

Overview

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

Crowne Plaza
4831 Tanger Outlet Boulevard
North Charleston, SC

April 26-27, 2016

A. Status of Amendments under Development and Recently Implemented (*Attachment 1*)

Council staff will present an overview of recent amendments to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The overview includes amendments that are still under development and those that have been recently implemented.

B. Black Sea Bass Pot Selectivity Study (*Attachment 2*)

Paul Rudershausen, North Carolina State University, will present results of a study to explore the selectivity of different mesh sizes in commercial black sea bass pot gear. The commercial black sea bass minimum size in the South Atlantic was increased to 11 inches without a concurrent increase in the minimum size of trap mesh to harvest the species. Researchers from North Carolina State University teamed up with Tom Burgess (Sneads Ferry, NC) in cooperative research funded by North Carolina Sea Grant to investigate trap mesh sizes larger than the current minimum trap mesh configuration (five sides 1.5 inch mesh, one side 2 inch mesh). The purpose of the study was to determine whether larger mesh traps would optimize selectivity; that is, maximize escape of sub-legal fish while maintaining catch of legal fish. Traps with uniform mesh sizes of 2, 2.25, and 2.5 inches were tested. The study found that at the current minimum size limit of 11 inches, the 2.25-inch mesh trap would optimize selectivity. The research also showed that the current minimum trap mesh configuration retains a higher number of sub-legal fish than traps of larger mesh sizes. Researchers were able to successfully predict approximate black sea bass sizes at first retention by the experimental traps of uniform mesh sizes; this is useful information given any future changes in the minimum size limit for this species.

C. Amendment 37 (hogfish; *Attachment 3*)

Amendment 37 to the Snapper Grouper FMP contains twelve actions pertaining to management of hogfish in federal waters of the South Atlantic. Hogfish in the South Atlantic can be split into two genetically distinct stocks: one off Georgia and the Carolinas (GA-NC) and one off the Florida Keys/East Florida (FLK/EFL). The stock status for the GA-NC stock is unknown due to insufficient data for a stock assessment to be accepted. The FLK/EFL stock of hogfish is undergoing overfishing and is overfished based on a completed stock assessment in 2014 (SEDAR 37 2014). Since the FLK/EFL stock is overfished a rebuilding plan is needed.

Amendment 37 would specify the boundary between the FLK/EFL hogfish stock and the Gulf of Mexico stock, specify Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limits (ACLs), and Optimum Yield (OY) for both stocks, establish a rebuilding plan for the FLK/EFL stock, and implement or modify management measures for both stocks to attain the desired level of harvest.

Public hearings for Amendment 37 were held from January 25 through February 3, 2016. Public testimony was obtained at the meetings and written comments were accepted until February 10, 2016.

D. Amendment 41 (mutton snapper; Attachment 4)

In June 2015, the Council directed staff to begin development of a new amendment to revise the biological parameters, catch levels, and management measures for mutton snapper in response to the latest stock assessment for that species (completed in 2015 with data through 2013). At their December 2015 meeting, the Council approved Amendment 41 for scoping. Scoping meetings were held in-person from January 25 to February 3, 2016. Meetings in Florida were held in conjunction with workshops conducted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), which is also considering changes to management of mutton snapper in Florida state waters. Scoping comments were accepted until February 10, 2016.

E. Allocations Amendment (Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 10/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44; Attachment 5)

At their December 2015 meeting in Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, the Council discussed allocation issues facing the dolphin and yellowtail snapper fisheries. The Council directed staff to plan for a March 2016 joint meeting of the Dolphin Wahoo and Snapper Grouper Committees to discuss the potential development of a new joint Dolphin Wahoo/Snapper Grouper Amendment to address allocation considerations. Council staff will give an overview of the White Paper that the Dolphin Wahoo and Snapper Grouper Committees discussed in March and update the AP on the outcome of those discussions.

F. Update on SEDAR stock assessments (red snapper, gray triggerfish, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, red grouper)

SEDAR staff will update the AP on progress to date on stock assessments for red snapper and gray triggerfish, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and red grouper.

G. For-hire Reporting Amendment (Attachment 6)

This amendment addresses reporting in the for-hire segment, including actions for mandatory, trip level reporting in the charter segment; modification of the timing of reporting in the headboat segment; and location reporting requirements for the charter segment. The for-hire reporting amendment was taken to public hearing January 25-February 5, 2016. Council staff will provide an overview of the actions/alternatives in the amendment, analyses to date, and timing.

H. Update on Citizen Science Program (Attachment 7)

In 2015 the Council expressed interest in a Citizen Science program to address the many outstanding data needs and take advantage of repeated offers by constituents to contribute to data

collection efforts. An organizing committee of Council members, staff and interested parties was assembled to address the challenge of starting such a program. As a first major step, to judge interest and obtain broad feedback on a possible citizen science program, a workshop was held January 19-22 in Charleston, SC. Following the workshop, and relying heavily upon the discussion and recommendations provided, the Organizing Committee developed a program blueprint for the Council to consider. Council staff will review the draft blueprint and brief the AP on progress and planned activities.

I. Visioning Amendment – Fisheries Seasonality/Retention (Attachments 8a & 8b)

The South Atlantic Council’s Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper fishery (*Attachment 8a*), approved in December 2015, is the long-term (2016-2010) strategic plan for managing the fishery. This strategic plan constitutes a pro-active approach to addressing issues within the current system of management for the snapper grouper fishery. At the urging of stakeholders, the Council began developing the plan in 2012 through the Visioning project, which included extensive stakeholder engagement throughout the region and across all sectors in the fishery. The Council’s intent throughout the Visioning project was to identify several critical issues in the snapper grouper fishery and, with the help of stakeholders, identify solutions for resolving the issues. Now that the Vision Blueprint outlines these critical issues and stakeholders have weighed in on suggested solutions, the Council is considering amendments to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan based on the priority objectives and actions included in the Vision Blueprint.

In December 2015, Council members completed a survey to rank different amendment approaches/topics for a Visioning Amendment in 2016. The highest ranked approach/topic was Fishery Seasonality/Retention. Additionally, Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 23/24 was put on hold in 2015 until the Vision Blueprint was complete. This draft regulatory amendment included items that address several of the short-term management strategies identified in the Vision Blueprint. To prioritize items for inclusion in a Visioning Amendment, Council members were asked to complete another survey in February 2016 to rank specific management strategies on Fishery Seasonality/Retention and Sub-regional Approaches to Management (*Attachment 8b*). Council staff reviewed the survey results with the Snapper Grouper Committee in March 2016. The Snapper Grouper Committee discussed the options below but made no motions:

OPTION 1: Seasonality Amendment – i.e., shallow water grouper closure (all sectors)

OPTION 2:

- Recreational Amendment – i.e., aggregate bag limits; deepwater species (bag/size limits); start dates of fishing year; fishing season
- Commercial Amendment – i.e., aggregate trip limits; start dates of fishing year

OPTION 3: Retention Amendment – i.e., aggregate bag limits/trip limits (all sectors)

Ultimately, the Council approved a motion directing staff to explore separate amendments addressing seasonality and retention in the snapper grouper fishery. The AP should discuss and recommend actions for the Council to consider including and developing in each of these amendments.

J. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

The AP will conduct elections for Chair and Vice Chair. Incumbents are Jim Atack (Chair), and Ken Fex (Vice-Chair).

K. Other Business

The AP will address other items as appropriate.