

**FINAL SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE**

Cocoa Beach, Florida

June 14-15, 2016

The Snapper Grouper Committee met June 14-15, 2016 and received updates from Southeast Regional Office staff on the status of commercial and recreational landings for snapper grouper species. The Committee requested that recreational landings updates be provided twice per year, at the June and December meetings. The Committee also requested that blueline tilefish be added to the list of species for which updates are provided. The Committee then received an update on the status of snapper grouper amendments under review and recently implemented.

Southeast Reef Fish Survey (SERFS) Update for 2015

The Committee received a presentation from Dr. Joey Ballenger, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, on the 2015 fishery independent activities in the South Atlantic region. Salient points of the discussion that ensued are below:

- Concern about drop in Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) for black sea bass
- Dr. Bonnie Ponwith, Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), indicated she would look into options to outfit current sampling with a means to obtain length data
- Red snapper: drop in CPUE in 2010 but steady increase thereafter.
- When will video data be included in CPUE analyses? Dr. Ponwith cautioned against making inferences on stock status/abundance based on data that have not been duly processed; however, she indicated the Committee could request that indices of abundance be updated. The Committee is indeed interested in putting more effort into updating indices of abundance.
- Bycatch mortality study conducted by graduate student on black sea bass and other species. Analyses are being finalized.

Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation Presentations

Frank Helies and Dr. Scott Raborn provided updates on two research projects pertaining to snapper grouper species under Council management. The Committee was appreciative of the reports and was supportive of continuing this research.

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Report

Kenny Fex, chair of the Snapper Grouper AP, briefed the Committee on discussions and recommendations pertaining to developing snapper grouper amendments, etc.

Scientific and Statistical Committee Report

Dr. Marcel Reichert, Chair of the SSC, delivered a summary report on deliberations during the April 2016 meeting of the SSC and resulting recommendations. Following are salient points of that report pertaining to snapper grouper species:

- The SSC expressed the usual concern about stocks that exceeded the ACL. The SSC also expressed concern about stocks that were well below their ACLs. The SSC recommended investigating stocks with landings less than 40% of the ACL.

- The Socio-Economic Panel of the SSC recommended several items for the Council consider when attempting to achieve Optimum Yield, especially in the context of reallocating between sectors.
- Regarding the Terms of Reference for SEDAR 50 (blueline tilefish), the SSC suggested to add some language to address ecosystem considerations and climate considerations, consistent with text put forth by the MAFMC to include elements such as food habits and environmental conditions. The SSC also recommended that effects of abiotic and biotic factors (e.g., climate change, predator/prey interactions) on recruitment, growth, geographic distribution, and natural mortality of blueline tilefish be investigated. In addition, the SSC recommended against a priori selection of a spatially-explicit model but rather let the data determine the best modeling approach.
- The SSC recommended that the red grouper assessment be conducted as a standard assessment and that the effects of the updated model fitting procedure be evaluated.
- The SSC reviewed and made recommendations on bag limit analysis methodology for black sea bass.
- As far as data reporting, emphasis should be given to data that can be used for both the assessments as well as management advice. Analysts and fishermen should be consulted. Also, the SEP recommended including information that has socio-economic relevance such as distance traveled, hours fished, and split trips. If additional data (such as home zip code of anglers) can be incorporated, it would be of value in generating consumer surplus estimates of for-hire trips. The impact of the sheer amount of requested data should be considered, especially relative to the return for the analyses (what do you get out of the collected information). For instance, it may be difficult to collect all of the suggested data on weekly reports.
- Pertaining to research/operational assessments, the SSC stressed the importance of involving the data providers in scheduling discussions. The SSC will also be the sole review body for operational assessments. This is expected to significantly increase the SSC's workload.
- The SSC reviewed the Golden Tilefish Update Assessment. The SSC concluded the assessment constituted Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA) and was adequate for management. However, the Committee expressed concern about differences between fishing level recommendations between SEDAR 25 and the update.
- Dr. Mike Errigo, Council staff, explained that the new projections are below those resulting from the previous assessment mainly due to the improved robust likelihood procedure and the shifting of selectivities to older ages due to the additional years of data included in the update assessment.
- The SSC and the SEP discussed the recreational and commercial decision tools for Amendment 37 (hogfish) and made several recommendations. Overall, the SSC considered the hogfish decision tool to be BSIA, but SERO staff agreed to incorporate the commendations to the extent practicable. And the SSC also recommends a retroactive validation of the tool.
- Dr. Luiz Barbieri, former chair of the SSC, reviewed the results of SEDAR 41 (red snapper and gray triggerfish) – see below.

Red Snapper 2016 Season

Dr. Michael Larkin, NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO), delivered a presentation on total removals of red snapper in 2015. A red snapper fishing season can occur in a given year if the total removals (landings and dead discards) from the previous year do not exceed the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for that year. Dr. Larkin indicated that total removals of red snapper in 2015 exceeded the ABC and, therefore, harvest of red snapper will not be allowed in 2016. Dr. Michelle Duval noted that a species miscoding resulted in erroneous estimated red snapper landings for North Carolina. The error was identified and corrected. Committee members questioned why the discard mortality estimate generated from the previous red snapper assessment (SEDAR 24) was used to estimate mortality in 2015 when a new estimate of discard mortality was generated during the SEDAR 41 process. It was explained that since the ABCs being used to determine whether harvest can be allowed were generated from the SEDAR 24 assessment, the same discard mortality should be used in order to make valid comparisons. Staff explained that calculations using the discard mortality estimate from SEDAR 41 would still not result in an open season in 2016.

Review of SEDAR 41 (red snapper and gray triggerfish)

Dr. Luiz Barbieri provided a detailed review of results of the SEDAR 41 assessment for red snapper. Committee members engaged in lengthy discussions. Salient points are below:

- Committee members noted that a new approach to estimate natural mortality was used in SEDAR 41. The Committee stated interest in having the SSC evaluate this approach in more detail during their October 2016 meeting.
- Red snapper have strong compensatory reserve, so that even at a fairly low spawning stock biomass, the stock may be able to remain stable at SPR levels below 30%.
- Asked whether data from early in the time series (1950s and 60s) should be excluded from the analysis, Dr. Barbieri explained that statistical catch-at-age models are designed to incorporate a long time series of data. Even so, sensitivity runs were performed that excluded various portions of the dataset, and these runs did not affect the model outputs.
- Dr. Barbieri acknowledged there is a lot of uncertainty in data post-moratorium (2010).
- The Committee questioned why three different stock assessments for red snapper have produced three different estimates of stock productivity and requested that the SSC consider impacts of the stock productivity on management.
- Asked whether adequate progress is being made to rebuild red snapper, Dr. Barbieri stated that the age composition is improving and abundance is indeed increasing.
- The Committee expressed interest in adopting a catch specification procedure similar to what is used in the Mid-Atlantic to set annual catch limits. Dr. Ponwith, SEFSC, stated that, while such an approach should not be used in lieu of a stock assessment, she would look into whether a similar approach could be used in the South Atlantic to inform management decisions.

During discussions pertaining to red snapper, the Council received a letter signed by 13 members of Congress expressing concerns about the red snapper assessment. In particular, the letter requested that the Council address “discrepancies between NOAA’s and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute’s statistical evidence regarding red snapper populations.” The letter maintained that data obtained by the state of Florida supported allowing commercial and recreational harvest of red snapper yet these data were not considered “best available science”.

Further, the letter suggested that “competent non-NOAA scientists should be given a more active role in the Science and Statistical Committee.”

Dr. Barbieri stated that there is a level of misconception regarding data that were used in the SEDAR 41 assessment of red snapper. While the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute appreciates the congressmen’s concern, considering that the assessment’s terminal year was 2014, the vast majority of data from the FWCs data collection programs were included in the assessment. What was not included were data collections in 2015 and 2016 that continued to document increase in stock abundance and age class reconstruction; but this does not mean that the assessment did not include all the data that were available at the time the assessment was conducted. Dr. Barbieri discussed this extensively with his staff and concluded that all the available data as of the terminal year of the SEDAR 41 were in fact included. Data collection continues but assessments need to have a terminal year to be completed. Subsequent data can be used to validate issues brought up during the review phase of the assessment. Dr. Barbieri indicated that any data obtained after 2014 could be evaluated during the next SSC meeting. Furthermore, Dr. Barbieri offered to distribute emails where he explains in detail how the available data were used in SEDAR 41 to assess the status of the red snapper stock in the South Atlantic.

Asked to what extent the recruitment patterns predicted in the assessment materialized in terms of recruitment in 2015, Dr. Reichert indicated that increased abundance of young red snapper was indeed observed in the MARMAP survey supporting the strong year classes in the terminal year of the assessment.

As far as the composition of the SSC, Council staff indicated that of the 18 members comprising the SSC, 15 are non-NOAA participants.

The stock assessment for gray triggerfish was found to have severe problems and was not considered BSIA or adequate for management. Below are some of the stated concerns:

- Uncertainty in age determination, natural mortality estimates, and over fitting of the fishery independent index.
- An error was identified during the Review Workshop in the chevron trap age composition
- In light of the assessment being rejected, the SSC recommends that the current ABC be maintained and further research be conducted to resolve ageing issues.
- An age validations study is underway and results are expected in a year or two.
- It was noted that fishermen have concerns about the use of chevron traps to inform gray triggerfish abundance and would like to provide input.
- Fishermen are seeing a shift in the distribution of gray triggerfish.

Amendment 37 (hogfish)

The Committee reviewed the actions and alternatives in Amendment 37 and made the following motions:

MOTION #1: APPROVE SUGGESTED EDIT TO PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 6

Action 6. Establish Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) for the Florida Keys/East Florida (FLK/EFL) stock of hogfish

Preferred Alternative 2. Establish ACLs for the FLK/EFL stock of hogfish. Specify commercial and recreational ACLs for 2017-2027. **ACLs will not increase automatically in a subsequent year if present year projected catch has exceeded the total ACL.** Specify commercial and recreational ACLs using re-calculated sector allocations based on proposed modifications to the management unit (9.63% commercial and 90.37% recreational).

Sub-alternative 2a. ACL = OY = ABC

Preferred Sub-alternative 2b. ACL = OY = 95% ABC

Sub-alternative 2c. ACL = OY = 90% ABC

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #2: SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2A AS AN ADDITIONAL PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 11

Action 11. Establish a recreational fishing season for the Florida Keys/East Florida (FLK/EFL) stock of hogfish

Preferred Alternative 2. Establish a recreational fishing season for the FLK/EFL stock of hogfish in the South Atlantic region.

Sub-alternative 2a. May-June

Sub-alternative 2b. July-August

Sub-alternative 2c. July-September

Preferred Sub-alternative 2d. July-October

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION # 3: APPROVE SUGGESTED EDIT TO PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 12

Action 12. Establish commercial and recreational accountability measures (AMs) for the Georgia through North Carolina (GA-NC) and the Florida Keys/East Florida (FLK/EFL) stocks of hogfish

Preferred Alternative 2. If commercial landings reach or are projected to reach the commercial annual catch limit (ACL), NMFS would close the commercial sector for the remainder of the fishing year. On and after the effective date of such a notification, all sale or purchase is prohibited and harvest or possession of hogfish in or from the EEZ would be limited to the recreational bag and possession limit. **This bag and possession limit applies in the South Atlantic on board a vessel for which a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper grouper has been issued, without regard to where such species were harvested, i.e., in state or Federal waters.** Additionally, if the commercial ACL is exceeded, NMFS would reduce the commercial ACL in the following fishing year by the amount of the

commercial overage, only if hogfish is overfished and the total ACL (commercial ACL and recreational ACL) of the respective stock is exceeded.

Preferred Sub-alternative 2a. For the GA-NC stock of hogfish.

Preferred Sub-alternative 2b. For the FLK/EFL stock of hogfish.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Amendment 41 (mutton snapper)

The Committee reviewed actions and alternatives in Amendment 41 and made the following motions:

MOTION # 3: APPROVE SUGGESTED EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE TITLES OF ACTIONS 1-7 IN AMENDMENT 41.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION # 4: SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2A UNDER ACTION 5 AS PREFERRED
Action 5. Designate spawning season during which commercial and recreational management measures for mutton snapper should apply in the South Atlantic Region

Alternative 2. For regulatory purposes, designate the following as “spawning months”. The remainder of the year would be the “regular season.”

Sub-alternative 2a. April-June

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION # 5: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 4, SUB-ALTERNATIVE 4B, UNDER ACTION 6 AS PREFERRED

Action 6. Modify mutton snapper recreational bag limit in the South Atlantic Region

Alternative 4. Retain mutton snapper within the recreational 10 snapper aggregate bag limit in the South Atlantic, but specify bag limits for mutton snapper within the aggregate bag limit year round.

Sub-alternative 4b. 3 fish/person/day.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #6: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3, SUB-ALTERNATIVE 3B AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 7

Action 7. Modify mutton snapper commercial trip limit in the South Atlantic Region

Alternative 3. Specify a commercial trip limit for mutton snapper during the “spawning months” in the South Atlantic.

Sub-alternative 3b. 3 fish/person/day

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #7: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2, SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2A UNDER ACTION 7 AS PREFERRED

SUBSTITUTE MOTION: SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2C (500 POUNDS) AS PREFERRED

SUBSTITUTE MOTION FAILED

Action 7. Modify mutton snapper commercial trip limit in the South Atlantic Region

Alternative 2. Establish a commercial trip limit for mutton snapper during the “regular season” (i.e., non-spawning months) in the South Atlantic.

