

# Overview

## Snapper Grouper Committee

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The Committee will: (A) receive reports from SERO on the status of commercial and recreational catches versus the respective ACLs for snapper grouper species; (B) receive a status report from SERO staff on snapper grouper amendments under Secretarial review; (C) receive an update from Council staff on recent work by the Oculina Experimental Closed Area Evaluation Team; (D) receive an overview of scoping comments on Regulatory Amendment 16 (black sea bass pot closure) and provide guidance to staff; (E) receive an update from NOAA GC on whether the proposed recreational harvest tag program being developed in Amendment 22 would be considered a Limited Access Privilege Program and thus be subject to specific requirements; (F) receive an overview of public hearing comments on Amendment 29 (ORCS & gray triggerfish), select preferred alternatives as needed, make the needed modifications to the amendment, and approve all actions; (G) receive an overview of the Options Paper for Amendment 32 (blueline tilefish) and provide guidance to staff; (H) receive an overview of the Options Paper for Regulatory Amendment 20 (snowy grouper and mutton snapper) and provide guidance to staff; (I) receive an overview of Regulatory Amendment 21 (MSST), select preferred alternatives, provide guidance on any needed modifications, and approve for formal review; (J) receive an overview of Snapper Grouper Amendment 33 (fillets) and provide guidance to staff; (K) receive an overview of the Generic Accountability Measures Scoping Document and provide guidance to staff; (L) receive an update on the visioning project and progress to date; (M) receive an update from the SEFSC on the feasibility of using economic efficiency analyses/net benefit analyses to evaluate the possible impacts of regulations; and (N) address other business as necessary.

### **A. Status of landings for quota-managed snapper grouper species (*Attachments 1a & 1b*)**

The Committee will receive an update on the status of landings (commercial and recreational) for snapper grouper species under ACLs.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and take action as necessary.

### **B. Status of Amendments Approved for Secretarial Review**

The Committee will receive a status report from SERO staff on the following amendments:

- A. Amendment 27/EA (Mgmt Authority/Fmwk/Crew Size/Blue Runner)
- B. Regulatory Amendment 14/EA (Multiple Species)
- C. Emergency Rule (Blueline Tilefish)

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and take action as necessary.

### **C. Oculina Experimental Closed Area Evaluation**

In April 2004, regulations were implemented through Amendment 13A that extended the bottom fishing restrictions for the Oculina Experimental Closed Area (OECA) for an indefinite period. The amendment was developed to address the 10-year sunset provision for the closure of the area to snapper grouper fishing. In addition to extending the closure, the amendment required that the size and configuration of the OECA be reviewed within three years of the implementation date of Amendment 13A and that a 10-year re-evaluation be conducted. The Council also developed an Evaluation Plan to address needed monitoring and research, outreach, and enforcement efforts. The Council approved the OECA Evaluation Plan in March 2005. The Plan contains goals and objectives in three broad areas: Outreach, Law Enforcement, and Research/Assessment.

As part of the OECA Evaluation Plan, the Council established the Oculina Evaluation Team (OET) -- comprised of law enforcement representatives, research scientists, resource managers, commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, outreach experts, and non-governmental organization representatives -- to review and provide recommendations for the ongoing research and monitoring, outreach, and law enforcement components of the Evaluation Plan.

The OET convened in August 21-23, 2006 in Port Canaveral, Florida to:

- Compile up-to-date accomplishments in research and monitoring, information and education projects, and law enforcement strategies and timelines outlined in the OECA Evaluation Plan.
- Review and evaluate the size and configuration of the OECA and provide recommendations to the Council.
- Provide recommendations to assist the Council in their 10-year evaluation of research and monitoring, law enforcement and outreach efforts supporting fishing regulations.

The Oculina Evaluation Team was originally going to convene via webinar on February 13, 2014 to initiate discussions on re-evaluation of the OECA. However, the webinar had to be re-scheduled to March 12<sup>th</sup> due to weather-related problems. A series of breakout groups to discuss the research (March 18<sup>th</sup>), outreach (March 13<sup>th</sup>), and law enforcement (March 14<sup>th</sup>) portions of the Evaluation Plan have also been scheduled. The OECA Evaluation Team's final report will be presented to the Council at their June 2014 meeting.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and take action as necessary.

### **D. Regulatory Amendment 16 (black sea bass pot closure; Attachments 2a & 2b)**

Council staff will present an overview of scoping comments received on the amendment. Council staff will review recommended changes to the amendment and provide clarification on analyses as needed. The amendment includes one action to modify the November 1 – April 30 annual closure on the use of black sea bass pots to protect ESA-listed whales.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Modify the amendment as necessary, select preferred alternatives if appropriate, and provide guidance to staff.

**E. NOAA GC Update on Amendment 22 (recreational harvest tag program)**

NOAA GC will update the Committee on whether the proposed recreational harvest tag program being developed in Amendment 22 would be considered a Limited Access Privilege Program and thus be subject to specific requirements.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and take action as necessary.

**F. Amendment 29 (ORCS & gray triggerfish; Attachments 3a – 3c)**

Council staff will provide a summary of comments received on the amendment during the January 2014 round of public hearings. The Committee will review the amendment, select preferred alternatives as appropriate, modify the document as necessary, and approve all actions. The amendment will be finalized with the intent that the Council will approve it for formal review at the June 2014 meeting.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Modify the amendment as necessary, select preferred alternatives as appropriate, and provide guidance to staff.

**G. Amendment 32 (Blueline Tilefish; Attachment 4)**

Council staff will present an overview the Options Paper for Amendment 32. The amendment includes actions to adjust the ABC/ACL for blueline tilefish according to the results of the latest stock assessment. Actions to adjust management measures to end overfishing would also be included. An Emergency Rule is being prepared and will be in place in 2014 to make the necessary adjustments to the ABC/ACL while Amendment 32 is developed and implemented.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Provide guidance to staff.

**H. Regulatory Amendment 20 (Snowy grouper & mutton snapper; Attachment 5)**

Snowy grouper was assessed in 2013 through SEDAR 36. Snowy grouper was previously assessed in SEDAR 4, and was determined to be overfished and experiencing overfishing. This led to the Council developing a rebuilding plan in Amendment 15A. Rebuilding began in 2006 and ends in 2039. Commercial accountability measures specified in Amendment 17B include in-season closure ability and payback of overages. The recreational season will be reduced if the average landings over the prior 2 years exceed the recreational ACL. During initial reviews of assessed stocks, the SSC calculated a P\* of 30% for snowy grouper, and a probability of rebuilding of 70%. However, since rebuilding of snowy grouper began prior to existence of the P\* approach, the rebuilding plan was based on a 50% chance of reaching SSB<sub>msy</sub> by the end of the rebuilding period. This is the first assessment of snowy grouper under both the Reauthorized MSA and the P\* methodology. The SSC was scheduled to review the assessment at their October 2013 meeting. However, the review will not be taking place until April 2014. The Council needs to consider action to adjust biological benchmarks, fishing levels, and management measures, as appropriate, for snowy grouper based on the stock assessment projections.

A stock assessment for mutton snapper was initiated in 2013 by the state of Florida. The assessment encountered some issues with recreational data, however, and has been delayed.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Provide guidance to staff.

**I. Regulatory Amendment 21 (MSST; Attachments 6a & 6b)**

The Council gave staff guidance to begin development of this amendment at the December 2013 meeting. Regulatory Amendment 21 would re-define the overfished threshold for snapper grouper species with low natural mortality rates. The current definition of minimum stock size threshold (MSST), which is used to determine if a species is overfished, is a function of the natural mortality rate. Thus, even small fluctuations in biomass due to natural variations not related to fishing mortality may cause a stock to be classified as overfished. When a species is identified as overfished, the Magnuson Act requires that a plan be implemented to rebuild the stock. Currently, a number of snapper grouper species with low natural mortality rates could unnecessarily be classified as overfished. Re-defining MSST for these species would help to prevent overfished designations when small drops in biomass are due to natural variation in recruitment or other environmental variables, and ensure that rebuilding plans are applied to stocks when truly appropriate.

A public hearing on this amendment will be held prior to the Council taking final action at the end of the March 2014 meeting week.

*NOTE: NMFS does not codify MSST values; hence there is no codified text to approve for this amendment. NOAA GC will provide guidance at the meeting on how this will be handled.*

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Select preferred alternatives as appropriate, approve any needed modifications to the amendment document, and approve for formal review.

**J. Amendment 33 (transporting of fillets; Attachments 7a & 7b)**

In December 2013, the South Atlantic Council made a motion to address the issue of transporting species under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU) from The Bahamas into the U.S. EEZ along similar guidelines as is under consideration for dolphin and wahoo. Based on these discussions, the IPT has prepared actions and alternatives for the Committee to consider.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Review options and provide guidance on proposed actions and alternatives.

**K. Generic Accountability Measures Amendment (Attachments 8a & 8b)**

At the December 2013 meeting, the Council approved development of an amendment that would examine existing accountability measures for snapper grouper species and modified them as appropriate to achieve consistency. Council staff will present an overview of progress to date on the amendment and request guidance from the Committee on content and timing.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Review options and provide guidance on AMs.

**L. Visioning Project (Attachment 9)**

At the December 2013 Council meeting, the Council approved moving forward with a series of port meetings to be held throughout the South Atlantic region in early 2014. The meetings are intended to reach out to stakeholders for their input regarding future management of the snapper grouper fishery. Stakeholders will host the meetings and Council staff will provide facilitation. Staff will give the Committee an update of the port meetings that will have been held to date and input gathered at those meetings.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Provide guidance as appropriate.

**M. Economic Efficiency Analysis/Net Benefit Analysis**

During the December 2013 meeting, the Council inquired as to whether the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) could evaluate whether data are currently sufficient to utilize tools such as an economic efficiency analysis or net benefits analysis to evaluate possible management actions. The Committee will receive an update from SEFSC Center staff on this issue.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and take action as necessary.

**N. Other Business**

The Committee will address other items as appropriate.