

OVERVIEW

Snapper Grouper Committee Meeting

December 3 & 4, 2008
Hilton Wilmington Riverside
301 N. Water Street
Wilmington, NC

The Snapper Grouper Committee needs to: (A) receive an update on outreach efforts associated with the *Oculina* Bank Experimental Closed Area; (B) receive an update on Gray's Reef Research Area; (C) receive a report from the SSC on the vermilion snapper SEDAR and Amendment 17 to the Snapper Grouper FMP; (D) review the vermilion snapper actions in Amendment 16 as they relate to the assessment results; (E) review draft Amendment 17, modify as appropriate, and approve for public hearings; (F) consider interim measures for red snapper; and (G) discuss items to go to public scoping for the Comprehensive ACL Amendment.

A. *Oculina* Monitoring Report (Attachment 1)

Kim Iverson will provide an update on outreach efforts associated with the *Oculina* Bank Experimental Closed Area (**Attachment 1**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Take action as necessary.

B. Gray's Reef Research Area Update (Attachment 2)

George Sedberry, Superintendent of Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary, will present an update on spearfishing and the proposed research (**Attachment 2**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Take action as necessary.

C. SSC Report on Vermilion Snapper SEDAR Assessment and Snapper Grouper Amendment 17 (Attachment 3)

Dr. Carolyn Belcher, the SSC chair, will present the SSC recommendations on the vermilion snapper SEDAR (**Attachment 3**) and Amendment 17 to the Snapper Grouper FMP.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Take action as necessary.

D. Vermilion Snapper Actions in Amendment 16 (Attachments 4 & 5)

Amendment 16 was submitted to the Secretary of Commerce on October 21st, 2008. According to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Secretary shall immediately (immediately defined as within 5 days of the transmit date) initiate a review of the amendment and proposed regulations submitted by the Council and within 90 days shall approve, partially approve, or reject the actions in the Amendment.

In order to meet the Magnuson-Stevens Act one-year requirement to prepare an amendment to end overfishing (the Council was notified about overfishing of vermilion snapper in June 2007), the Council has specified management measures based on the existing assessment (SEDAR Update #3 2007). The 2007 Update was based on length data. The Council requested a new stock assessment based on ages rather than lengths. The Council will receive the SSC recommendations on the new, age-based, benchmark assessment at this meeting. The Council recognized that the recommendations would be too late in the process to change the management measures in Amendment 16 and so the Council specified a measure that allows the NMFS Regional Administrator to determine the actual regulations to implement in the final rule for Snapper Grouper Amendment 16. Two tables provide the specific guidance to be used by the NMFS RA in determining the actual regulations (**Attachment 4**). The potential changes to the vermilion snapper management measures are shown in **Attachment 5**.

Based on the assessment results and SSC management advice during their November 30th – December 3rd meeting, the final TAC and regulations to end overfishing of vermilion snapper will be determined. The SEDAR Benchmark Assessment and SSC review will result in a new numerical estimate of OY that has been specified by the Council as the yield at 75%F_{MSY}. That is, the new value for OY replaces the value of 628,459 pounds whole weight (566,179 pounds gutted weight) shown in Table 4-52a of the amendment. (Note: The values for 65% and 85% of F_{MSY} will also change based on the new F_{MSY} from the new age-based benchmark assessment/SSC review.) The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) (Table 4-53) would be respecified as the new value of yield at F_{OY}. The TAC would be allocated 68% to the commercial sector and 32% to the recreational sector and the new values will replace those found in amendment in Table 4-54a.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review SSC's recommendations for Amendment 16, review the resultant vermilion snapper TAC and management regulations, and take action as necessary.

E. Amendment 17 (Attachments 6 & 7)

The following actions are in Amendment 17:

- Action 1. Extend Fishery Management Unit (FMU)
- Action 2. Specification of Optimum Yield (OY)
- Action 3. Annual Catch Limits (ACL)
- Action 4. Allocations

- Action 5. Annual Catch Targets (ACT)
 - Action 5a. Commercial Sector ACT
 - Action 5b. Recreational ACT
- Action 6. Management Measures – Deepwater Fishery
 - Action 6a. Regulations to Limit Landings of Speckled Hind and Warsaw Grouper to the ACT
 - Action 6b. Regulations to Limit Landings of Snowy Grouper and Golden Tilefish to the ACTs
- Action 7. Management Measures – Shallow Water & Mid-Shelf Fisheries
 - Action 7a. Regulations to Limit Landings of Red Snapper to the ACT
- Action 7b. Regulations to Limit Landings of Black Grouper, Black Sea Bass, Gag, Red Grouper, and Vermilion Snapper to the ACTs
- Action 8. Accountability Measures (AM)
 - Action 8a. AMs for the Commercial Sector
 - Action 8b. AMs for the Recreational Sector
- Action 9. Red Snapper Rebuilding Plan
 - Action 9a. Rebuilding Schedule
 - Action 9b. Rebuilding Strategy
- Action 10. Improvements to Data Reporting
- Action 11. Improvements to Law Enforcement Capabilities
- Action 12. Establish an ABC Control Rule

The SSC and Law Enforcement Advisory Panel will provide their recommendations to the Committee. Team members will brief the Council on the impacts of the actions. The Committee should review and refine the range of alternatives, choose preferred alternatives for detailed analyses, and approve for public hearings (**Attachments 6 & 7**).

The schedule for the amendment is as follows:

- Scoping through February 22, 2008. Done.
- Council review scoping comments and Options Paper & provide direction to Staff/Team – March 3-7, 2008 meeting in Jekyll Island, GA. Done.
- Scientific & Statistical Committee review Options Paper– June 8-10, 2008 meeting in Orlando, FL. Done.
- Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel and Committee/Council review Options Paper & provide direction to Staff/Team – June 9-13, 2008 meeting. Done.
- Committee/Council review options paper and specifies preferred 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.
- Effective date of January 1, 2010 (required by Reauthorized MSA).

Public hearings are scheduled as follows:

- (1) January 26, 2009 in Charleston, SC
- (2) January 27, 2009 in New Bern, NC
- (3) February 3, 2009 in Key Largo, FL
- (5) February 4, 2009 in Cape Canaveral, FL
- (6) February 5, 2009 in Pooler, GA

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Modify document as necessary and approve for public hearings.

F. Interim Rule (Attachments 8-12)

A SEDAR assessment has been completed and indicated that red snapper are overfished and undergoing overfishing (**Attachment 8A & 8B**). 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 9**). Pursuant to Section 305(c)(1) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act as reauthorized, the Council discussed, at their June meeting, 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 SSC approval of the 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 10**). NOAA Fisheries (SERO) presented actions in the interim rule to the Committee at the September Council meeting. The Council decided not to proceed with a red snapper interim rule at the time and decided to postpone discussions until the December Council meeting.

The Committee should discuss an interim rule for red snapper. The interim rule request for red porgy is included as background information on use of emergency/interim rules (**Attachment 11**). A PowerPoint presentation outlining the stock status of red snapper and alternatives that were taken to scoping is included as **Attachment 12**.

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 about submitting an interim rule for red snapper for formal secretarial review.

G. Comprehensive ACL Amendment (Attachment 13)

The Comprehensive ACL amendment will specify ACLs, ACTs, AMs, and allocations for all species managed by the Council not subject to overfishing. Scoping meetings will be held late January and early February. A draft list of items to be scoped is included as **Attachment 13**.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Recommend items to be scoped for Comprehensive ACL Amendment.