Sub-alternative 2a. 300 pounds

MAIN MOTION APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #8: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 8

Action 8. Modify mutton snapper minimum size limit in the South Atlantic Region

Alternative 3. Increase the minimum size limit for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic region to 18 inches TL.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #9: MOVE MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT ACTION TO BEFORE CURRENT ACTION 5 (SPAWNING SEASON ACTION)

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #10: APPROVE AMENDMENT 41 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS

APPROVE BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Amendment 43 (red snapper)

The Committee received a synopsis of red snapper data including landings and discards, seasonality, length harvested, and distribution of commercial and recreational catches. Subsequently, Florida Council member Ben Hartig delivered a presentation on a possible new approach to manage red snapper. The Committee made the following motions:

MOTION #11: REQUEST THE SSC REVIEW ADDITIONAL RUNS AT F_{MAX} AND $F_{20\% SPR}$ AT OCTOBER 2016 MEETING. PROVIDE ADVICE REGARDING RISK OF THESE AS REFERENCE POINTS FOR OVERFISHING.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #12: REQUEST THE SSC EVALUATE THE CURRENT RED SNAPPER MRIP ESTIMATES TO DETERMINE IF THEY ARE RELIABLE AND ADEQUATE FOR MANAGEMENT INCLUDING QUOTA MONITORING AND DISCARD INFORMATION.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

***DIRECTION TO STAFF: TAKE SUITE OF OPTIONS AND STRUCTURE INTO SCOPING DOCUMENT TO INCLUDE BAG LIMITS, SIZE LIMITS, TRIP LIMITS, GEAR RELATED ACTIONS, SEASONAL AREA CLOSURES, SURGICAL AREA CLOSURES (HOT SPOTS), STAMP, ELECTRONIC REPORTING AND DATA COLLECTION ITEMS

Vision Blueprint Amendment(s) - Fisheries Seasonality and Retention

Council staff reviewed the outcome of discussions at the March 2016 Council meeting as well as recommendations from the Snapper Grouper AP pertaining to items that could be included in future amendments addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery.

The Committee provided the following guidance:

Develop two amendments to the Snapper Grouper FMP, one to address commercial management measures and one to address recreational management measures. Include the following items in each, respectively:

Amendment to address issues in the commercial fishery:

- Deepwater (400 feet and deeper) split seasons for blueline tilefish, snowy grouper, wreckfish, yellowedge grouper, golden tilefish (?)
- Split seasons for red pogy and other small-mouthed species (gray trigger and vermilion snapper)
- Examine trip limits and step-downs (especially as they pertain to traditional bandit boats, vermilion trip limit step-down in second season)
- Examine limiting commercial trips to a certain number per time-period, as appropriate (month, week)
- Re-evaluate shallow water grouper closure
- Fishing year changes (golden tile hook-and-line)

Amendment to address issues in the recreational fishery:

- Recreational stamp
- Reconsideration of the aggregate bag limits
- Re-evaluation of shallow water grouper closure
- Recreational season
- Seasonal area depth closure

Staff will advise the Committee on which items can be addressed via the existing framework procedure (possibly in regulatory amendments 23 and/or 24) and which ones would necessitate a plan amendment.

Staff requested guidance on how to differentiate “regular” amendments versus those related to the Vision Blueprint. Committee members suggested either “SG Regulatory Amendment XX – Vision Blueprint” or “Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment XX”.

Limited entry for the for-hire sector

The Committee received a briefing from Council staff on the number of for-hire (charter and headboat) permits currently active in the region. Discussion centered on whether

compliance for upcoming reporting requirements would be enhanced if a limited-entry system was established for the for-hire sector. The Committee made the following motions:

MOTION #13: ESTABLISH A JUNE 15, 2016 CONTROL DATE FOR THE THREE OPEN ACCESS CHARTER VESSEL/HEADBOAT PERMITS.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION: ESTABLISH AN APRIL 30, 2016 CONTROL DATE FOR THE THREE OPEN ACCESS CHARTER VESSEL/HEADBOAT PERMITS.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION FAILED

MAIN MOTION APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #14: DIRECT STAFF TO BEGIN DEVELOPMENT OF A LIMITED ENTRY AMENDMENT FOR THE THREE FOR-HIRE PERMITS
APPROVED BY COUNCIL (6/5)

MOTION #15: DIRECT STAFF TO DEVELOP A LIMITED ENTRY AMENDMENT FOR THE FOR THE THREE FOR-HIRE PERMITS.

MOTION FAILS.

Timing and Tasks

MOTION #16: APPROVE THE FOLLOWING TASKS AND TIMING:

- PREPARE AMENDMENT 41 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS IN AUGUST 2016
- REQUEST THAT THE SEFSC PROVIDE FURTHER EXPLANATION FOR THE DIFFERENCES IN THE OUTCOMES OF SEDAR 24 AND SEDAR 41 FOR RED SNAPPER
- INVESTIGATE WHAT METHODS HAVE BEEN/ARE BEING USED IN THE MID-ATLANTIC TO ASSESS THE STATUS OF GOLDEN TILEFISH
- COUNCIL REQUEST THAT THE SSC FURTHER REVIEW THE GOLDEN TILEFISH UPDATE ASSESSMENT, AND ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING:
 1. REVIEW PRODUCTIVITY ESTIMATES OF PREVIOUS TILEFISH ASSESSMENTS, IDENTIFY UNCERTAINTIES THAT IMPACT PRODUCTIVITY ESTIMATES, AND COMMENT ON HOW WELL OVERALL STOCK PRODUCTIVITY IS DETERMINED AT THIS POINT IN TIME. IDENTIFY RESEARCH OR DATA NEEDS THAT COULD IMPROVE ESTIMATES OF PRODUCTIVITY FOR FUTURE ASSESSMENTS.
 2. REVIEW APPLICATION OF THE P* TECHNIQUE TO THE TILEFISH UPDATE. PROVIDE AN EXPLANATION FOR THE APPARENT UNUSUALLY LARGE DIFFERENCE IN YIELD BETWEEN THE OFL (P* = 0.5) AND THE ABC (P* = 0.3). COMPARE THE BUFFER ESTIMATED FOR TILEFISH WITH THOSE FOR OTHER ASSESSMENTS WITH SIMILAR P* VALUES. IDENTIFY WHICH ASSESSMENT UNCERTAINTIES ARE “DRIVING” THE P* ANALYSIS AND THE HIGH BUFFER. CONSIDER WHETHER THE P* APPROACH IS APPROPRIATE FOR THIS ASSESSMENT, AND WHETHER BASING ABC ON

YIELD AT 75% FMSY AND OFL ON YIELD AT FMSY IS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE.

3. REVIEW THE PERFORMANCE, ACCURACY, AND RELIABILITY OF TILEFISH ASSESSMENT PROJECTIONS FROM PAST ASSESSMENTS. THE COUNCIL IS CONCERNED WITH THE IMPACT OF THE HIGH AGE OF FISHERY SELECTIVITY COMBINED WITH THE LACK OF FISHERY INDEPENDENT INFORMATION FOR YOUNGER FISH ON STOCK PROJECTIONS. IDENTIFY RESEARCH OR DATA NEEDS THAT COULD IMPROVE FUTURE PROJECTIONS.
 4. COMMENT ON THE BIOLOGICAL RISK AND THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF A PHASED-IN APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING THE REDUCED CATCH LEVELS FOR TILEFISH, SUCH THAT THE ABC IS SET EQUAL TO OFL IN YEAR 1 AND THEN ABC IS SPECIFIED THROUGH THE STANDARD APPLICATION OF THE CONTROL RULE IN LATER YEARS. ALSO CONSIDER PROVIDING A CONSTANT ABC FOR LATER YEARS, SPECIFIED IN 3-YEAR BLOCKS.
- REQUEST THAT THE SSC CONSIDER REVISING THE ABC CONTROL RULE BY REMOVING STOCK STATUS FROM THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE UNCERTAINTY ADJUSTMENT. THIS IS REQUESTED BECAUSE THE AGENCY HAS FINAL AUTHORITY TO DETERMINE STOCK STATUS, AND BECAUSE THE ABC CONTROL RULE IS INTENDED TO ADDRESS ASSESSMENT UNCERTAINTY, WHEREAS STOCK STATUS IS AN ASSESSMENT OUTCOME RATHER THAN A SOURCE OF UNCERTAINTY. THEREFORE, STATUS IS MORE APPROPRIATELY CONSIDERED BY THE COUNCIL IN ESTABLISHING ITS RISK TOLERANCE.
 - REQUEST THAT THE SSC DISCUSS AND EVALUATE THE NEW APPROACH USED TO ESTIMATE NATURAL MORTALITY IN SEDAR 41
- APPROVED BY COUNCIL