

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Jekyll Island, GA
March 4 -6, 2019

The Committee approved minutes from the December 2018 meeting and the agenda.

Status of Commercial & Recreational Catches versus Quotas for Species under ACLs

NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff delivered briefings to the Committee on the status of commercial landings relative to ACLs as of February 26, 2019.

Status of Amendments under Formal Review

SERO staff updated the Committee on the status amendments currently under review:

- Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 – was submitted for formal review on 1/24/19. Due to the partial government shutdown, review of this amendment was delayed. NMFS is working on the proposed rule package.
- Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 – the Council approved the amendment for formal review at their December 2018 meeting. Due to the partial government shutdown, the amendment has not yet been submitted but is under review by the Council chair.
- Abbreviated Framework 2 (black sea bass & vermilion snapper) – the proposed rule for this amendment published on 2/19/19 and the comment period ended on March 6, 2019.

Update on 2019 Red Snapper Season

SERO staff briefed the Committee on the projected 2019 red snapper season. As implemented through Amendment 43, the commercial season begins each year on the second Monday in July and the recreational season begins on the second Friday in July. SERO has predicted that the recreational red snapper season in 2019, based on the catch rate in 2018 and the ACL established through Amendment 43, can be open for 5 days. Consequently, red snapper harvest in 2019 will be allowed on July 12, 13, and 14 (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) and on July 19 and 20, (Friday and Saturday). Commercial harvest of red snapper will open on July 8, 2019, and will close at 12:01 a.m., local time, on January 1, 2020, unless the commercial annual catch limit is met or projected to be met before this date. The Committee discussed possibly modifying the definition of “weekends” for the recreational sector to allow more flexibility in 2020 and future red snapper seasons in the South Atlantic.

MOTION #1: INITIATE A FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT TO MODIFY THE RED SNAPPER SEASON FOR 2020 AND ONWARDS TO ALLOW MORE FLEXIBILITY IN HOW THE SEASON IS SPECIFIED

- REMOVE THE SPECIFICATION THAT IF PROJECTIONS INDICATE THE SEASON WOULD BE THREE DAYS OR LESS, THEN THERE WOULD BE NO SEASON FOR THAT FISHING YEAR
- MODIFY START DATES (SPRING, SUMMER, FALL) FOR BOTH RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL SECTORS

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

GUIDANCE TO BRING TO COUNCIL IN JUNE*

Regulatory Amendment 29 – (Best Fishing Practices and Powerheads)

The Council reviewed a draft public hearing document and provided the following guidance:

DIRECTION TO TAKE THIS AMENDMENT TO THE LAW ENFORCEMENT AP FOR REVIEW.

MOTION: ADD AN ALTERNATIVE THAT WOULD REQUIRE DESCENDING DEVICE OR VENTING DEVICE ONBOARD FOR CHARTER/FOR-HIRE VESSELS.

MOTION FAILS (3 IN FAVOR, 9 OPPOSED, 1 ABSTENTION)

MOTION #2: DIRECT STAFF TO DEVELOP A RESEARCH AND MONITORING PLAN FOR ADDRESSING DESCENDING DEVICE USAGE AND RELEASE TREATMENT, INCLUDING:

- THROUGH EXISTING PROGRAMS (FOR EXAMPLE: COMMERCIAL, FOR-HIRE LOGBOOKS AND MRIP). INCLUDE INFORMATION ON COMPLIANCE RATES AND TYPE OF DEVICE USED.
- CONSULTING WITH THE SSC ON HOW INFORMATION WILL BE USED IN FUTURE STOCK ASSESSMENTS

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (12 IN FAVOR, 2 ABSTENTIONS).

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

NOTE: THE MOTIONS BELOW WERE MODIFIED THROUGH MOTIONS 2 & 3 BELOW:

MOTION: MODIFY ALTERNATIVES 2 AND THREE AS FOLLOWS:

Alternative 2. WITHIN THREE YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SNAPPER GROUPER REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29, Require a *descending device** be onboard a vessel FISHING FOR OR possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

Alternative 3. WITHIN THREE YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SNAPPER GROUPER REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29, Require a *venting device** be onboard a vessel FISHING FOR OR possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (11 IN FAVOR, 2 ABSTENTIONS)

MOTION: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2, AS MODIFIED, AND SUB-ALTERNATIVES 2A, 2B, 2C AS PREFERRED.

Alternative 2. WITHIN THREE YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SNAPPER GROUPER REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29, Require a *descending device** be onboard a vessel FISHING FOR OR possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

Sub-alternative 2a. private recreational **VESSELS**

Sub-alternative 2b. for-hire vessels

Sub-alternative 2c. commercially permitted South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels

* For the purpose of this requirement, “descending device” means an instrument that will release fish at a depth sufficient for the fish to be able to recover from the effects of barotrauma, generally 33 feet (twice the atmospheric pressure at the surface) or greater. The device can be, **BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO**, a weighted hook, lip clamp, or box that will hold the fish while it is lowered to depth. The device should be capable of releasing the fish automatically, releasing the fish by actions of the operator of the device, or by allowing the fish to escape on its own. Since minimizing surface time is critical to increasing survival, descending devices ~~should~~ **SHALL** be rigged and ready for use while fishing is occurring.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (11 IN FAVOR, 1 OPPOSED, 2 ABSTENTIONS).

MOTION: RECONSIDER:

MOTION: MODIFY ALTERNATIVES 2 AND THREE AS FOLLOWS:

Alternative 2. WITHIN THREE YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SNAPPER GROUPER REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29, Require a *descending device** be onboard a vessel FISHING FOR OR possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

Alternative 3. WITHIN THREE YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SNAPPER GROUPER REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29, Require a *venting device** be onboard a vessel FISHING FOR OR possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

MOTION TO RECONSIDER APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (12 IN FAVOR)

SUBSTITUTE MOTION: CHANGE THE PHASE-IN PERIOD FOR REQUIREMENT FOR DESCENDING DEVICES (ACTION 1/ALTERNATIVES 2 & 3) IN REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29 BE 6 MONTHS OF THE EFFECTIVE DATE INSTEAD OF THREE YEARS.

Alternative 2. WITHIN THREE YEARS SIX MONTHS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SNAPPER GROUPER REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29, Require a *descending device** be onboard a vessel FISHING FOR OR possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

Alternative 3. WITHIN THREE YEARS SIX MONTHS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SNAPPER GROUPER REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29, Require a *venting device** be onboard a vessel FISHING FOR OR possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION APPROVED (10 IN FAVOR, 1 ABSENTION) AND BECOMES SUBSTITUTE BECOMES MAIN MOTION

MAIN MOTION APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (10 IN FAVOR)

MOTION: RECONSIDER:

SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2, AS MODIFIED, AND SUB-ALTERNATIVES 2A, 2B, 2C AS PREFERRED.

MOTION TO RECONSIDER APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (12 IN FAVOR)

MOTION #3: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2, AS MODIFIED, AND SUB-ALTERNATIVES 2A, 2B, 2C AS PREFERRED.

Alternative 2. WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SNAPPER GROUPER REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29, Require a *descending device** be onboard a vessel FISHING FOR OR possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

Sub-alternative 2a. private recreational **VESSELS**

Sub-alternative 2b. for-hire vessels

Sub-alternative 2c. commercially permitted South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (12 IN FAVOR)

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #4: SEND ALTERNATIVE 5 UNDER ACTION 2 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX.

Action 2. Modify the requirement for the use of non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for and/or possessing snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear.

Alternative 5. Remove the requirement for use of non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for and/or possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit with hook-and-line gear and natural baits north of 28 degrees north latitude:

Sub-alternative 5a. private recreational and for-hire vessels.

Sub-alternative 5b. commercially permitted South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #5: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 AND SUB-ALTERNATIVE 3A AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 2

Action 2. Modify the requirement for the use of non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for and/or possessing snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear.

Alternative 3. Require the use of *non-offset*, non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for and/or possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit with hook-and-line gear and natural baits in the exclusive economic zone:

Sub-alternative 3a. north of 28 degrees north latitude (approximately 25 miles south of Cape Canaveral, Florida).

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (11 IN FAVOR, 2 ABSTENTIONS)

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #6: CONSULT WITH THE SSC ON HOW A NON-OFFSET CIRCLE HOOK REQUIREMENT WILL BE CONSIDERED IN FUTURE STOCK ASSESSMENTS.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #7: MOVE ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 2 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX.

Action 2. Modify the requirement for the use of non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for and/or possessing snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear.

Alternative 2. Require the use of non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for and/or possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit with hook-and-line gear and natural baits in the exclusive economic zone:

Sub-alternative 2a. throughout the extent of the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction (North Carolina/Virginia border through Key West, Florida).

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #8: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 6, AS MODIFIED, UNDER ACTION 2 AS PREFERRED.

Action 2. Modify the requirement for the use of non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for and/or possessing snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear.

Alternative 6. Require the use of non-stainless-steel hooks when fishing for and/or possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit with hook-and-line gear and natural baits in the exclusive economic zone.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #9: SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVES 2A AND 2B AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 3.

Action 3. Adjust powerhead prohibitions in the South Atlantic Region.

Alternative 2. Allow the use of a powerhead for harvest of species in the South Atlantic snapper grouper complex in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina.

Sub-alternative 2a. private recreational and for-hire vessels.

Sub-alternative 2b. commercially permitted South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #10: APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPE REGULATOR AMENDMENT 29 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Regulatory Amendment 30 (Red grouper Rebuilding)

The Committee provided the following guidance:

MOTION #11: APPROVE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS TO PURPOSE STATEMENT.

Purpose for Action

The *purpose* of this amendment is to modify the rebuilding schedule for red grouper based on the results of the most recent stock assessment; minimize regulatory discards; and extend protection for red grouper during the spawning season.

Need for Action

The *need* of this amendment is to rebuild the red grouper stock; and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #12: APPROVE ALL ACTIONS IN REGULATORY AMENDMENT 30, AS MODIFIED, TO CONSIDER FOR FINAL APPROVAL IN JUNE 2019.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Amendment 42 (Sea Turtle Release Gear & Framework Modification)

The amendment proposes modifications to regulations for vessels with South Atlantic snapper grouper commercial or charter vessel headboat permits to allow the use of three additional sea turtle release gear types and to clarify dimension requirements for current sea turtle release gear. The amendment also proposes changes to the snapper grouper framework procedure to facilitate modifying sea turtle and other protected resources release gear and handling requirements in the future. Council and NOAA staff proposed including in this amendment objectives in the Snapper Grouper FMP as revised during the visioning process. The Committee reviewed a public hearing draft of Amendment 42 at the December 2018 Council meeting. The document was reformatted to expedite review once approved. Public comment was obtained during the March 2019 meeting. The Committee provided the following guidance:

GUIDANCE TO REMOVE SNAPPER GROUPE VISION BLUEPRINT OBJECTIVES FROM AMENDMENT 42

MOTION #13: APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPE AMENDMENT 42 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

Wreckfish ITQ Review

The Committee received an updated on the development of the Wreckfish ITQ Review report. While some work had been done since the December 2018 meeting, enough progress was not made due to the Federal government shutdown. The Council can expect to see a draft final document in June and then a final document for approval at the September meeting.

NMFS SERO Permits Presentation

The Council discussed this request at their October 2018 meeting and directed staff to request a presentation from the Southeast Region Permits Office to be delivered at the March 2019 Council meeting and the Spring 2019 AP meeting. The Council provided further guidance at their December 2018 meeting and the request was sent to SERO on 12/17/19. Kevin McIntosh, Acting Permits Branch Chief, delivered the presentation to the Committee. During the discussion, it was suggested that the Council could modify logbook compliance requirements. NOAA GC will work with staff to explore the possibility and bring that information back to the Committee.

Results of Recreational Workshops

Following the American Sportfishing Association (ASA) September 2018 workshop with the Council to discuss new ideas for management of the private recreational sector of the Snapper Grouper fishery, a series of regional meetings were coordinated by ASA to get input from local recreational representatives on angler preferences, harvest rate management, harvest tags for deep-water species, registration and reporting, and barotrauma reduction. Dr. Kari Buck, facilitator for the meetings, presented the outcome of the regional meetings. Final recommendations from the ASA workshops are listed below:

- The Council should consider regional regulations for appropriate species.
- The Council should continue to explore harvest rate management for high value snapper grouper species, especially for red snapper.
- The Council could consider an Exempted Fishing Permit for a pilot program to test harvest tags for certain deep-water species (i.e., those with low annual catch limits or low abundance).
- The Council should work with state partners to establish a registration for anglers targeting snapper grouper species, with consistency across all states.
- The Council should continue development of Snapper Grouper Amendment 46 to implement required or selective reporting for recreational anglers and continue outreach on benefits of providing data.
- The Council should continue development of Snapper Grouper Amendment 29 to require use of descending devices or venting tools, along with other best fishing practices, to reduce release mortality.

The Committee requested that results of this project be presented to the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel at their Spring 2019 meeting and that the AP provide recommendations/perspective on the practicability of the suggested approaches for management of the recreational snapper grouper fishery.

Spearfishing in the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery

The Snapper Grouper AP discussed spearfishing at their spring 2018 meeting and approved two motions to encourage the Council to characterize use of this gear in the commercial and recreational sectors of the snapper grouper fishery. At their October 2018 meeting, the AP approved another motion to recommend a gear endorsement for the commercial sector. The Council subsequently instructed staff to prepare a white paper to discuss the topic in March 2019. Council staff presented data on landings of snapper grouper species (combined and for select species) attributed to spearfishing gear in the commercial and recreational. The Committee requested that the white paper and presentation be delivered to the Snapper Grouper AP at their Spring 2019 meeting. A suggestion was made for each state to identify prominent commercial spearfishing participants and possibly bring them together via webinar to discuss the topic after the June 2019 meeting.

Agenda Items for April 2019 Snapper Grouper AP Meeting

Staff presented possible agenda items for the Spring 2019 meeting and obtained guidance from the Committee. The Committee approved the following list of items to include in the agenda:

- Fishery Performance Reports for blueline tilefish and scamp
- Input on ABC Control Rule Amendment (actions and alternatives; risk of overfishing categories for unassessed SG species)
- Input on Recreational Accountability Measures amendment
- Southeast Regional Office Permits Presentation
- Spearfishing in the Snapper Grouper Fishery – provide recommendations for possible regulations
- Student presentation on effect of management measures on fishing rates for select species
- Recreational Workshops results presentation – provide recommendations/perspective on practicability of suggested approaches
- Review descending device definition in Am 29 and provide input
- Input on current Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan objectives
- Citizen Science update and AP recommendations

Vision Blueprint Outreach

The 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery was approved in December 2015 and includes prioritized short-term objectives around broad goals addressing science, management, communication, and governance. In December 2018, the Committee provided guidance to assist in developing next steps. Staff presented outreach material that includes an overview of the actions left to address in the Vision Blueprint. The Committee opted not to request direct stakeholder input on the Vision Blueprint at this time, noting that stakeholders are encouraged to provide their input to the Council at any time. The Committee requested that the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel provide feedback on the current objectives in the Snapper Grouper FMP at their Spring 2019 meeting.

Spawning Special Management Zone Update

The System Management Plan Workgroup has been drafting sections for an outreach document/webpage on the Spawning Special Management Zones recommended in Amendment 36. Staff presented an overview of progress to date. The Committee will receive another update at the June 2019 meeting.

Other Business

The Committee approved the following motions:

MOTION #14: REQUEST THAT THE COUNCIL INITIATE PROCESS TO DESIGNATE 30 ARTIFICIAL REEF AREAS OFF NORTH CAROLINA AS SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONES WITH THE FOLLOWING GEAR RESTRICTIONS:

PROHIBITION OF FISHING WITH GEAR OTHER THAN HANDLINE, ROD AND REEL, AND SPEARFISHING GEAR AND HARVEST AND POSSESSION OF SG SPECIES BE LIMITED TO THE RECREATIONAL BAG LIMIT WHEN USING SPEARFISHING GEAR.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #15: REQUEST DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE REMOVAL OF JACKS (GREATER AMBERJACK, LESSER AMBERJACK, ALMACO JACK, BANDED RUDDERFISH) FROM THE SNAPPER GROUPER MANAGEMENT UNIT (POSSIBLY INCLUDE IN THE CMP FMP) AT NEXT SG COMMITTEE MEETING.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

GUIDANCE TO BRING BACK OPTIONS/ISSUES TO THE COMMITTEE IN JUNE AS THE CMP FMP IS A JOINT PLAN WITH THE GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

TIMING AND TASKS:

MOTION #16: ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASKS:

1. CONSULT WITH THE SSC ON HOW A NON-OFFSET CIRCLE HOOK REQUIREMENT WILL BE CONSIDERED IN FUTURE STOCK ASSESSMENTS.
2. PREPARE SG AMENDMENT 42 FOR FORMAL REVIEW
3. PREPARE WRECKFISH ITQ REVIEW FOR JUNE MEETING
4. INVESTIGATE POSSIBLE REMOVAL OF JACKS (GREATER AMBERJACK, LESSER AMBERJACK, ALMACO JACK, AND BANDED RUDDERFISH) FROM THE SNAPPER GROUPER FMP AND PLACE IN THE COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGICS FMP AND PRESENT OPTIONS/ISSUES TO THE COMMITTEE IN JUNE
5. PREPARE RED SNAPPER FRAMEWORK FOR JUNE MEETING
6. PREPARE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 30 FOR FINAL APPROVAL IN JUNE
7. CONDUCT PUBLIC HEARINGS FOR REG 29 BEFORE JUNE MEETING

APPROVED BY COUNCIL