

**FINAL**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**  
**SNAPPER GROUPEE COMMITTEE**  
**SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**  
**December 7-8, 2021**

The Committee approved the minutes from the September 2021 meeting and the agenda for the December 2021 meeting. Two items concerning the Fort Pierce Offshore Reef Special Management Zone (SMZ) and blueline tilefish were added for discussion under Other Business.

**Ecopath project on red snapper recruitment**

An Ecopath with Ecosim (EwE) model was developed and examined the effects of high red snapper recruitment on the South Atlantic ecosystem. This project was reviewed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) at their October meeting. The Council received a presentation describing the project, and the SSC Chair presented the SSC's comments and recommendations.

**Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Revisions – AP Comments and Recommendations**

At their October 2021 meeting, the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) responded to questions from the Council regarding release mortality reduction and more holistic management for the snapper grouper fishery. The AP Chair presented the AP's comments and recommendations.

**Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Revisions – Release Mortality Reduction Framework**

In September 2021, the Council directed staff to begin work on a framework amendment to reduce dead releases of snapper grouper species. Staff presented a discussion document that provided information on previous Council discussions and actions to reduce release mortality, as well as some management methods used by another multispecies management plan, Pacific Groundfish. The Committee gave the following direction to staff:

- Compile information or analyses to inform whether a demonstrable change in recreational dead releases can be estimated, such that it could be used in estimation of the acceptable biological catch (ABC), by the following potential management changes:
  - Area closure:
    - By depth
    - Defined area identified as a species hot spot
  - Gear modifications:
    - Single hook
    - Leader length
    - Hook Size
    - Lines per person
  - Weight limit per person (red snapper-specific)
  - Seasons
  - Consider sector differences and regional differences as possible and appropriate

- In March 2022, Staff will present the information or analyses to the Committee. Also in March 2022, the Committee will select potential management changes for the SSC to consider at their meeting in April 2022.
- Continue to promote best practices through outreach.
- Direct staff to add an action to set ABC, including options to set at the SSC's recommended level and considering potential adjustments resulting from gear modification or other potential actions.
- Allocation revisions would be considered after an ABC is determined.
- Begin gathering general public input through informal scoping prior to the March 2022 Council meeting via online means (e.g. wufoo) to solicit additional ideas.
- Request that the SSC review potential management changes in April 2022 and determine whether the gathered information could adequately support an estimated change in dead releases and an adjustment to the recommended ABC for red snapper.
- Continue to gather public input after the March 2022 Council meeting, possibly through more structured in-person meetings and AP meetings.

### **Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Revisions – Update from Private Recreational Workgroup**

The Council's Private Recreational Workgroup met on December 1, 2021 to continue discussing approaches to private recreational reporting. The Workgroup Chair provided an update on the group's progress and next steps. The Committee gave the following direction to staff:

- Hold the next Workgroup meeting prior to the March 2022 Council meeting and present the Workgroup's final recommendations at the March 2022 Council meeting.
- Provide presentations/information on the following items prior to the March 2022 meeting:
  - Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council – Mid-Atlantic recreational tilefish permit and reporting
  - US Fish and Wildlife Service – Federal Duck Stamp
  - Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) – State Reef Fish Survey
  - NOAA Fisheries – Atlantic Highly Migratory Species permit
  - NOAA Fisheries – How recreational permit system could fit with MRIP
  - Staff would provide synthesis of information to facilitate discussion in March 2022.

### **Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Revisions – Red Snapper Response and Holistic Management Approach**

In September 2021, the Council directed staff to begin work on an approach to manage the snapper grouper fishery in a more holistic manner. Staff presented a proposed work plan for a project evaluating management strategies for the snapper grouper fishery to address this directive. The work plan included a project description, potential timeline, participants, budget, and preliminary goals. The Committee directed work on this project to continue as proposed and will continue to receive updates as this project progresses.

## **Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Revisions – White Paper on Commercial Snapper Grouper Permits**

In 2020, the Council provided a response to Executive Order (EO) 13921: Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth, identifying the 2 for 1 provision for the South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper Grouper permit as an item to be evaluated and to consider if changes would provide social or economic benefits to the fishery. The Committee reviewed information describing background of the provision, an evaluation of trends in the commercial Snapper Grouper fishery and commercial permits, as well as input from the AP provided during their October 2021 meeting. The Committee indicated that the information presented at the September 2021 and December 2021 Council meetings provided a satisfactory response to the EO and that further consideration of changes to the commercial Snapper Grouper permit could be considered in the Management Strategy Evaluation that will examine holistic management changes in the Snapper Grouper fishery.

## **SEDAR 68 Scamp Research Track Assessment**

SEDAR 68 is the first research track assessment and the first assessment of Atlantic scamp through the SEDAR process. Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff presented the assessment's results to the Committee. The SSC reviewed the results of SEDAR 68 in October 2021. The SSC Chair presented the SSC's comments and recommendations. An operational assessment will begin in 2022, using methods developed through the SEDAR 68 research track assessment to provide management advice for Atlantic scamp.

## **Snowy Grouper (SG Amendment 51)**

The Committee reviewed the AP's recommendations regarding the commercial trip limit, commercial spawning season closure, recreational management measures, and recreational accountability measures. The Committee then reviewed the updated options paper which included modifications from the Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) and feedback from the AP. The Committee accepted the IPT changes, approved the following motion, and gave the following direction to staff:

- Include an action within the amendment that would shift the recreational season to non-peak spawning months.
- Gather information from the public on how the alterations to the snowy grouper season would affect blueline tilefish.

**MOTION 1:** APPROVE AMENDMENT 51 FOR SCOPING.

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

## **Golden Tilefish (SG Amendment 52)**

The AP Chair presented the AP's comments and recommendations on Amendment 52, addressing catch levels and management measures for golden tilefish. Staff presented an options paper. The Committee reviewed the AP recommendations and options paper. The Committee approved the following motion and gave the following direction to staff:

- Include actions for different start dates for commercial hook and line and long line seasons.
- Include actions to revise accountability measures.

**MOTION 2: APPROVE AMENDMENT 52 (CATCH LEVEL ADJUSTMENTS AND ALLOCATIONS FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH) FOR SCOPING.**

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**Gag Grouper (SG Amendment 53)**

The Committee was provided an overview of the SSC's discussion during their October 2021 meeting along with the AP's recommendations regarding gag grouper. Staff then reviewed the options paper. The Committee made the following motion and gave the following direction to staff:

- Request a rebuilding projection based on  $P_{rebuild}$  of 60%. Request that the SSC provide ABC values based on this projection to minimize social and economic impacts while preventing overfishing. The Committee noted willingness to deviate from standard application of the ABC Control Rule for this amendment.
- Incorporate an allocation action that uses the most recent year of gag grouper landings currently available (2020) for each sector to split the harvest reduction in year one and split the subsequent increases from year 2 through the final year of the rebuilding plan.
  - Consider other baseline scenarios for the year 1 reduction split (average of most recent 3 or 5 year).
- Estimate sector ACLs (Action 3) based on the ACL being set equal to the ABC (Action 2 – Option 2).
- Include the following potential commercial management modifications for scoping:
  - Reduction in commercial trip limit to 200 - 500 pounds gutted weight.
  - Increase in the commercial minimum size limit.
  - Establish a commercial slot size limit.
  - Restriction of spear fishing gear (including bang sticks) for certain times of the year.
  - Removing spearfishing gear (including bang sticks) from allowable gear when harvesting gag grouper during the duration of the rebuilding plan.
- Include the following potential recreational management modifications for scoping:
  - Increase in the minimum size limit.
  - Establish a recreational slot size limit.
  - Modify the recreational bag limit from 1 fish/person/day to 1-6 fish/vessel/day.
    - Including headboats.
    - Excluding headboats.
  - Modify the recreational season (accounting for regional differences).
    - Modify the recreational spawning closure.
  - Restriction of spear fishing gear (including bang sticks) for certain times of the year.
  - Removing spearfishing gear (including bang sticks) from allowable gear when harvesting gag grouper during the duration of the rebuilding plan.

- Include the following potential modifications to recreational accountability measures for scoping:
  - Remove the in-season accountability measure and modify the post-season accountability measure similar to proposed modifications in Amendment 50 (red porgy).
  - Also include alternatives for the post-season AM being triggered by exceeding the total ACL OR stock status.

**MOTION 3:** APPROVE AMENDMENT 53 FOR SCOPING.  
**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**  
**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**Greater Amberjack (Amendment 49)**

Staff presented a decision document summarizing the draft amendment and preliminary analyses of the current actions. The Committee reviewed proposed actions and corresponding analyses, approved the following motions, and provided the following direction to staff:

- Incorporate the IPT’s recommended edits to the Draft Purpose and Need and add revision of the ABC to the Draft Purpose and Need statements.
- Add revision of the ABC to Action 1.

**MOTION 4:** REMOVE ACTION 1, ALTERNATIVE 5 FROM FURTHER CONSIDERATION.

**Action 1. Revise the greater amberjack total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield**

**Alternative 5.** Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack. For the 2022/2023 season through the 2024/2025 season, set the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield equal to the middle value of the updated acceptable biological catch projected for 2022/2027. For the 2025/2026 season through the 2026/2027 season, set the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield equal to the updated acceptable biological catch. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Total ACL (lbs ww)</b>
2022/2023	2,818,000
2023/2024	2,818,000
2024/2025	2,818,000
2025/2026	2,699,000
2026/2027+	2,669,000

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**  
**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 5:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 2.

**Action 2. Revise the greater amberjack sector allocations and sector annual catch limits**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Retain the current commercial sector and recreational sector allocations as 40.66% and 59.34%, respectively, of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack. Apply these percentages to the revised total annual catch limit. The percentages are based on applying the formula of sector annual catch limit = ((mean landings 2006-2008)\*0.5) + ((mean landings 1986-2008)\*0.5) to the landings dataset used in the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (Amendment 25 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region) that included recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey.

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	4,380,000	1,712,412	1,027,447	684,965	2,599,092
2023/2024	3,233,000	1,263,979	758,387	505,591	1,918,462
2024/2025	2,818,000	1,101,730	661,038	440,692	1,672,201
2025/2026	2,699,000	1,055,205	633,123	422,082	1,601,587
2026/2027+	2,669,000	1,043,476	626,086	417,391	1,583,785

\*The total annual catch limit (ACL) is allocated in pounds whole weight (lbs ww) to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

\*\*Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 6:** ADD AN ALTERNATIVE TO ACTION 3 TO INCREASE THE RECREATIONAL MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT TO 30 INCHES FORK LENGTH.

**Action 3. Increase the recreational minimum size limit for greater amberjack**

**Alternative 4.** Increase the recreational minimum size limit to 30 inches fork length.

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 7:** SELECT THE ALTERNATIVE FOR 30 INCHES FORK LENGTH FOR THE RECREATIONAL MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 3.

**Action 3. Increase the recreational minimum size limit for greater amberjack**

**Alternative 4.** Increase the recreational minimum size limit to 30 inches fork length.

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 8:** ADD AN ALTERNATIVE TO ACTION 4 TO DECREASE THE COMMERCIAL MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT TO 30 INCHES FORK LENGTH.

**Action 4. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack**

**Alternative 4.** Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 30 inches fork length.

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 9:** SELECT THE ALTERNATIVE FOR 30 INCHES FORK LENGTH FOR THE COMMERCIAL MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 4.

**Action 4. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack**

**Alternative 4.** Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 30 inches fork length.

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 10:** EDIT ACTION 5 TO PERTAIN TO BOTH COMMERCIAL SEASONS AND ADD ALTERNATIVES FOR 1,500, 2,000, AND 2,500 POUNDS FOR EACH OF COMMERCIAL SEASONS 1 AND 2.

**Action 5. Increase the Season 2 commercial trip limit for greater amberjack**

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 11:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 7 AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

**Action 7. Remove recreational annual catch targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan**

**Alternative 2.** Remove recreational annual catch targets for species managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

- The Committee will consider approving Amendment 49 for public hearings at the March 2022 meeting.

At Full Council, the Council reviewed additional information provided by staff concerning rationale for the establishment of the April spawning closure. The Council then approved the following motion:

**MOTION 12:** ADD AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE ACTION THAT CONSIDERS THE APRIL SPAWNING CLOSURE TO REMOVE THE CLOSURE.

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

### **Yellowtail Snapper (SG Amendment 44)**

The Snapper Grouper AP Chair summarized input from the AP and staff briefed the Committee on feedback from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council meeting and comments received during scoping in November 2021. The Committee provided the following direction to staff:

- Suspend work on this amendment and request that FWC conduct an update to the assessment to incorporate three additional years of data and a constant catch projection to set an ABC.

### **Red Porgy (SG Amendment 50)**

Staff reviewed changes to the language of some actions and alternatives and input from the Snapper Grouper AP pertaining to the action to reduce the recreational bag limit. The Committee requested that staff obtain additional feedback from the Law Enforcement AP before the March 2022 Council meeting. Additionally, staff reviewed draft rationale for each of the actions in the amendment. The Committee approved the following motion:

**MOTION 13:** APPROVE ALL ACTIONS AS MODIFIED IN SNAPPER GROUPE AMENDMENT 50.

**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

### **AP comments on items not previously covered**

The Snapper Grouper AP met on October 19-21, 2021, and discussed a list of topics other than those addressed in this Committee meeting. The AP Chair presented the AP's comments and recommendations on items not scheduled for discussion at this meeting, including vermilion snapper commercial trip limits, barrellfish management, and aquaculture.

### **Updates on South Atlantic Red Snapper Count and Greater Amberjack Count**

Council staff updated the Committee on the status of research projects to obtain abundance estimates for red snapper and greater amberjack.

### **Other Business**

#### *Correcting A Regulatory Error for the Fort Pierce Offshore Reef Special Management Zone*

A mistake was made in the rulemaking for Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2 (CE-BA 2 2011) that resulted in limiting possession of snapper grouper species within the Fort Pierce Offshore Reef SMZ to the recreational bag limit. NOAA General Counsel indicated work would be initiated as soon as possible to correct the issue through independent rulemaking (not associated with South Atlantic amendments already undergoing rulemaking).

#### *Blueline Tilefish*

SERO staff presented a report detailing the management history, recent landings and ACLs, and current management and accountability measures for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic region. The Committee discussed the report information, approved the following motion, and gave the following direction to staff:

- Look into use of interim analyses (~1-2 years to develop) and management procedures for longer-term consideration.

At Full Council, the Council revisited discussion of changes to the blueline tilefish accountability measures and recreational bag limit, as well as how best to develop an amendment to implement these changes. The Council approved the following motion and gave the following direction to staff:

**MOTION 14:** ADD AN ACTION TO ADJUST THE RECREATIONAL BAG LIMIT FOR BLUELINE TILEFISH. ADD THIS ACTION AND THE ACTION TO MODIFY



RECREATIONAL AMs TO AMENDMENT 52 (GOLDEN TILEFISH). INTENT TO CONDUCT SCOPING IN WINTER 2022.

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

- Include alternatives that consider modification to captain and crew bag limit and different seasonal bag limits.

**Timing and Tasks:**

**MOTION 15:** DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Compile information or analyses to inform whether a demonstrable change in recreational releases can be estimated, such that it could be used in estimation of the ABC, by potential management changes.
- Conduct informal scoping for the Release Mortality Reduction Framework Amendment
- Conduct scoping meetings for Amendment 51 (snowy grouper), Amendment 52 (golden tilefish and blueline tilefish), and Amendment 53 (gag grouper).
- Schedule an SSC meeting before the March 2022 Council meeting for consideration of other  $P_{rebuild}$  and ABC values for gag grouper.
- Prepare Amendment 49 (greater amberjack) as modified for discussion and approval for public hearings at the March 2022 Council meeting.
- Suspend work on Amendment 44 (yellowtail snapper) and request that FWC conduct an update to the yellowtail snapper assessment.
- Prepare Amendment 50 (red porgy) for final approval at the March 2022 Council meeting.
- Add Amendment 46 (recreational permit) to the Snapper Grouper Committee agenda for the March 2022 Council meeting.

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**