affecting the snapper grouper fishery since 2014.

2. Red Snapper Management and Recreational Reporting (*Attachments 2a-2c*)

During the March 2017 Council meeting, the Snapper Grouper Committee received a briefing from Dr. Bonnie Ponwith (Southeast Fisheries Science Center, SEFSC) on the Council's request for red snapper ABC projections under a discards-only scenario. Dr. Ponwith explained that the SEFSC was not able to provide those projections due to the length of time since the completion of the assessment, uncertainty in the landings since most landings are coming from discards, and the change in MRIP methodology for estimating landings and discards. See *Attachment 2a* for the SEFSC's reply to the Council's request. Council staff presented a summary of the scoping comments received on Amendment 43 during the January/February rounds of hearings and the Snapper Grouper Committee discussed options for management approaches for red snapper. Dr. Roy Crabtree went on record stating that the Council has likely taken sufficient actions to address overfishing of red snapper in the South Atlantic and should focus on developing a methodology to obtain an ABC for red snapper. *Attachment 2b* is the letter Dr. Crabtree sent to the Council. Council staff were directed to continue work on Amendment 43 but focus on best fishing practices items pending resolution on obtaining an ABC for red snapper. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the SEFSC will collaborate to explore approaches to arrive at an ABC for red snapper.

Council staff will facilitate discussion of possible management options (*Attachment 2c*) to reduce discards of red snapper and improve the survival of released fish. In addition, Amendment 43 also contains actions to improve recreational reporting. The AP should discuss and provide recommendations.

3. Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 - Recreational Management Measures (Attachment 3)

Scoping hearings (conducted via webinar and in-person) were held from January 14 to February 8, 2017. At the March Council meeting, staff presented a summary of the scoping comments and the Council provided guidance on actions and alternatives that should remain in the document and be further analyzed. Actions being considered in this amendment pertain to the recreational sector and are listed below:

1. Establish a recreational aggregate bag limit and recreational season for deep-water species;
2. Establish a recreational aggregate bag limit for shallow-water grouper species;
3. Modify the 10-snapper and 20-fish recreational aggregate bag limits;
4. Modify the seasonal prohibition on recreational harvest and possession of shallow-water groupers;
5. Remove the recreational minimum size limits for deep-water snapper species;
6. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for black sea bass; and
7. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off East Florida.

The AP will review the discussion document (*Attachment 3*), discuss each action, and provide recommendations.

4. Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 - Commercial Management Measures (Attachment 4)

Scoping hearings (conducted via webinar and in-person) were held from January 14 to February 8, 2017. At the March Council meeting, staff presented a summary of the scoping comments and the Council provided guidance on actions and alternatives that should remain in the document and be further analyzed. Actions being considered in this amendment pertain to the commercial sector and are listed below:

1. Establish a commercial split season for blueline tilefish;
2. Establish a commercial split season for red porgy;
3. Establish a commercial split season for snowy grouper;
4. Establish a commercial split season for greater amberjack;
5. Modify the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper in the second season;
6. Implement a commercial trip limit for the Other Jacks Complex;
7. Modify the seasonal prohibition on commercial harvest and possession of shallow-water groupers;
8. Remove the commercial minimum size limits for deep-water snapper species; and
9. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in federal waters off East Florida.

The AP will review the discussion document (*Attachment 4*), discuss each action, and provide recommendations.

5. Buoy Gear Discussion (*Attachment 5*)

Council staff and Council members were recently made aware of the rise in popularity of buoy gear in the snapper grouper fishery. Buoy gear is classified as “allowable gear” in the fishery and is currently under the category of hook-and-line gear. The AP is asked to provide information/recommendations to the Council on the use of this type of fishing gear.

6. Discussion on limited-entry for the for-hire component of the snapper grouper fishery (*Attachments 6a & 6b*)

At recent meetings, the Council discussed several issues with the for-hire sector of the snapper grouper fishery that could be addressed through limiting the number of for-hire permits, and potential benefits to the for-hire component from this management approach. Possible challenges that could be addressed include limiting the number of for-hire vessels interacting with red snapper thereby lowering discards and discard mortality, data quality issues, compliance with existing (headboats) and upcoming (charter vessel) reporting requirements, lack of stability for businesses to plan, and overcapacity in the for-hire fleet (too many boats, not enough fish). The Snapper Grouper AP has discussed limiting the number of for-hire (Charter/Headboat) permits in the past (most recently at their November 2016 meeting). Stakeholders also brought up the topic during the visioning process in 2014-2015. To inform the Council’s discussion of this topic, staff prepared a white paper (*Attachment 6a*) and accompanying presentation (*Attachment 6b*) for the March 2017 Council meeting. However, the Council did not have sufficient time to discuss how or whether to move forward with possibly implementing limited entry for the for-hire component of the snapper grouper fishery. Hence, the same briefing material is being provided to the AP for their comments and recommendations. The Council intends to continue discussing this topic at their June 2017 meeting.

7. SAFMC Research Plan, 2015-2019 (*Attachment 7*)

The 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act directed the Fishery Management Councils to develop a prioritized research plan for submission to the Secretary of Commerce. The initial South Atlantic Council (Council) plan, addressing needs for 2008-2012, was submitted to NMFS in 2007. That plan detailed overall data needs by fishery, provided a list of priority stocks for stock assessment, and included a number of specific data needs. Updates to the Council plan were prepared and submitted annually from 2007 through 2015.

Given the long-term nature of many research needs, the fact that the priority plans cover a 5 year period, and recognizing that only minor changes were occurring from year to year, in 2015 the Council recommended moving to a bi-annual update process. Additionally, the research plan approach also changed with the 2015 submission, becoming more focused, explicit, and time specific. *Attachment 7* contains summarized research needs identified by the Council for 2015-2019. The AP is encouraged to provide comments and suggest specific changes/additions to the existing plan. The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee will be providing their recommendations at their April 25-27, 2017 meeting.

8. Updates (*Attachments 8-10*)

- **SEDAR:**

A brief status summary of the SEDAR South Atlantic snapper grouper projects is below. SEDAR staff will provide an update on the South Atlantic SEDAR schedule and upcoming stock assessments. Additionally, staff would like to identify Advisory Panel members who would be interested in participating in upcoming SEDAR assessments, so those names can be provided to the SAFMC for their consideration during the appointment process.

SEDAR Project Status:

- SEDAR 48, Southeastern Black Grouper: In progress. A benchmark assessment of Black Grouper will be prepared during 2017 with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission providing the analytical team. This is a jointly managed stock with the Gulf Council, so both Councils made appointments and approved the schedule and Terms of Reference. The Data Workshop was held March 15-17, 2017 in St. Petersburg, FL. Unfortunately, no Council (SAFMC) industry representatives attended the workshop. The Assessment Workshop is scheduled for June 27-29, 2017 and the Review Workshop is scheduled for November 14-16, 2017. The SAFMC SSC will consider the assessment in April 2018 and recommendations will be provided to the Council in June 2018.
- SEDAR 56, South Atlantic Black Sea Bass: In progress. A standard assessment was requested to allow consideration of new video data and to reconsider the use of length and age data. The terminal year is 2015 and the assessment will be developed through a series of five webinars held between February and August 2017. The assessment will be submitted to the SSC for review in October 2017 and recommendations provided to the Council in December 2017.
- SEDAR 50, Atlantic Blueline Tilefish: In progress. A benchmark assessment has been underway since mid-2016. Significant events to date include a recommendation from the August 2016 Age Workshop that age determinations are not reliable and should not be used in the assessment; and a recommendation from the June 2016 Stock ID workshop that the biological stock extends from the Mid-Atlantic through the Gulf of Mexico. Following discussion of the stock ID recommendation, the SEDAR Steering Committee recommended a joint SSC review of the stock ID findings; this review was held October 28, 2016. The Steering Committee recommended a regional leadership level review of the joint SSC findings to provide TOR guidance, conducted during a conference call on November 14, 2016. The Council-Agency leadership group recommended conducting the SEDAR 50 assessment with a Gulf-South Atlantic stock dividing line at the Gulf-South Atlantic Council boundary. The SAFMC passed a motion in December 2016 to modify the TORs in accordance with this recommendation. The Data Workshop was held January 23-27, 2017, the Assessment Process will be a combination of in-person workshop on May 23-26, 2017 and a series of webinars held between April and July 2017, and the Review Workshop will be August 29-31, 2017. The assessment will be considered by the SSC in October 2017 and recommendations provided to the Council in December 2017.

- SEDAR 55, South Atlantic Vermilion Snapper: Planning underway. A standard assessment was requested to allow consideration of new video index data. The terminal year will be 2016 and assessment webinars will be held in late 2017 and early 2018. Preliminary scheduling provides the assessment for SSC consideration in April 2018 and Council consideration in June 2018. The Council will be asked to make appointments for the assessment panel and approve the schedule and TORs at the June 2017 meeting. SEDAR staff would like to identify Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel members who are interested in potentially participating in SEDAR 55 to provide to the SAFMC for their consideration.
- MRIP Revision Assessments: Requested stocks for revision assessments are Red Snapper, Red Grouper, Blueline Tilefish, and Black Sea Bass. Revision assessments will include an update of the MRIP data, based on calibrations applied to address the effort survey change. No additional changes or data will be considered, and the terminal year of the assessment will not be advanced. Revision assessments were initially schedule for development in late 2017 for SSC review in April 2018. Due to delays in the calibration process and recommendations from the calibration team and Council to include the full 3 years of side-by-side survey information (2015-2017), the Council has requested the revision assessments be prepared in 2018. Due to the delays noted above, at their March 2017 meeting, the SAFMC requested that the SEDAR Steering Committee consider replacing the planned MRIP Revision Assessments in 2017 with a standard assessment of Golden Tilefish. This request will be discussed at the Spring 2017 SEDAR Steering Committee meeting.
- Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Scamp: Early planning stages. A Research Track assessment is tentatively scheduled to start in 2018. Schedule and Terms of Reference will be developed in the upcoming months. SEDAR staff would like to identify Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel members who are interested in potentially participating in the Scamp assessment. Once planning gets underway and a preliminary schedule is developed, staff will follow up with any identified Advisory Panel members to determine availability before providing names to the SAFMC for their consideration in the appointment process.

- **Socio-economic characterization of the snapper grouper fishery (*Attachment 9*):**

As part of Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 (Commercial Management Measures), the public was asked to comment on management approaches that would meet the needs of ‘traditional bandit boats.’ Several ideas were submitted for the Council to consider; however, such items would have to be developed through a full amendment to the Snapper Grouper FMP (as opposed to a regulatory amendment) and would take some time. In addition, the Council expressed the need for an in-depth characterization of the snapper grouper (SG) fishery before considering substantial changes to how the fishery is managed. Hence, staff were directed to begin work on a socio-economic characterization of the fishery that would address items such as descriptive statistics (location, permit portfolios, corporation vs. individual, demographics, etc.) about SG permit holders and changes over time; leased permits (via vessel leasing); latent permits; vessel characteristics (for evaluation of ‘traditional bandit boat’ definition); qualitative descriptions of fishing communities; SG participant catch portfolios; SG dealer information; economic importance of the total fishery and by species sub-complex;

seasonality and regional distribution of landings; and growth potential analysis. Council staff will provide an overview of the work plan, timing for the project, and preliminary results as available.

- **Fishery Performance Report - Red Grouper**

The SSC is currently considering modifying the ABC Control Rule. As part of the modification process, the SSC is interested in exploring how to incorporate social and economic factors into the ABC decision.

One example that has been used in the Mid-Atlantic is the use of fishery performance reports. The Mid-Atlantic SSC receives annual reports from the FMP Advisory Panels on fishery performance, which are incorporated into the SSC's decision for setting the ABCs for the managed species. Similar to the [Beige Book](#) generated by the Federal Reserve, the fishery performance reports are intended to supplement quantitative data with anecdotal and qualitative data from the field. Examples of the fishery performance reports are available here: <http://www.mafmc.org/fishery-performance-reports/>.

Council staff will facilitate a discussion with the AP for a fishery performance report about their experiences and observations about red grouper. The report will be provided to the Socio-Economic Panel, the SSC, and the Council.

- **Citizen Science Program:**

During the March 2017 meeting, the Council adopted the Year 1 Plan of Work for the Council's Citizen Science Program. Objectives in the draft plan include:

- 1) Establish programmatic resources to support initiation and coordination of the SAFMC Citizen Science Program.
- 2) Create a system of organizational governance to support the infrastructure and activities of the SAFMC Citizen Science Program.
- 3) Develop programmatic communication strategies to promote the SAFMC Citizen Science Program to stakeholders.
- 4) Initiate a "kickstarter" citizen science project to serve as a test project for the SAFMC Citizen Science Program.
- 5) Develop comprehensive outreach and training approaches to support the SAFMC Citizen Science Program and associated projects.
- 6) Foster development of partnerships to support the SAFMC Citizen Science Program and funding and administration of projects.
- 7) Pursue funding opportunities to support citizen science projects under the SAFMC Citizen Science Program.

In December 2016, the Council approved creating a staff position to manage the Citizen Science program and to back-fill the Outreach Specialist position in order to begin implementation of the Council's Citizen Science Program Blueprint. A Citizen Science Program Manager was hired in January 2017 and has started to implement items 2 and 4 from the year 1 plan of work – creating the program's organizational infrastructure and pursuing support for a pilot project.

To support creating the program's organizational infrastructure, the Council discussed an approach for building the organizational infrastructure of the Citizen Science Program using a "Transition Team" approach. Guidance was provided by NOAA General Counsel to form a

Citizen Science Advisory Panel to begin the work of building Action Teams who will work on developing program components for Volunteers, Finance, Data Management, Project/Topics Management, and Communication/Outreach/Education.

- **Amendment 44 (yellowtail snapper):**

The amendment contains two actions: manage yellowtail snapper harvest under a single ABC and ACL for the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions, and consider modifications to sector allocations to avoid in-season closures. The former action was added to the amendment during the December 2016 Council meeting when the amendment was approved for public hearings. Hearings were held in January/February 2017 and the Council reviewed public comments at their March 2017 meeting. The Council discussed possibly slowing down development of the amendment to allow for consideration of a commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper. Ultimately, the Council approved a motion to suspend work on this amendment (as well as Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 10) to allow time for pending revisions to MRIP data.

- **Amendment 45 (ABC Control Rule Revisions & Golden Tilefish):**

During their December 2016 meeting, the Council received a presentation from NMFS regarding revisions to the National Standard 1 (NS 1) guidelines that provide guidance to Councils on how to prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield. While the 2016 revisions do not require Councils to revise their FMPs, they provide added flexibility to address management issues within the current framework. Among the features that would impart more flexibility and stability to managed fisheries are (1) phasing-in changes to catch levels, (2) carrying over unused quota from one fishing year to the next, and (3) multi-year overfishing status determinations. In order to apply these approaches to managed stocks, changes must first be made to the ABC Control Rule. In addition, the Council has expressed interest in modifying the current ABC Control Rule to allow more flexibility in selecting the risk of overfishing. Hence, at its May 2017 meeting, the SSC will be asked to consider ABC control rule modifications, which would be implemented for snapper grouper species through Amendment 45 to the Snapper Grouper FMP.

Once the ABC Control Rule is modified, the Council would like to apply the more flexible approach to revising the catch levels of golden tilefish (that must be modified in response to the latest stock assessment update) and specifying the risk of overfishing. However, because the latest stock assessment update indicated the golden tilefish stock in the South Atlantic is undergoing overfishing, the Council must act soon to end overfishing and adopt new catch level recommendations.

The table below shows fishing level recommendations from SEDAR 25 (2011) and SEDAR 25 Update (2016) in pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) a $P^*=0.30$:

	SEDAR 25 (2011) (lbs gw)	SEDAR 25 Update (2016) (lbs gw)
MSY	596,643	560,000
OFL		
2017	804,000	377,000
2018	763,000	402,000
2019	730,000	426,000
ABC		
2017	608,000	233,000
2018	596,000	267,000
2019	586,000	302,000

However, at their March 2017 meeting, the Council approved a motion to request that the SSC consider specifying establishing an interim ABC for tilefish based on the projected yield at 75% F_{MSY} , and compare and contrast the risks and uncertainty with establishing the ABC for tilefish at the projected yield at 75% F_{MSY} (2017 = 344,000; 2018 = 374,000 lbs gw) versus that provided by the P^* approach (projections in the table above). The interim ABC would be in effect until a new tilefish assessment is prepared. If the SSC endorses this approach, the Council would request, at their June 2017 meeting, that NMFS issue an interim rule to implement these changes and any other deemed necessary to reduce the level of overfishing for golden tielfish.

- **Charter Vessel Electronic Reporting Pilot (*Attachment 10*):**

Council staff provided an update to the Council at their March 2017 meeting. Progress to-date on the 4 components of the project is as follows:

Electronic logbook for charterboat captains to log catch:

- All software development is complete
- Data collection from actual trips has begun
- 48 trip reports submitted by captains using the mobile app
- 25 submitted since the Dec Meeting update
- Over 75% of those are from GA and FL
- Over 75% of those were logged in Feb of this year.
- Most of the data collection will happen this Spring

Reporting tool for electronic dockside validation of trip reports:

- Development of the validation tool is underway, with collaboration of MRIP/OST
- Decided to build an electronic version of the current MRIP APAIS survey
- Following the direction of the ongoing MRIP Validation Pilot in SC
- Currently developing a working prototype of the app for testing

Electronic measuring boards to be used for discards on trips and during dockside interviews:

- Work will begin on this component as the Dockside Validation app is developed

Phone app allowing law enforcement officers to check reporting compliance:

- Work on LE tool has not yet begun pending progress on validation app

9. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Mr. Kenneth Fex was elected Chair of the Snapper Grouper AP in April 2016 and Mr. David Moss was elected to serve as the AP's vice-chair. Normally the chair would serve a two-year term (4 meetings); however, Mr. Fex's term on the AP will expire in June of this year prompting selection of a new chair and vice-chair to facilitate the fall 2017 meeting.

10. Other Business

The Committee will address other business as appropriate.