

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
June 15-16, 2021

The Committee approved the minutes from the March 2021 meeting and the agenda for the June 2021 meeting.

Status of Amendments under Formal Review

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff updated the Committee on the status of Regulatory Amendment 34 (Special Management Zones in NC and SC). A final rule for this amendment was published on April 2, 2021. The rule went into effect on May 3, 2021.

Gag Grouper Stock Assessment

SEDAR 71 included data through 2019 and indicated that the Gag Grouper stock in the South Atlantic is overfished and experiencing overfishing. Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) staff presented the assessment's results to the Committee. The South Atlantic Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed results of SEDAR 71 in April 2021. Genny Nesslage, SSC Chair, presented the SSC's recommendations. Council Staff provided an overview of available Gag Grouper landings and other pertinent data.

The Committee discussed projections and rebuilding timelines at different fishing mortality and recruitment scenarios. With management starting in 2023 and average recruitment, under the F=0 (no fishing mortality) scenario the stock would be rebuilt by 2028 (6 years). For the F=0 and low recruitment option, the stock would be rebuilt by 2030 (8 years). However, the Committee noted that the projection of no fishing mortality is not achievable for the multi-species fishery that catches Gag Grouper, due to dead discards that would persist even if landings were prohibited. Therefore, the Committee requested a projection that included discard mortality but no landings mortality to determine the time to rebuild under this scenario (See item under Other Business). The Committee made the following motion:

MOTION 1: INITIATE A PLAN AMENDMENT TO REBUILD AND END OVERFISHING OF GAG GROUPEL.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Red Porgy (Amendment 50)

The most recent assessment of the Red Porgy stock in the South Atlantic followed a standard approach with data through 2017 and indicated that the South Atlantic Red Porgy stock is overfished and experiencing overfishing. The Council received the results of the assessment and the SSC's recommendations at their June 2020 meeting and directed staff to begin work on a plan amendment. Scoping hearings were conducted in February 2021 and, during the March 2021 meeting, the Committee reviewed, modified, and approved actions and the range of alternatives under each action for further analyses. Jimmy Hull, Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) Chair, presented feedback from the AP. Council staff presented an overview of the decision

document and updated analyses. The Committee made the following motions and provided the following guidance:

MOTION 2: APPROVE PURPOSE AND NEED AS MODIFIED

Purpose for Action

The *purpose* of this fishery management plan amendment is to ~~revise the rebuilding schedule,~~ **establish a rebuilding plan, set an acceptable biological catch, sector allocations and annual catch limits and recreational annual catch target** for South Atlantic Red Porgy based on the results of the most recent stock assessment, and modify management and accountability measures.

Need for Action

The *need* for this fishery management plan amendment is to end overfishing of South Atlantic Red Porgy, rebuild the stock, and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Action 1. Establish a Rebuilding Plan for Red Porgy

- The Committee directed the Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) to clarify language for the No Action Alternative considering that the previous rebuilding plan (which ended in December 2017) was not successful in rebuilding the stock.

MOTION 3: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 5 UNDER ACTION 1 AS PREFERRED

Action 1. Establish a Rebuilding Plan for Red Porgy

Alternative 5. Establish the rebuilding plan to equal the time estimated to rebuild the stock with a 50% probability of success while maintaining fishing mortality at 75% of the Maximum Fishing Mortality Threshold during the rebuilding period. For Red Porgy, $75\%MFMT = 75\%FMSY$. This would equal 26 years with the stock reaching a 50% probability of rebuilding success in 2047. 2022 would be Year 1.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

SUBSTITUTE MOTION: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 4 AS PREFERRED

Alternative 4. Establish the rebuilding plan to equal T_{min} times two. This would equal 22 years with the rebuilding period ending in 2044. 2022 would be Year 1.

MOTION FAILS FOR LACK OF SECOND

Action 2. Revise the Red Porgy Total Annual Catch Limit and Annual Optimum Yield

- Direction to staff: Use gutted weight instead of whole weight to specify catch levels and retain current preferred.

MOTION 4: MOVE ALTERNATIVE 5 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED

APPENDIX

Action 2. Revise the Red Porgy Total Annual Catch Limit and Annual Optimum Yield

Alternative 5. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for Red Porgy and set equal to zero. The 2022 annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 5: MOVE ALTERNATIVE 4 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX

Action 3. Revise the Red Porgy sector allocations and sector annual catch limits

Alternative 4. Remove sector allocations and manage under the total annual catch limit.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 6: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 AS PREFERRED FOR ACTION 3

Action 3. Revise the Red Porgy sector allocations and sector annual catch limits

Alternative 3. Apply the current allocation formula: Annual catch limit = ((mean landings 2006-2008)*0.5) + ((mean landings 1986-2008)*0.5) to the revised total annual catch limit. This would result in a commercial allocation of 51.43% and a recreational allocation of 48.57%. using revised recreational landings estimates from the Fishing Effort Survey.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 7: SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVES 2A AND 3A AS PREFERRED (15 FISH PER TRIP IN EACH SEASON)

Action 4. Action 4. Modify Red Porgy commercial trip limits

Alternative 2. Reduce the commercial trip limit for Red Porgy from January 1 – April 30 to:

2a. 15 fish per trip

Alternative 3. Reduce the commercial trip limit for Red Porgy from May 1 – December 31 to:

3a. 15 fish per trip

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 8: MOVE ALTERNATIVES 3 AND 4 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX

Action 5. Modify Red Porgy recreational management measures

Sub-Action 5a. Bag and vessel limits

Alternative 3. Establish a recreational vessel limit for private recreational and charter vessels for Red Porgy as:

Alternative 4. Establish a vessel limit for headboats for Red Porgy as:

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 9: SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2A AS PREFERRED

Action 5. Modify Red Porgy recreational management measures

Sub-Action 5a. Bag and vessel limits

Alternative 2. Reduce the recreational bag limit for Red Porgy to:

2a. 1 fish per person per day, or 1 fish per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 10: SELECT ALTERNATIVES 3 AND 4 UNDER ACTION 5B AS PREFERRED

Action 5. Modify Red Porgy recreational management measures

Sub-Action 5b. Recreational fishing season

Alternative 3. Establish a recreational fishing season for Red Porgy; harvest would be allowed during May through June.

Alternative 4. Establish a recreational fishing season for Red Porgy; harvest would be allowed during July through August.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 11: ADD NEW ALTERNATIVE ESTABLISHING A RECREATIONAL FISHING SEASON FOR RED PORGY FROM JUNE THROUGH AUGUST

Action 5. Modify Red Porgy recreational management measures

Sub-Action 5b. Recreational fishing season

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 12: ADD THE ALTERNATIVE BELOW TO ACTION 6

Action 6. Modify Red Porgy Recreational Accountability Measures

If the total (commercial and recreational combined) annual catch limit is exceeded, reduce the length of the following year's recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the annual catch limit from being exceeded in the following year. However, the length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best available science, that it is not necessary.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL (1 OPPOSED)

MOTION 13: APPROVE AMENDMENT 50 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS. DIRECT STAFF TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARINGS DURING THE SEPTEMBER 2021 MEETING.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Tilefish Stock Assessment

SEDAR 66 included data through 2018 and indicated that the Tilefish stock in the South Atlantic is not overfished and is not experiencing overfishing, although the assessment notes high uncertainty in both statuses. SEFSC staff presented the assessment's results. The South Atlantic SSC reviewed results of SEDAR 66 in April 2021. Genny Nesslage, SSC Chair, presented the SSC's recommendations. Council staff provided an overview of available Tilefish landings and other pertinent data.

The Committee discussed ways to improve data informing recruitment estimates. The assessment noted a lack of information on fish 7 years and younger, leading to uncertainty in recruitment estimates, especially in the terminal years of the assessment. Current survey efforts have had difficulty sampling small Tilefish. Some new deep water surveys may be useful for informing

future assessments, but these will require some years to accumulate enough data. Commercial dealers or observers may be another source that could provide small Tilefish for length composition or age information. The Committee made the following motion:

**MOTION 14: INITIATE A PLAN AMENDMENT FOR TILEFISH TO INCORPORATE NEW ABC RECOMMENDATION AND CONSIDER REVISIONS TO ALLOCATIONS.
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

Yellowtail Snapper

The Council received catch level recommendations for the Yellowtail Snapper stock in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico during its December 2020 meeting. The Council instructed staff to initiate an amendment to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan to respond to those recommendations in cooperation with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council since the stock overlaps both Councils' jurisdictions. The Snapper Grouper AP discussed the Yellowtail Snapper fishery during its April 2021. Council staff presented an overview of available Yellowtail Snapper landings and other pertinent data. The Committee discussed the AP's feedback, a tentative timeline of development, and the suite of actions that were once considered for the fishery. The Committee provided the following guidance:

- Important to maintain consistency in regulations between South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.
- Timeline presented is acceptable to the Committee.
- Bring back preliminary catch level analysis, including potential closures due to changes in catch levels for review at next meeting.
- Look at any modification to management measures after looking at catch levels. May need to consider a commercial trip limit.
- IPT to develop range of alternatives for commercial trip limits and sector allocations for the South Atlantic.

Red Snapper Stock Assessment

SEDAR 73 included data through 2019 and indicated that the Red Snapper stock in the South Atlantic is not yet rebuilt and is experiencing overfishing. Compared to the last benchmark assessment (SEDAR 41, 2017), this assessment suggested lower levels of overfishing in terminal years and higher values of stock size relative to their benchmarks. SEFSC staff presented the assessment's results to the Committee. The South Atlantic SSC reviewed results of SEDAR 73 in April 2021, and requested to revisit these results with additional information in the summer of 2021. Genny Nessler, SSC Chair, presented the SSC's comments and recommendations. Council Staff also presented an overview of available Red Snapper landings and other pertinent data. Additionally, Council Staff provided a presentation summarizing takeaway points from the assessment and draft tasks for the Committee to consider in forming their management responses to the assessment results. The Committee edited these draft tasks, providing the following guidance and direction:

Summer SSC Meeting Discussions

- Direct staff to schedule an SSC meeting in Summer 2021 for the SSC to revisit results of the SEDAR 73 stock assessment and recommendations for the overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC).
- The Council requests that the SEFSC provide projections based on recent recruitment (last 10 years of assessment) for consideration by the SSC.
 - Coordinate requested projection with SSC.
- The Council requests that the SSC:
 - Provide short-term management advice (i.e., 3-year yield stream of OFL and ABC) based on alternative recruitment projections (recent 10 years) that consider recent trends in recruitment.
 - Staff will work with GC to address potential legal questions.
 - Provide a range of plausible OFLs and ABCs noting associated uncertainties.
 - Consider weighting and averaging results, as appropriate.
 - Provide the Council guidance on the effects of alternative recruitment assumptions on stock rebuilding by 2044 and to preventing overfishing over the next 3 years.
 - Further evaluate discard mortality reductions due to descending devices in SG RA 29 and provide short-term management advice based on alternative descending device usage and mortality rates. Thoroughly document the justification for any recommendations that deviate from SEDAR 73.
 - Review the alternate assessment projection approach offered by the SEFSC that accounts for shifting of yield from discards to landings.

Short-Term Response (Options Paper in September 2021)

- Amendment to 1) Revise ACL based on SEDAR 73 and SSC recommendations, and 2) Consider revision to allocations.
 - Maybe additional Council Meeting between September and December.
 - Short-term response timing intended to affect 2022.
- Brainstorm ideas to help shift discard loss to retained catch (Exempted Fishing Permit or longer season), etc.
 - Discuss ideas in September for inclusion in longer-term response.
- Direct Staff to begin an Options Paper in anticipation of receiving the SSC's recommendations in July 2021.
 - SSC will present their recommendations and guidance in September 2021.
 - Staff will present the SSC's recommendations in Options Paper format at the September 2021 meeting, as well.
 - Council Staff will coordinate with SERO on amendment timing.

Long-Term Responses (Amendment to follow short-term response)

- Consider recommendations of the SAFMC recreational reporting working group and evaluate data improvements to better characterize discards.
- Consider recommendations that come out of Section 102 Working Group.
 - Context of overall Snapper Grouper fishery.
- Based on brainstormed ideas, develop management strategies that reduce discards and increase landed yield.

- Evaluate the efficacy of a slot limit for rebuilding and after the stock is rebuilt.
- Direct the Council Staff to develop a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) simulation model to consider different approaches to management designed to help minimize dead discards and increase landed yield.
 - Context of overall Snapper Grouper fishery.
 - Later discussion to specify strategies to consider.
- SSC Recruitment Projections and Assumptions Best Practices Working Group
 - Would not have Red Snapper decisions this summer.
- Evaluate Alternative proxy reference pts (F_{MSY} and MSST proxy values, MSST reporting units)
 - Range of higher/lower F_{MSY} proxies.
 - Proxy should approximate F_{MSY} ; SSC would need to weigh in.
 - Possibly re-run/update analysis from SEDAR 41.
- AP Recommendations:
 - Potential gear changes: large hooks, single hook rig, smaller leader, no natural bait.
 - Spatial or time closure of bottom area.
 - Improve data on recreational catch and effort.
 - Continue to promote descending device use and best practices for releases.
 - Consider changes to timing of the season.
 - Consider requesting a recreational federal fishing license for the Snapper Grouper fishery.

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) Recommendations not covered in previous items

The Snapper Grouper AP met on April 21-23, 2021, and discussed a list of topics besides those addressed in this Committee meeting. Some of these topics are scheduled to be discussed in September. Jimmy Hull, AP Chair, presented the AP's recommendations on items not scheduled for discussion at this meeting or scheduled for September, including the AP's comments on recreational discards and recommendation for a recreational license for the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper fishery.

The Committee asked about consideration of a slot limit for the Red Snapper fishery. The AP had some mixed commentary on a slot limit, but not a direct, in-depth discussion. Some Committee members commented that a slot limit could be explored further to potentially reduce discards due to high-grading and increase the number of large, old fish in the population. The AP also commented on the potential use of gear changes or bottom area closures to help reduce discards. Some of the AP's recommendations for reducing discards were listed in the long-term management response for Red Snapper for further exploration.

Updates

Red Snapper and Greater Amberjack Research Projects:

In 2020, the NMFS Sea Grant Consortium received funding to administer programs to solicit research on Red Snapper (South Atlantic) and Greater Amberjack (South Atlantic and Gulf). The goal is to support research that would generate absolute estimates of abundance, with accompanying measures of uncertainty, for these stocks. The intent is for this information to be used as an "anchor point" for future stock assessments. These are sister projects to the much

larger “Great Red Snapper Count” that was conducted in the Gulf of Mexico. Council staff serve on the Steering Committees for each project and provided updates on progress to date for each project.

Other Business

After feedback from NOAA General Counsel, the Committee decided that the Gag Grouper rebuilding timeline will be decided in September.

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 15: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Draft Options Papers for the Gag Grouper and Tilefish amendments for the December 2021 Council Meeting.
- Work with NOAA General Counsel and SERO to develop options for rebuilding timelines for Gag Grouper for discussion in September 2021.
- Request an assessment projection estimating the rebuilding timeline for Gag Grouper with no harvest allowed (landed F=0) but accounting for discard mortality.
- Conduct public hearings for Amendment 50 DURING the September 2021 meeting.
- Add language regarding SMZs being designated as Essential Fish Habitat-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern to Amendment 50.
- Conduct preliminary catch level analysis for Yellowtail Snapper, including potential closures due to changes in catch levels, for consideration at the September 2021 meeting.
- Schedule an SSC meeting in Summer 2021 for the SSC to revisit results of the SEDAR 73 (Red Snapper) stock assessment and recommendations for the OFL and ABC.
- Draft an Options Paper to adjust catch levels and for Red Snapper (based on the SSC’s OFL and ABC recommendations from their Summer 2021 Meeting) and revise sector allocations. Prepare this for review at the September 2021 meeting.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL