

**FINAL  
SUMMARY REPORT  
SNAPPER GROUPE COMMITTEE MEETING  
JEKYLL ISLAND, GA  
MARCH 7-8, 2017**

**Status of Amendments Approved for Secretarial Review & Status of Commercial Landings for Snapper Grouper Species Under ACLs**

The Snapper Grouper Committee received an update on the status of amendments recently submitted and an update on the status of commercial landings for snapper grouper species relative to their ACLs as of March 6, 2017.

Dr. Bonnie Ponwith (Southeast Fisheries Science Center, SEFSC) delivered a presentation on golden tilefish and vermilion snapper ACL forecasting to track commercial landings. Dr. Ponwith explained the derivation of in-season landings and how they compare to the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) dealer reports. Reported landings (raw landings obtained from dealers) and calculated landings are used to track landings in-season. In 2016, a two-week latent period was added to the methodology to account for late reporting from dealers and stabilize the data. Dr. Ponwith emphasized the need to get as close to 100% reporting from dealers to reduce the need to project landings. The SEFSC is improving their ACL tracking approach to deliver compliance information to law enforcement agents so it is available as close to real-time as possible. ACCSP landings are quality controlled by the partner states so there is lag period in the availability of final data. The latent calculation approach used by the SEFSC has helped to close the golden tilefish and vermilion snapper fisheries at or very close to their respective commercial ACLs. The Committee indicated their intent to solicit assistance from the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel and the Law Enforcement Committee to improve compliance with reporting requirements.

**Guidance on re-opening criteria when projected landings are close to the ACL**

Staff from the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) presented potential approaches that would provide guidance for re-opening commercial harvest when landings are close to reaching a commercial ACL. In instances when harvest is sometimes reopened for a short time to allow the entirety of the ACL to be harvested, the risk of final landings exceeding the ACL increases. The discussion document outlined criteria that the Council could consider to provide guidance to NOAA Fisheries regarding whether to reopen commercial harvest after a closure has occurred, while minimizing the risk of exceeding an ACL. The Committee made the following motion:

**MOTION #1: IF LESS THAN 95% OF THE ACL IS TAKEN AND AT LEAST 3 CONSECUTIVE DAYS OF PROJECTED HARVEST REMAIN, THEN THE RA SHALL REOPEN THE FISHERY.**

**SUBSTITUTE MOTION: IF LESS THAN 95% OF THE ACL IS TAKEN AND AT LEAST 2 CONSECUTIVE DAYS OF PROJECTED HARVEST REMAIN, THEN THE RA SHALL REOPEN THE FISHERY.**

**SUBSTITUTE MOTION APPROVED**

MAIN MOTION APPROVED BY COMMITTEE  
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 - Recreational Management Measures**

Council staff delivered a summary of the scoping comments received on Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 (Recreational Measures) and walked the Committee through the Decision Document. The Committee provided guidance on actions to retain in the amendment and ranges of alternatives, as appropriate. The Committee made no motions but provided the following guidance to staff:

Re-structuring of aggregate bag limits:

- Develop alternatives for deep-water complex with individual bag limits of 2, 3, or 4 fish. This would apply to all species in the deep- water complex (yellowedge grouper, silk snapper, misty grouper, queen snapper, sand tilefish, black snapper, and blackfin snapper) in addition to snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, and golden tilefish.
- Develop alternatives for shallow-water complex with individual bag limits of 1, 2, or 3 fish. Include sub-alts that include no more than one of each species.
- Develop alternatives/sub-alternatives for 20 fish aggregate limit with 10 fish/person of triggerfish, with 10 fish/person of spadefish, 10 fish/person of any species in the aggregate limit, 5 fish/person of any species in the aggregate limit, and status quo.
- Include analysis for a May-Aug season for deep-water species (status quo, May-Aug for snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, golden tilefish, and all deep-water complex species) and include single-hook rig option and descending devices.

Shallow-water grouper closure:

- Develop alternatives/sub-alts of alternatives 2, 4, and 5 from the list of possible alternatives in the decision document. Add an alternative/sub-alternative(s) for red grouper (i.e., Jan-May, Feb-May) that apply specifically off of North Carolina.
- Present landings of gag, scamp, and red grouper by month and state for both commercial and recreation sectors (separately).

Removal of size limits for deepwater species:

- Develop action/alternatives that support the removal of size limits for the deepwater complex.

Modification of minimum size limit for black sea bass:

- Direction to staff to perform an analysis for the reduction in the minimum size limit for black sea bass of 11” an 12”
- Present information on distribution of black sea bass discards (state vs. federal waters)

Modification of the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish:

- Keep action and only consider a 12” minimum size limit off the east coast of Florida.

## **Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 - Commercial Management Measures**

Council staff delivered a summary of the scoping comments received on Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 (Commercial Measures) and walked the Committee through the Decision Document. The Committee provided guidance on actions to retain in the amendment and ranges of alternatives, as appropriate. The Committee made no motions but provided the following guidance to staff:

### Commercial split seasons:

- Provide landings by state over time (month/year) for deepwater species (blueline, snowy, hook-and-line golden tilefish), red porgy and greater amberjack.
- Show different ACL proportion splits over different month scenarios for blueline, red porgy, and snowy starting with a January 1 start of the fishing year.
- Show different ACL proportion splits over different month scenarios for greater amberjack with a March 1 start of the fishing year.

### Trip limits and step-downs:

- Explore options for a reduced trip limit for vermilion in the second season of 500, 750, and 1,000 lbs (status quo) and retain the current step-down when 75% of the commercial ACL is met (trip limit goes down to 500 lbs). Include analysis of expected closure dates.
- Do not consider number of trips option for golden tilefish at this time.
- Update the analyses on trip limits for the Jacks Complex analyses that were done for a previous amendment. In June bring a range of trip limits as suggested by public comments. Do not include greater amberjack in this aggregate trip limit.
- Do not proceed with consideration of setting commercial ACTs to trigger step-downs in this amendment (this type of action would need to be considered in a full plan amendment, not a regulatory amendment).

### Shallow-water grouper closure and other actions:

- Consider same alternatives for shallow water grouper management from vision blueprint amendment 26 in vision blueprint amendment 27.

### Fishing year change for golden tilefish fishing year (hook-and-line only):

- Do not consider this action in this amendment.

### Other guidance:

- Continue work on portfolio analysis and socioeconomic characterization of the snapper grouper commercial fishery to explore management approaches for “traditional bandit boats” in the future.

## **Amendment 43 (Red Snapper & Recreational Reporting)**

The Committee received a briefing from Dr. Ponwith (SEFSC) on the Council’s request for red snapper projections under a discards-only scenario. Dr. Ponwith explained why the SEFSC was not able to provide those projections due to time since the completion of the assessment, uncertainty in the landings since most landings are coming from discards, and change in MRIP methodology for estimating landings and discards. Council staff then presented a literature

review on red snapper release mortality and Dr. Ponwith gave an overview of the 2012 Southeast Barotrauma Workshop. Council staff then gave an overview of the scoping comments received on Amendment 43 and led the Committee on a discussion on possible management approaches for red snapper. Dr. Crabtree (SERO) stated the Council has taken sufficient actions to address overfishing; now the focus is shifting to developing an interim methodology to obtain an ABC. Continuing to monitor discards and working to reduce the number of discards and improving survivorship of released fish is important; however, that effort has been complicated by the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) transition. The current rebuilding plan for red snapper is working. Fishery-independent indexes in fact show that the population is recovering. The Committee discussed the options paper for Amendment 43 (management actions only) and provided guidance to staff to revise the actions and alternatives in the options paper. Among the guidance provided was to consider options being explored in Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 (i.e. a recreational season for deep-water species, re-structuring of aggregate bag limits) to ensure continuity in management approaches. Committee members also expressed the intent to consider requiring descending devices at all depths fished (not only at depths greater than 100 feet), and requiring single-hook rigs for all snapper grouper species.

The Committee approved the following motion:

**MOTION #2: REMOVE ACTION 6 FROM AMENDMENT 43 OPTIONS PAPER**  
***Action 6. Establish Closed Areas to Reduce Red Snapper Bycatch and Mortality***  
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE  
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

The Committee provided the following guidance to staff:

- Remove Actions 1-6 and 11. These actions would be reconsidered after a new ABC is recommended by the SSC given the discussion at the meeting.
- Action 7 – closed season to include peak spawning months of June to September (maybe April to October), size limits (16-20 inch and no size limit), no maximum size
- Action 8- add closure line 110 and 120 feet, need to address for-hire fleet, closure times would consider spawning season for red snapper and important fishing time (June – August)
- Action 9- the permit goal is to identify the recreational sector universe, request state partners to develop ideas to improve estimation
- Action 10 – add a voluntary option for reporting, remove paper logbooks, and explore vessel and individual reporting
- Action 12 – explore adding require of use to the option for alternative 2, add alternatives for single hook rigs

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

Council staff presented an overview of public hearings comments on Amendment 44, addressing management of yellowtail snapper. The Committee discussed actions and alternatives in the Decision Document, made modifications, and provided guidance to staff. In addition, the Committee discussed possibly slowing down development of the amendment to allow for consideration of a commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper.

The Committee approved the following motions:

**MOTION #3:** APPROVE WORDING IN ACTION A IN AMENDMENT 44 AS MODIFIED.

*Action A. Modify the jurisdictional allocation of the acceptable biological catch (ABC) for yellowtail snapper.*

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #4:** APPROVE WORDING IN ACTION B OF AMENDMENT 44.

*Action B. Specify a single annual catch limit (ACL) for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.*

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #5:** APPROVE WORDING IN ACTION C OF AMENDMENT 44 AS MODIFIED.

*Action C. Allow adaptive management of annual catch limits (ACLs) and revise or establish sector allocations for yellowtail snapper.*

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #6:** APPROVE WORDING IN ACTION D OF AMENDMENT 44.

*Action D. Revise the accountability measures for yellowtail snapper.*

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #7:** ADD COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT ACTION TO AMENDMENT 44

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

The Committee provided the following guidance to staff:

- Action A - add an alternative that would allow sharing of the ABC for yellowtail snapper between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. Also in Alternative 2, add a sub-alternative that would allow management measures to be different in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.
- Action C - Alternative 4, remove Sub-alternatives 4a, 4b, 4c, and 4d and add new sub-alternatives using the most recent 5, 10, and 15 years (with 2015 being the terminal year) to base potential allocations. Keep sub-alternative 4e.
- Add the trip limit alternatives below and develop an additional option(s) for multi-day trip limit(s):

*Action X. Establish a commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper.*

**Alternative 2.** Establish a commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper from May 15 to July 31, during the peak spawning months.

**Sub-alternative 2a.** 500 pounds per vessel per day.

**Sub-alternative 2b.** 750 pounds per vessel per day.

**Sub-alternative 2c.** 1,000 pounds per vessel per day.

**Alternative 3.** Establish a commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper once 65% of the quota has been harvested.

**Sub-alternative 3a.** 500 pounds per vessel per day.

**Sub-alternative 3b.** 750 pounds per vessel per day.

**Sub-alternative 3c.** 1,000 pounds per vessel per day.

**Alternative 4.** Establish a commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper once 70% of the quota has been harvested.

**Sub-alternative 4a.** 500 pounds per vessel per day.

**Sub-alternative 4b.** 750 pounds per vessel per day.

**Sub-alternative 4c.** 1,000 pounds per vessel per day.

**Alternative 5.** Establish a commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper once 75% of the quota has been harvested.

**Sub-alternative 5a.** 500 pounds per vessel per day.

**Sub-alternative 5b.** 750 pounds per vessel per day.

**Sub-alternative 5c.** 1,000 pounds per vessel per day.

**Amendment 45 (ABC Control Rule Revisions & Golden Tilefish)**

Dr. Ponwith presented results of projections at  $P^*=0.40$  and  $P^*=0.45$  that the Council requested in December 2016. Council staff then presented a possible approach for the Committee to consider that would specify an interim ABC for golden tilefish at the projected yield at  $75\%F_{MSY}$ . This option would have to be first discussed and approved by the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Reasons for this approach (which deviates from the current ABC Control Rule approach for assessed stocks) include a shift in selectivity towards larger/older fish that was not considered in the latest update assessment and a better fitting approach for age-composition data and making 2016 the terminal year of data. The intent is for the Council to request a standard assessment for golden tilefish in late 2017. The Committee discussed possibly requesting the National Marine Fisheries Service to issue an interim rule to revise fishing levels while the new assessment is completed. Also, the phase-in approach to end overfishing that was included in recent revisions to National Standard 1 will still be considered for golden tilefish; however, revisions to the ABC Control Rule must first be completed through a plan amendment to apply this approach to golden tilefish.

The Committee made the following motion:

**MOTION #8:** REQUEST THE SSC TO CONSIDER ESTABLISHING AN INTERIM ABC FOR TILEFISH BASED ON THE PROJECTED YIELD AT  $75\% F_{MSY}$ , AND COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE RISKS AND UNCERTAINTY WITH ESTABLISHING THE ABC FOR TILEFISH AT THE  $75\% F_{MSY}$  YIELD VERSUS THAT PROVIDED BY THE  $P^*$  APPROACH. THE INTERIM ABC WOULD BE IN EFFECT UNTIL A NEW TILEFISH ASSESSMENT IS PREPARED TO ADDRESS:

- MULTIPLE SELECTIVITY PERIODS TO ACCOUNT FOR A SELECTIVITY SHIFT IN THE LONGLINE FISHERY, TOWARD LARGER (PRESUMABLY OLDER) FISH OVER TIME, AS SUPPORTED BY BOTH THE TESTIMONY OF TILEFISH

FISHERMEN AND THE SELECTIVITY PATTERN USED IN THE 2016 UPDATE ASSESSMENT.

- THE LATEST BEST SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION MODEL FITTING ALGORITHMS AS APPLIED IN THE RED GROUPER STOCK ASSESSMENT UPDATE.
- AN ADVANCEMENT OF THE TILEFISH TERMINAL YEAR, GIVEN THAT:
  - (1) THE MOST RECENT PROJECTIONS INCORPORATE A 5 YEAR LAG BETWEEN THE ASSESSMENT TERMINAL YEAR AND CHANGES IN MANAGEMENT,
  - (2) THE SEFSC MEMO REGARDING RED SNAPPER PROJECTIONS INDICATED THAT PROJECTION UNCERTAINTY IS “GENERALLY HIGH AFTER 3-5 YEARS”, AND
  - (3) THE UNCERTAINTY IN TILEFISH IS EXACERBATED BY THE 7 YEAR LAG OF ESTIMATED RECRUITMENT DEVIATIONS IN THE TILEFISH ASSESSMENT, DUE TO THE HIGH AGE OF SELECTIVITY FOR TILEFISH AND THE LACK OF ANY ABUNDANCE INFORMATION FOR AGES BELOW THE AGE OF FISHERY SELECTIVITY, THAT RESULTS IN 2006 BEING THE LAST YEAR CLASS INFORMED BY DATA IN THE ASSESSMENT.

THE COUNCIL INTENDS TO REQUEST A SEDAR STANDARD ASSESSMENT OF TILEFISH FOR LATE 2017, PROVIDED TO THE SSC FOR CONSIDERATION IN APRIL 2018, WITH A 2016 TERMINAL YEAR.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**Discussion on limited-entry for the for-hire component of the snapper grouper fishery**

The Committee discussed a possible limited-entry program for the for-hire component of the snapper grouper fishery. Council staff delivered a presentation outlining possible criteria for such a program, pros and cons of various approaches, and a summary of public input to date. The Committee made no motions.

**Timing and Tasks:**

**MOTION #9:**

- REQUEST LANDINGS (COMMERCIAL & RECREATIONAL) OF SCAMP, GAG, AND RED GROUPER BY STATE BY MONTH (LAST 15 YEARS TO CAPTURE FISHERY PERFORMANCE PRIOR TO REGULATORY CHANGES)
- REVIEW ANALYSES FROM REGULATORY AMENDMENT 25 TO DETERMINE WHETHER THE MAJORITY OF BLACK SEA BASS DISCARDS COME FROM STATE OR FEDERAL WATERS.
- REQUEST THAT THE SEFSC AND SSC WORK TOGETHER TO EXPLORE APPROACHES FOR OBTAINING AN ABC FOR RED SNAPPER. REQUEST THAT THE SEFSC PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING ITEMS PRIOR TO THE SSC’S CONSIDERATION OF RED SNAPPER FISHING LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS:
  - A BSIA DETERMINATION FOR THE SEDAR 41 RED SNAPPER ASSESSMENT IN LIGHT OF RECENT INFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENTS CITED BY THE SEFSC THAT PREVENT

DEVELOPMENT OF RELIABLE PROJECTION UPDATES AND RESULT IN AN INABILITY TO SET AN ABC THAT CAN BE EFFECTIVELY MONITORED. THE DETERMINATION SHOULD INDICATE WHETHER THE CURRENT SAFMC SSC FISHING LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE SEDAR 41 ASSESSMENT AND PROJECTIONS, INCLUDING ABC, OFL, MFMT, MSST, AND TERMINAL F AND SSB ESTIMATES, REPRESENT BSIA.

- A BSIA DETERMINATION ON THE ASPIC STOCK ASSESSMENT MODEL PREPARED FOR SEDAR 41, AND AN EVALUATION OF WHETHER THE ASPIC APPROACH COULD BE USED AS A DATA LIMITED METHOD FOR SUPPORTING RED SNAPPER FISHING LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS.
- ADDITIONAL DETAILS CONCERNING THE "... EVALUATION OF THE EFFECT OF UPCOMING CHANGES ON MRIP ON THE RED SNAPPER ASSESSMENT..." THAT THE SEFSC INDICATES IS NECESSARY BEFORE THE ASSESSMENT CAN BE USEFUL FOR MANAGEMENT, INCLUDING THE TYPE OF ANALYSES TO BE CONDUCTED AND WHEN RESULTS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW BY THE SSC.
- APPLICATION OF, AND RESULTS FROM, DATA LIMITED TECHNIQUES THAT CAN BE CONSIDERED BY THE SSC TO DEVELOP FISHING LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RED SNAPPER INCLUDING ABC AND OFL. THIS SHOULD INCLUDE A BSIA DETERMINATION AND A COMPARISON OF THE SCIENTIFIC PROS AND CONS OF EACH METHOD CONSIDERED.
- TO INFORM FURTHER DISCUSSION ON FOR-HIRE LIMITED ENTRY, PROVIDE OVERLAY OF FOR-HIRE PERMITS BY ZIP CODE AND TOURISM STATISTICS FOR SOUTH ATLANTIC STATES.
- REQUEST A PRESENTATION ON HOW NON-REPORTING COULD RESULT IN SUSPENSION OF PERMIT AS PER 307 OF THE MAGNUSON ACT.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL