

OVERVIEW

Snapper Grouper Committee Meeting

September 16 & 17, 2008
The Charleston Marriott Hotel
170 Lockwood Boulevard
Charleston, SC 29403

The Snapper Grouper Committee needs to: (A) receive an update on outreach efforts associated with the *Oculina* Bank Experimental Closed Area; (B) develop comments on the ACL proposed rule; (C) for Amendment 16, review public comments, modify document as necessary, approve all actions in the amendment, and approve for secretarial review; (D) develop recommendations for submitting the interim rule for formal secretarial review/action; and (E) for Amendment 17, provide direction to staff for options to be developed and specify preferred alternatives.

A. *Oculina* Monitoring Report (Attachment 1)

Kim Iverson will provide an update on outreach efforts associated with the *Oculina* Bank Experimental Closed Area, including a meeting with law enforcement personnel from Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, participation in the National Marine Educator's Association Conference, and other activities (**Attachment 1**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Take action as necessary.

B. ACL Proposed Rule (Attachments 2 & 4)

NMFS proposes revisions to the guidelines for National Standard 1 (NS1) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (73 FR 32526) (**Attachment 2**). This action is necessary to provide guidance on how to comply with new annual catch limit (ACL) and accountability measure (AM) requirements for ending overfishing of fisheries managed by federal fishery management plans. Comments on the proposed rule must be received by September 22, 2008. Staff has drafted suggested comments (**Attachment 3**) and ABC Control Rule options (**Attachment 4**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Develop comments on the ACL proposed rule.

C. Amendment 16 (Attachments 5-15)

SEDAR assessments have indicated that the South Atlantic gag grouper and vermilion snapper stocks are undergoing overfishing. The gag stock is not overfished as of 2005; however, the stock assessment model projections show the stock is below the biomass required to produce the maximum sustainable yield (B_{MSY}). It is unknown whether the

vermilion stock is overfished due to the uncertainty in recruitment and spawning stock biomass estimates. [Note: A new, age-based vermilion snapper assessment will be available at the December 2008 meeting and will be used to determine regulations.] The Council must prepare a plan amendment and proposed regulations to end overfishing within one year of notification of an overfishing status; notification was provided in June 2007 (**Attachment 5**).

Amendment 16 (**Attachment 6**) was reviewed at the June 2008 meeting, and the Council directed the Team to analyze four additional alternatives. The alternatives were analyzed in a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) (**Attachment 7**) and the Notice of Availability of the SDEIS was published in the Federal Register on August 1, 2008 (73 FR 44991). The comment period on the SDEIS ends on September 15, 2008. In addition, the Council obtained comments through three public hearings that were held in August 2008 (**Attachments 8-10**). Written comments are in **Attachments 11-13**. Staff will summarize the comments received (**Attachment 14**). Staff has provided an overview of diesel prices and fishing trips in the South Atlantic (**Attachment 15**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review comments, modify document as necessary, approve all actions in the amendment, and approve for secretarial review.

D. Interim Rule (Attachments 16-21)

A SEDAR assessment has been completed and indicated that red snapper are overfished and undergoing overfishing (**Attachment 16**). A summary of stock status will be provided (**Attachment 17**). The Council received notification, in a letter dated July 8, 2008, that the South Atlantic red snapper stock is undergoing overfishing and is overfished and that the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the Council to prepare a plan amendment or proposed regulations to end overfishing within one year (**Attachment 18**). Pursuant to Section 305(c)(1) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act as reauthorized, the Council is considering a prohibition on harvest and possession of red snapper to be implemented through interim measures. The Council approved the following motion at their June 2008 meeting in Orlando, Florida after reviewing the recent SSC reviewed/approved SEDAR stock assessment, extensive public input received during the scoping process and input from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel:

“The Council directed staff to develop a letter to the Regional Administrator requesting the regional office develop an interim rule closing harvest of red snapper and implementing the reductions in fishing mortality as specified in the preferred alternatives in Amendment 16 for gag grouper, vermilion snapper, black grouper, and red grouper.” The Council’s intent is that the Interim Rule would be brought before the Council for consideration at the September 2008 meeting.

A letter, dated July 16th, 2008, was sent to the Regional Administrator requesting the Regional Office to develop an interim rule (**Attachment 19**). NOAA Fisheries (SERO) will present actions in the interim rule to the Committee (**Attachment 20**). The interim rule

request for red porgy is included as background information on use of emergency/interim rules (**Attachment 21**).

The proposed interim rule should come close to ending overfishing upon implementation. Permanent measures to end overfishing and establish a rebuilding program are being developed in Amendment 17. The Council's current schedule is to approve Amendment 17 for public hearings at the December 2008 meeting and to review public input and DEIS comments during the March 2009 meeting. If possible, the Council intends to approve for formal review at the March 2009 meeting or at the June 2009 meeting at the latest. This schedule has the document being sent to the Secretary of Commerce in July 2009 at the latest and meets the one-year deadline.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Develop recommendations for submitting the interim rule for formal secretarial review.

E. Amendment 17 (Attachment 22)

The following actions are in Amendment 17:

- Action 1. Extend Fishery Management Unit (FMU)
- Action 2. Thresholds and Benchmarks
 - Action 2a. Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)
 - Action 2b. Optimum Yield (OY)
 - Action 2c. Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST)
- Action 3. Annual Catch Limits (ACL)
- Action 4. Allocations
- Action 5. Annual Catch Targets (ACT)
 - Action 5a. Commercial Sector ACT
 - Action 5b. For-Hire Sector ACT
 - Action 5c. Private Recreational ACT
- Action 6. Management Measures – Deepwater Fishery
 - Action 6a. Regulations to End Overfishing of Speckled Hind and Warsaw Grouper
 - Action 6b. Regulations to End Overfishing of Remaining Deepwater Species
- Action 7. Management Measures – Shallow Water & Mid-Shelf Fisheries
 - Action 7a. Regulations to End Overfishing of Red Snapper
 - Action 7b. Regulations to End Overfishing for the Remaining Shallow Water & Mid-Shelf Species
- Action 8. Accountability Measures (AM)
 - Action 8a. AMs for the Commercial Sector
 - Action 8b. AMs for the Recreational Sector
 - Action 8c. AMs for the Private Recreational Sector
- Action 9. Red Snapper Rebuilding Plan
 - Action 9a. Rebuilding Schedule
 - Action 9b. Rebuilding Strategy
- Action 10. Snowy Grouper Quotas
- Action 11. Data/Reporting

The current alternatives for the actions listed above are outlined in the decision document/options paper (**Attachment 22**). The Council should review and refine the range of alternatives and choose preferred alternatives for detailed analyses. (Note: The Council can change their preferred alternatives after seeing the detailed analyses.) The schedule (outlined below) calls for the Team to analyze the effects of the alternatives between September and December and for the Council to approve the amendment for public hearings at the December meeting. *The decisions required by the Council are outlined in the decisions document/options paper. It is crucial that the Committee/Council indicate their preferred alternatives and specify the range of alternatives in order for the Team to analyze the impacts by the deadline.*

The schedule for the amendment is as follows:

- Scoping through February 22, 2008. Done.
- Council reviewed scoping comments and Options Paper & provides direction to Staff/Team – March 3-7, 2008 meeting in Jekyll Island, GA. Done.
- Scientific & Statistical Committee reviewed Options Paper– June 8-10, 2008 meeting in Orlando, FL. Done.
- Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel and Committee, and Council reviewed Options Paper & provided direction to Staff/Team – June 9-13, 2008 meeting. Done.
- Committee/Council review options paper and specifies preferred ACL alternatives and range of alternatives for all actions – September 15-19, 2008.
- Team analyzes alternatives – September to November 2008
- Council approves Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement for public hearings – November 30-December 5, 2008 meeting.
- SSC reviews Amendment 17 at their December 2008 meeting.
- Public hearings – late January/early February 2009.
- Review complete document, review public comments, and approve for formal review by the Secretary of Commerce – March 2-6, 2009 meeting or at the June 2009 meeting at the latest.
- Estimated effective date of January 1, 2010 (required by Reauthorized MSA).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review the decision document/options paper and provide direction to staff for options to be developed. Special attention should be applied to the section outlining the Council's required decisions.