

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEE COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
(meeting held via webinar)

The Committee approved minutes from the March 2020 meeting and the agenda for the June 2020 Committee meeting.

Status of Amendments under Formal Review

NMFS SERO staff updated the Committee on the status of amendments under review or recently submitted:

- Regulatory Amendment 29 (Best Fishing Practices & Powerheads): The comment period on the Proposed Rule closed on May 6, 2020. The final rule package is being prepared.
- Abbreviated Framework 3 (Catch Levels for Blueline Tilefish): The comment period on the Proposed Rule closed on May 15, 2020. The final rule package is being prepared.
- Regulatory Amendment 33 (Red Snapper Seasons): Comments on the Proposed Rule will close on June 15, 2020.
- Red Snapper 2020 Seasons: NMFS announced the 2020 seasons on June 5, 2020. The recreational season will take place over four days: July 10, 11, 12, and 17. The commercial season will open on July 13 and will remain open until December 31, 2020 or until the commercial ACL is met or is projected to be met.

COVID-19 Impacts and Potential Response

On March 20, Council staff requested that advisory panel members (and their contacts) complete an online form designed to collect information on impacts from the pandemic-induced shutdown on stakeholders and their communities. Council staff presented a summary of the feedback received from March 20 through June 1. Committee members briefly shared how their respective areas had been affected and their concerns going forward, including data gaps that resulted from interruptions in sampling and monitoring. In addition, the Committee held initial discussion on potential changes to management measures that could be considered as temporary means to increase harvest and/or effort to offset some of the impacts of the current pandemic. Discussion on this topic continued during the Mackerel Cobia Committee and the Full Council session.

Greater Amberjack Stock Assessment

The SEDAR 59 assessment was conducted following a Standard approach and addressed the stock of Greater Amberjack in the South Atlantic. Kevin Craig, SEFSC, presented the assessment's results to the Committee. The assessment indicated that the Greater Amberjack stock in the South Atlantic is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The SSC reviewed the assessment during their Spring 2020 meeting and Genny Nessler, SSC Chair, delivered the SSC's comments and recommendations. The SSC found that the assessment addressed the terms of reference appropriately, was conducted using the best scientific information available, is adequate for determining stock status and supporting fishing level recommendations, and the methods to address uncertainty were consistent with expectations and available information. In addition, SSC comments/recommendations included:

- The natural mortality estimation method had significant impact on stock status determination and future yield projections.
- Projected catch and ABC values are dependent on assumption about future recruitment. If recent recruitment decline continues, projections may be overly optimistic.
- New research suggests that productivity of Greater Amberjack is higher than previously thought. Therefore, the SSC decreased the Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) risk score from medium to low.
- The SSC recommends projections at P*=50% be used to set the OFL and P*=45% be used to set the ABC.

The Committee approved the following motion:

**MOTION 1: DIRECT STAFF TO BRING BACK AN OPTIONS PAPER TO THE SEPTEMBER MEETING INCLUDING SECTOR ALLOCATIONS FOR GREATER AMBERJACK AND CATCH LEVEL ADJUSTMENTS BASED ON SSC RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE LATEST ASSESSMENT
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

Regulatory Amendment 34 (Special management zones off North and South Carolina)

Council staff provided an overview of progress since the March 2020 meeting, including comments from law enforcement (LE) partners in the region and the SSC. A salient concern was the enforceability of circular areas as opposed to areas defined by straight lines. The preferred approach from an enforceability perspective is that closed areas should be in the shape of a box and should be defined using latitude and longitude coordinates. Committee members provided rationale in response to LE concerns including the fact that artificial reefs for which an Army Corps of Engineers permit has been issued, typically for an area defined by a radius from a central point, are included in nautical charts. Having the regulatory boundary match that of the permitted area on nautical charts reduces confusion for the public. Boxes that would be drawn for ease of enforcement, however, will not be incorporated into nautical charts since the latter are meant to aid in navigation. Additionally, imposing a square or rectangular shape on top of a circle may result in the misperception that regulatory agencies are “claiming additional bottom” that was not included in the original permit.

Staff also reviewed SSC comments and briefly presented an additional economic analysis that was prepared in response to the SEFSC’s review of the amendment.

The Committee provided the following guidance to staff and postponed further discussion pending feedback from LE partners.

The Committee approve the following motion:

MOTION 2: ACCEPT THE IPT’S SUGGESTED EDITS TO ACTION 2 IN REGULATORY AMENDMENT 34

Alternative 1 (No Action). There are currently 28 artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina designated as special management zones. The

allowable gear for the snapper grouper fishery management plan for the commercial and recreational sectors are handline, rod and reel, spear (excluding powerheads), bandit gear, pot, and longline (the last two are commercial sector only). Do not designate additional artificial reef sites as special management zones or implement new restrictions on fishing gear used to harvest snapper grouper species from artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina.

Preferred Alternative 2. Designate four additional artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina as special management zones. Within the special management zones, harvest of snapper grouper species would only be allowed with handline, rod and reel, and spear (excluding powerheads). All harvest would be limited to the applicable recreational bag limit.

Alternative 3. Designate four additional artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina as special management zones. Within the special management zones, harvest of snapper grouper species would only be allowed with handline, rod and reel, and spear (excluding powerheads). All harvest by spear would be limited to the applicable recreational bag limit.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 3: APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPEE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 34 FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND RE-DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Red Porgy Stock Assessment

The SEDAR 60 assessment was conducted following a Standard approach and addressed the stock of Red Porgy in the South Atlantic. Nikolai Klibansky, SEFSC, presented the assessment's results to the Committee. Results of the assessment revealed that the Red Porgy stock in the South Atlantic is overfished and undergoing overfishing. The SSC reviewed the assessment during their Spring 2020 meeting and Genny Nesslage, SSC Chair, delivered the SSC's comments and recommendations. The SSC found that the assessment addressed the terms of reference appropriately, was conducted using the best scientific information available, is adequate for determining stock status and supporting fishing level recommendations, and the methods to address uncertainty were consistent with expectations and available information. In addition, SSC comments/recommendations included:

- Recruitment pattern has large effect on projected catches and rebuilding status.
- Fishery-dependent and -independent data show fluctuations in age/size at maturity and growth rate, which can constrain the stock's ability to rebuild.
- Rebuilding progress has been stifled by steady decline in recruitment since early 1990s.
- Projections using recent (2015-2017) mean recruitment suggest probability of rebuilding is zero even in the absence of fishing.

- Although reducing directed fishing and minimizing discards may not guarantee rebuilding, it would allow the stock maximum rebuilding potential should conditions improve.
- The SSC recommends using projections with average recruitment 2015-2017 and setting the OFL at $F = F_{MSY}$ and ABC at $F = 75\% F_{MSY}$.
- Although the SSC recommends an ABC based on $F=75\%F_{MSY}$ to end overfishing, projections indicate this ABC will have only a very minor impact on stock rebuilding.

The Committee approved the following motion:

MOTION 4: DIRECT STAFF TO BEGIN WORK ON A FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT TO END OVERFISHING OF RED PORGY AND BEGIN WORK ON A PLAN AMENDMENT TO ADDRESS REBUILDING AND ALLOCATIONS, ETC.

****DIRECTION TO STAFF TO PREPARE THE FRAMEWORK FOR REVIEW AT SEPTEMBER MEETING AND PLAN AMENDMENT IN DECEMBER****

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

NEW MOTION 4: DIRECT STAFF TO BEGIN WORK ON A PLAN AMENDMENT TO END OVERFISHING, TO ADDRESS REBUILDING AND ALLOCATIONS, ETC. FOR RED PORGY FOR REVIEW AT THE SEPTEMBER 2020 MEETING.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Other Business

An Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) request was submitted to the NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO). The applicant (Georgia Sea Grant) seeks to test the retrieval of rope-less gear with black sea bass pots using Acoustic Subsea Buoy Retrieval System. Bryan Fluech and Kim Sawicki delivered a presentation to the Committee and answered questions. The Council will further discuss the request during the Council session on Thursday, June 11, and provide their recommendation to SERO at that time.

Timing and Tasks

MOTION 5: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Initiate a plan amendment to address modifications to management of Greater Amberjack in response to the results of the new assessment. Prepare an options paper for the September meeting.
- Initiate development of a plan amendment to address overfishing, rebuilding of Red Porgy and other management modifications. Bring an options paper to the Council in September.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL