

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
September 12-14, 2023

The Committee approved the minutes from the June 2023 meeting and the agenda (after revisions) for the September 2023 meeting.

Wreckfish (SG Amendment 48)

A review of the Wreckfish ITQ Program was completed in 2019 and included recommendations for improvement. Modernizing the wreckfish ITQ program continues to be a complex process. To help facilitate continued development of SG Amendment 48, the Council established an Ad-Hoc Wreckfish Advisory Group (WAG) and a Wreckfish Sub-Committee (WSC). The Committee received an update on discussion topics for the WAG and WSC meetings to occur on September 19th and 20th, respectively, and an update on the amendment development timeline.

Additionally, NMFS staff provided a presentation on cost recovery, addressing questions posed by the Council during their March 2023 meeting. Ultimately, the Committee deferred additional cost recovery discussion until the WAG meets and provides additional input on the available options.

Private Recreational Permitting (SG Amendment 46)

Amendment 46 considers establishing a private recreational permit and education component for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. In recent meetings, the Council has received input and technical guidance from the Private Recreational Reporting Working Group, Joint Council Workgroup on Section 102 of the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act, and the Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting Technical Advisory Panel (RPRT AP). After reviewing this input, the Council began work on the amendment and approved it for scoping at the December 2022 meeting. Of note at this meeting was also the removal of a reporting component from further consideration in the amendment.

The Council has since further developed Amendment 46, with the amendment being reviewed by the RPRT AP in August 2023. Dr. Luiz Barbieri, AP Chair, provided a summary of the AP feedback and then the Committee reviewed a decision document for Amendment 46. The Committee passed the following motions and provided the following direction to staff:

MOTION 1: ACCEPT THE EDITS TO THE PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENTS.

The *purpose* of the amendment is to develop a recreational permitting system that will better identify the universe of private anglers or vessels targeting South Atlantic snapper grouper species and will enhance the ability to collect recreational effort and catch data. Also work to promote best recreational fishing practices through education.

The *need* for the amendment is to improve the quality of effort and catch data for the private component of the recreational sector that targets South Atlantic snapper grouper species, while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects. Also improve education on best fishing practices.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 2: REMOVE ALTERNATIVES 3 AND 6 IN ACTION 2 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED SECTION.

Action 2. Specify the species that would be covered by a private recreational snapper grouper permit

~~Alternative 3. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any assessed species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit for which recreational harvest is allowed.~~

~~Alternative 6. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any species with a size or bag limit.~~

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 3: REMOVE ACTION 3 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED SECTION.

~~**Action 3. Specify the effective term of a private recreational snapper grouper permit**~~

~~Alternative 1 (No Action). A federal permit is not required for a private angler or private vessel when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.~~

~~Alternative 2. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would remain valid for the calendar year that it was issued.~~

~~Alternative 3. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would remain valid for one year from issuance.~~

~~Alternative 4. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would expire on the date of birth for the permit holder.~~

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 4: REMOVE ACTION 6 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED SECTION AND CLARIFY IN ACTION 5 THAT THE INTENT IS FOR THE EDUCATION COMPONENT TO BE MANDATORY.

~~**Action 6. Specify whether an education component in the private recreational portion of the snapper grouper fishery would be mandatory or voluntary**~~

~~**Alternative 1 (No Action).** There is not a required education component for private recreational anglers to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.~~

~~**Alternative 2.** An education component would be mandatory for all private recreational permit holders to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.~~

~~**Alternative 3.** An education component would be voluntary for all private recreational permit holders to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.~~

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 5: REMOVE ALTERNATIVE 2 IN ACTION 8 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED SECTION.

~~**Action 8. Specify the timing of education component requirements for the private recreational portion of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic region**~~

~~**Alternative 2.** An education component would need to be completed each calendar year.~~

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Direction to Staff:

Permit-related actions

- In the amendment document, note what could be improved upon in the existing saltwater angler registry and how permit actions will help with those improvements.
- Although Action 3 is removed, clarify that the intent is for the permit to be issued on an annual basis in the discussion of Action 1.
- For Action 4, ask the IPT to develop a draft process for how NMFS would certify a state program to allow the opt out of a federal permit requirement.

Education component related actions

- Change “anglers” to “permit holders” in Action 5.
- Task the IPT to:
 - Consolidate the remaining education component actions.
 - In Alternative 2 of Action 7, revise the wording of “implement immediately” to reflect implementing the education requirement in conjunction with the rule for the permit.

- Develop an alternative in Action 8 that would require permittees to update their education requirement whenever education materials or modules are also updated.
- Clarify the connection between the education component and the option for states to opt out of the education requirement: Would the state need to use the same education materials?
- Ask the Outreach and Communications AP to provide input on developing an education requirement.
 - Inventory the applicable education materials or programs that already exist.
 - What types of information should be included in the materials or program.

Scamp/Yellowmouth Grouper (SG Amendment 55)

The results of SEDAR 68 were reviewed by the Council in March 2023 and staff were directed to start a plan amendment to reorganize the Other Shallow Water Grouper Complex, establish the new Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Complex and then establish a rebuilding plan, catch levels, allocations, and AMs for this new complex. In June 2023 the Council approved the amendment for scoping. Scoping hearings were held July 31, August 1 and 2. Staff reviewed a decision document which included an overview of scoping. The Council gave the following direction to staff:

Direction to Staff: Add stock determination criteria language to the purpose and need.

The *purpose* of this fishery management plan amendment is to remove yellowmouth grouper from the Other South Atlantic Shallow Water Grouper Complex and establish a new South Atlantic Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Complex. For the new complex, adopt stock determination criteria, establish a rebuilding plan, specify catch levels, sector allocations, and accountability measures based on the results of the SEDAR 68 (2022) stock assessment.

The *need* for this fishery management plan amendment is to rebuild the South Atlantic Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Complex, and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

Direction to Staff: Add an alternative to **Action 4** that would set the annual catch limit equal to 95% of the acceptable biological catch.

Action 4. Establish the acceptable biological catch, and total annual catch limit ~~and annual optimum yield~~ for the South Atlantic Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Complex

Alternative 1 (No Action). No ACL is established for the Scamp Yellowmouth Grouper Complex.

Alternative 2. ACL = ABC

Alternative 3. ACL = 90% of ABC

Alternative 4. ACL = 95% of ABC

Direction to Staff: Remove **Alternative 3** from **Action 6**.

Action 6. Establish commercial accountability measures for the Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Complex

Alternative	In-Season AM		Post-Season AM	
	Triggers	AM	Triggers	AM
Alternative 1 (No Action)	No commercial AM for the South Atlantic Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Complex, retain current AMs for scamp (individually) and yellowmouth grouper (within the OSASWG Complex)			
Alternative 2	Commercial landings meet/expected to meet sector ACL	Current commercial season closes	Commercial landings exceed/expected to exceed the commercial ACL Total ACL exceeded Stock is overfished *All triggers must be present for AM to occur	Commercial ACL is reduced for the following year by the amount of the overage
Alternative 3	NONE		Commercial landings exceed Commercial ACL *Not tied to stock status or total ACL	Commercial season for the following year is reduced by the amount necessary to prevent the commercial ACL from being exceeded
Alternative 4	Commercial landings meet/expected to meet sector ACL	Current commercial season closes	Commercial landings exceed commercial ACL *Not tied to stock status or total ACL	Commercial season for the following year is reduced by the amount necessary to prevent the commercial ACL from being exceeded

Direction to Staff: Remove **Alternative 2** from **Action 7**.

Action 7. Establish recreational accountability measures for the Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper complex

Alternative	In-Season AM		Post-Season AM	
	Triggers	AM	Triggers	AM
Alternative 1 (No Action)	No recreational AM for the South Atlantic Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Complex, retain current AMs for scamp (individually) and yellowmouth grouper (within the OSASWG Complex)			
Alternative 2	The season will open annually May 1, NMFS will annually announce the season end date			
Alternative 3	Recreational landings meet/expected to meet sector ACL	Current recreational season closes	Recreational landings exceed/expected to exceed the recreational ACL Total ACL exceeded Stock is overfished *All triggers must be present for AM to occur	Recreational ACL is reduced for the following year by the amount of the overage
Alternative 4	NONE		Recreational landings exceed recreational ACL *Not tied to stock status or total ACL	Recreational season for the following year is reduced by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational ACL from being exceeded
Alternative 5	Recreational landings meet/expected to meet sector ACL	Current recreational season closes	Recreational landings exceed recreational ACL *Not tied to stock status or total ACL	Recreational season for the following year is reduced by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational ACL from being exceeded

Direction to Staff: Regarding the Other South Atlantic Shallow Water Grouper Complex (OSASWG):

- Add an action (8b in the decision document) that modifies the OSASWG Complex for the remaining 5 species (rock hind, red hind, coney, graysby, yellowfin)
- Direct the IPT to explore additional options and whether the ACL needs to be modified, are yellowmouth landings significant enough for the ACL to be modified?
- Have the IPT assess the effects of reducing the catch limit and the need for management measures to avoid closures as well as clarifying the retention of the current size limit and recreational bag limit for scamp and yellowmouth grouper.

Yellowtail Snapper (SG Amendment 44/RF Amendment 55)

The Council reviewed the results of the SEDAR 68 Interim Analysis and instructed staff to resume work on this joint plan amendment in September 2022. This amendment will modify catch levels for South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico yellowtail snapper as well as updating the jurisdictional allocation of the stock acceptable biological catch, total South Atlantic annual catch limit, Gulf of Mexico annual catch limit, and South Atlantic sector allocations. Staff reviewed a decision document, and the Council provided the following direction to staff.

Direction to Staff:

- Ask the South Atlantic SSC to consider withdrawing the yellowtail snapper stock ABC and prioritize a new assessment for the stock in light of the MRIP-FES pilot study and Florida State Reef Fish Survey
- Because this is a joint amendment, ask the Gulf Council to consider consulting the Gulf SSC to do take the same action.

Black Sea Bass Stock Assessment (SEDAR 76)

The Council previously received results of the SEDAR 76 assessment, which indicated the Black Sea Bass stock in the South Atlantic is overfished and experiencing overfishing. The SSC Chair presented results of the SSC's July 2023 discussion of revised assessment projections. The SSC has formed a working group to further investigate assessment reference points and projections to develop catch level recommendations. These recommendations are expected to be available for the March 2024 Council meeting.

Council staff reported on the South Atlantic Ropeless Gear Workshop held on August 22-23 in Georgia. Council staff also presented a decision document outlining potential management actions for black sea bass, as well as timing and process options to develop these actions. The Committee made the following motion and provided the following guidance:

MOTION 6: INCLUDE BLACK SEA BASS ON-DEMAND POT GEAR IN THE BLACK AND GAG GROUPE FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Direction to Staff:

- Develop the Gag/Black Grouper/Black Sea Bass on-demand pots framework amendment for approval for scoping at the December 2023 Council meeting.
- The plan amendment addressing the management response to the SEDAR 76 assessment will next be discussed by the Council in March 2024. At the March 2024 meeting, the Council will receive catch level and rebuilding recommendations from the SSC and consider approval of the plan amendment for scoping.
- Consider interim actions responding to assessment results at or following the March 2024 Council meeting.

Updates

The Committee received updates from staff on the Systems Management Plan Work Group and Best Fishing Practices outreach, including details on “What It Means to Me,” a proposed outreach initiative.

The Committee was in support of the ‘What It Means to Me’ project and provided the following input:

- Committee members noted the importance of positive messaging for the Council. Sharing the stories of those involved in South Atlantic fisheries may help change attitudes surrounding the management process.
- Suggestions for additional conversation topics included: perspectives of changes within the fishery, habitat, and explaining how preservation is different than conservation.
- To target the younger generation, Committee members recommended utilizing video-focused social media platforms such as YouTube and Tik Tok.
 - It was recommended that staff utilize caution when identifying platforms to share participant videos.
- The Committee suggested possible project participants, including spearfishermen, Council members, and other fisheries managers.
- It was recommended that staff consider ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Direction to Staff: Ask the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel for ‘What It Means to Me’ conversation topic suggestions.

MOTION 7: APPROVE THE ‘WHAT IT MEANS TO ME’ PROJECT AND BEGIN FILMING AT FALL AP MEETINGS.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

The Committee also received an update on the Best Fishing Practices Volunteer Program (BFP MVP). They supported the continued development of the program and commented on how port samplers are an important audience to target because they regularly interact with fishermen at the docks.

SEDAR 86 (Red Grouper) Modifications

The SSC held a webinar on September 7, 2023, to discuss potential modifications to the SEDAR 86 (Red Grouper) Operational Assessment, including the incorporation of spatial structure into the assessment model and whether the changes necessitate changing the type of assessment being conducted. The SSC Chair presented the SSC's recommendation for the Council to consider transitioning the red grouper assessment to a benchmark rather than an operational assessment. This transition will require new terms of reference and new participant appointments.

Approve Topics for Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting

The Snapper Grouper AP is scheduled to convene on October 10-12, 2023. The Committee approved the following list of topics for the AP's agenda:

- Golden and Blueline Tilefish Fishery Performance Report Updates
- Management Strategy Evaluation Update and Discussion
- Discussion of Limited Entry into the Snapper Grouper For-Hire Fishery
- Amendment 55 (Scamp/Yellowmouth Grouper)
- Amendment 46 (Recreational Permitting)
- Offshore Wind Presentation
- Best Fishing Practices Update and New Projects (Master Volunteer Program and What It Means to Me)
- Amendment Updates: Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper), Black Sea Bass Amendments (Framework with Gag/Black and Plan Amendment 56), and Amendment 48 (Wreckfish)
- Other Updates: Citizen Science, SEDAR, South Atlantic Ropeless Gear Workshop, MRIP FES Resources and Fall Seminar

Other Business

The Committee also discussed gag and black grouper vessel limits defined in Amendment 53, was informed of an open Request for Proposals to develop innovative strategies to reduce discards of red snapper, and discussed whether to revisit Regulatory Amendment 35 prior to its submission for secretarial review.

MOTION 8: INITIATE A FRAMEWORK ACTION TO MODIFY THE GAG AND BLACK GROUPE VESSEL LIMIT TO 2 FISH COMBINED PER VESSEL

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 9: ADD DISCUSSION OF REGULATORY AMENDMENT 35 TO THE DECEMBER 2023 AGENDA.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

ROLL CALL VOTE REQUESTED

APPROVED BY COUNCIL (8-5)

In light of recent issues with the MRIP-FES, and the dependence of red snapper discard estimates on MRIP, the Council's intent is to reconsider whether to submit Reg 35 in

December 2023. If the decision is not to submit, then look at information that was compiled during development of Reg 35 and consider what additional information would be needed to consider a different “short-term” action (would need to conduct public meetings).

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 10: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Continue to develop Amendment 48 including bringing together the WAG and WSC to discuss cost recovery, monitoring, participation and eligibility. Provide the Committee with an update on the WAG and WSC meetings at the December 2023 Council meeting.
- Prepare an Amendment 46 public hearing document for approval at the December 2023 Council meeting.
- Continue to develop the BFP MVP and ‘What It Means to Me’ program. Identify possible participants for 'What it Means to Me' during the Fall 2023 AP meetings.
- Begin development of a framework amendment that will address the Gag and Black Grouper vessel limit and Black Sea Bass commercial on-demand gear to approve for scoping in December 2023.
- Request the SSC withdraw the stock ABC for yellowtail snapper in light of the MRIP-FES data issue and the availability of SRFS data for the species.
- Request the FWC consider prioritizing the yellowtail snapper assessment to include SRFS data.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL