



## SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, North Charleston SC 29405  
 Call: (843) 571-4366 | Toll-Free: (866) SAFMC-10 | Fax: (843) 769-4520 | Connect: www.safmc.net

Charlie Phillips, Chair | Captain Mark Brown, Vice Chair  
 Gregg T. Waugh, Executive Director

### AGENDA

#### Snapper Grouper Committee

Westin Jekyll Island  
 110 Ocean Way  
 Jekyll Island, GA

**Tuesday, March 6, 2018 – 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.**

**Wednesday, March 7, 2018 – 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. (Times subject to change)**

Approval of Agenda – Dr. Michelle Duval

Approval of December 2017 Committee minutes – Dr. Michelle Duval

1. Status of Commercial Catches versus Quotas for Species under ACLs – NMFS SERO (*Attachment 1*)
2. Status of Amendments under Formal Review – NMFS SERO
  - a. Amendment 41 (Mutton Snapper)
  - b. Golden Tilefish Interim Rule
  - c. Amendment 43 (Red Snapper)
  - d. Abbreviated Framework Amendment 1 (Red Grouper)
3. Amendment 46 (Recreational Reporting and Best Fishing Practices) (*Attachment 2*)
  - a. Overview – Dr. Chip Collier
  - b. **Committee action:** review and provide guidance to staff – Dr. Michelle Duval
4. Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 – Recreational (*Attachments 3a and 3b*)
  - a. Overview – Myra Brouwer
  - b. **Committee action:** review, modify document as necessary, and approve for public hearings – Dr. Michelle Duval
5. Improving Recreational Estimates (*Attachment 4*)
  - a. Overview – John Carmichael
  - b. **Committee action:** discuss and provide guidance to staff – Dr. Michelle Duval
6. Socio-economic Profile of the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Commercial Fishery (*Attachments 5a and 5b*)
  - a. Presentation on findings from final report – Dr. Kari MacLauchlin
  - b. **Committee action:** review and provide comment – Dr. Michelle Duval

7. Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 – Commercial (*Attachments 6a and 6b*)
  - a. Overview – Myra Brouwer
  - b. **Committee action:** review, modify document as necessary, and approve for public hearings – Dr. Michelle Duval
  
8. Snapper Grouper For-hire Moratorium (*Attachment 7*)
  - a. Overview – John Hadley
  - b. **Committee action:** review and provide guidance to staff – Dr. Michelle Duval
  
9. Red Grouper Rebuilding (*Attachments 8a and 8b*)
  - a. Overview – John Hadley
  - b. **Committee action:** discuss and provide guidance to staff – Dr. Michelle Duval
  
10. Regulatory Amendment 28 – Golden Tilefish (*Attachments 9a-9c*)
  - a. Overview – Dr. Brian Chevront
  - b. **Committee action:** provide guidance to staff and approve for public hearings – Dr. Michelle Duval
  
11. Wreckfish ITQ Review (*Attachments 10a and 10b*)
  - a. Status of ITQ review – Dr. Brian Chevront
  - b. **Committee action:** discuss and provide guidance to staff – Dr. Michelle Duval
  
12. Yellowtail snapper (*Attachments 11a and 11b*)
  - a. Potential management options for yellowtail snapper – John Hadley
  - b. **Committee action:** discuss and provide guidance to staff – Dr. Michelle Duval
  
13. Vision Blueprint Review Guidance for December 2018 (*Attachment 12*)
  - a. Overview – Myra Brouwer & Amber Von Harten
  - b. **Committee action:** discuss and provide guidance to staff – Dr. Michelle Duval
  
14. System Management Plan Review Guidance (*Attachment 13*)
  - a. Overview – Dr. Chip Collier
  - b. **Committee action:** discuss and provide guidance to staff – Dr. Michelle Duval
  
15. Sea Turtle and Other Protected Resources Release Gear (*Attachment 14*)
  - a. Overview – Dr. Chip Collier
  - b. **Committee action:** discuss and provide guidance to staff – Dr. Michelle Duval

Other Business – Dr. Michelle Duval

Adjourn – Dr. Michelle Duval

**Committee Members**

Michelle Duval, Chair  
Jessica McCawley, Vice Chair  
Anna Beckwith  
Mel Bell  
Zack Bowen  
Chester Brewer  
Mark Brown  
Chris Conklin  
Roy Crabtree  
Tim Griner  
Ben Hartig  
Doug Haymans  
Charlie Phillips  
Mid-Atlantic Liaison, Tony DiLernia/Dewey Hemilright

**Attachments**

**Attachment 1:** Status of commercial catches vs. ACLs  
**Attachment 2:** Amendment 46 Options Paper  
**Attachment 3a:** Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 Decision Document  
**Attachment 3b:** Draft Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26  
**Attachment 4:** Presentation on Improving Recreational Estimates  
**Attachment 5a:** Socio-economic Profile of the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Commercial Fishery (presentation)  
**Attachment 5b:** Socio-economic Profile of the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Commercial Fishery (report)  
**Attachment 6a:** Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 Decision Document  
**Attachment 6b:** Draft Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27  
**Attachment 7:** Snapper Grouper For-hire Permit Moratorium Amendment Options Paper  
**Attachment 8a:** White paper on revising the rebuilding plan for red grouper  
**Attachment 8b:** Red grouper status letter from NMFS to the SAFMC  
**Attachment 9a:** Regulatory Amendment 28 Decision Document  
**Attachment 9b:** Draft Regulatory Amendment 28  
**Attachment 9c:** Golden Tilefish Projections  
**Attachment 10a:** Draft Wreckfish ITQ Review  
**Attachment 10b:** Presentation on Wreckfish ITQ Review  
**Attachment 11a:** SAFMC letter on yellowtail snapper to the Gulf Council and the Gulf Council's response  
**Attachment 11b:** Background document on yellowtail snapper  
**Attachment 12:** Excerpt from Vision Blueprint Evaluation Plan  
**Attachment 13:** SMP for Spawning SMZs Guidance Document  
**Attachment 14:** Draft Options Paper on Modifications to Sea Turtle Release Gear and Snapper Grouper Framework

**Staff:** Myra Brouwer

# OVERVIEW

## Snapper Grouper Committee

The Committee will approve minutes from December 2017 meeting and agenda.

### 1. Status of Commercial Catches for Species under ACLs – (*Attachment 1*)

**Description:** National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office (NMFS SERO) staff will update the Committee on the status of commercial landings of snapper grouper species and species complexes relative to their respective ACLs.

**Required Committee Action:** None.

### 2. Status of Amendments under Formal Review

**Description:** NMFS SERO staff will update the Committee on the status of two amendments (Amendments 41 and 43) submitted for formal review in March 2017 and November 2017, respectively. In addition, the Committee will receive an update on implementation of the interim rule to reduce overfishing of golden tilefish and the abbreviated framework 1 that would implement revised catch levels to end overfishing of red grouper (submitted in December 2017).

**Required Committee Action:** None.

### 3. Amendment 46 (recreational reporting and best fishing practices) (*Attachment 2*)

**Description:** During the December 2017 meeting, Council staff delivered an overview presentation including two timelines for amendment development and a recommendation to remove actions addressing red snapper from this amendment since an Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendation will not be available until summer 2018. The Committee removed several actions from consideration in Amendment 46 and provided guidance on remaining actions. The Committee requested revisions to Action 1 (previously Action 9 (Private Recreational Snapper Grouper Permit or Tag Program)) to focus on a snapper grouper permit designed to improve recreational effort estimates that can eventually be used to improve landings estimates, Action 2 (previously Action 10 (Private Recreational Reporting)) to focus on three alternatives for reporting, and Action 3 (previously Action 11 (Best Fishing Practices)) to add options for removing the circle hook requirement for commercial and recreational sectors.

**Status of amendment:** Draft options paper was updated based on guidance given during the December 2017 meeting.

**Required Committee Action:** Review and provide guidance to staff.

### 4. Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 (*Attachments 3a and 3b*)

**Description:** During the December 2017 meeting, the Committee modified and approved the purpose and need statements, reviewed actions and alternatives, removed some from further consideration, and provided guidance on remaining actions and alternatives. The Committee also received a presentation showing seasonal trends in recreational landings by species groupings to inform discussion on proposed recreational management measures. Staff will provide an overview of the expected effects of proposed actions.

**Status of amendment:** Analyses for all actions have been completed and a draft document has been prepared for the Committee to consider approval for public hearings.

**Required Committee Action:** Review, modify document as necessary, select preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings.

#### 5. Improving Recreational Estimates (*Attachment 4*)

**Description:** Since around 2012, when the Council finished implementing annual catch limits for managed species under its jurisdiction to meet new mandates of the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act, the importance of recreational landings estimates substantially increased. The accuracy of such estimates, however, has not improved enough to allow efficient tracking of recreational annual catch limits (ACLs) and has led to mounting frustration among fishery managers, stock assessment analysts, and recreational anglers. Over the past five years, the Council has requested information on possible approaches to improving recreational landings estimates, particularly for species that are infrequently intercepted in the recreational survey. There have been significant issues with landings estimates of species such as blueline tilefish, hogfish, cobia, and greater amberjack in recent years and, on at least two occasions, the Council has requested that landings estimates be recalculated (hogfish and cobia). Stock assessments conducted under the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) program have also struggled with incorporating recreational data in stock assessment models. Smoothing approaches to address abnormally high landings estimates, or “spikes,” are controversial because they don’t account for potentially abnormally low landings estimates therefore introducing bias. Analysts thus have to introduce uncertainty values that allow models to “converge” (i.e., produce a result); however, this artificial level of uncertainty is likely is much lower than the actual uncertainty in the data.

In recent letters to NMFS leadership (letter to Chris Oliver, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, dated January 16, 2018), members of Congress (letter to Senator Graham dated January 24, 2018), and the Council Coordinating Committee Working Paper on Magnuson-Stevens Act Reauthorization Issues (November 14, 2017), the Council has laid out in detail the issues affecting South Atlantic recreational fishery data. The Council has also sent several letters to the Marine Recreational Information Program directly, urging exploration of possible approaches to improve recreational landings estimates in the South Atlantic region. MRIP is currently undergoing substantial revisions that are scheduled to be completed by mid-2018. The Council has received acknowledgement that once the revision is complete, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) will address recreational estimates for “rare event” species.

While it is not within the Council’s purview to directly assist in improving existing recreational data collection efforts, the Council is already working on methods to obtain additional data (e.g., Amendment 46, MyFishCount App) that could eventually be used to improve management of recreational fisheries in the region. A possible avenue to lessen the impact of uncertain recreational data on stakeholders is revision of accountability measures to remove in-season closures. Actions to consider such revisions across fishery management plans could be included in the developing ABC Control Rule Amendment.

**Required Committee Action:** Discuss and provide guidance to staff

**6. Socio-economic Profile of the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Commercial Fishery (*Attachments 5a and 5b*)**

**Description:** The Socio-economic Profile of the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Commercial Fishery is a broad project characterizing the commercial sector of the snapper grouper fishery. The project includes detailed information about permits and permit holders, snapper grouper vessels, participation, catch portfolios, and landings and revenue over the last 20 years. The Council contracted Dr. Kari MacLauchlin to conduct the analysis and produce a report. Dr. MacLauchlin will present an overview of the report and key findings.

**Status of report:** Complete

**Required Committee Action:** None

**7. Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 (*Attachments 6a and 6b*)**

**Description:** During the December 2017 meeting, the Committee modified and approved the purpose and need statements, reviewed actions and alternatives, removed some from further consideration, and provided guidance on remaining actions and alternatives. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) recommended using the simplest of two methods used to conduct the effects analysis for this amendment. The Council requested that NMFS SERO staff deliver a presentation to the SSC on the two analytical approaches at their Spring 2018 meeting. Council staff will provide an overview of the expected effects of proposed actions.

**Status of amendment:** Analyses for all actions have been completed and a draft document has been prepared for the Committee to consider approval for public hearings.

**Required Committee Action:** Review, select preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings.

**8. Snapper Grouper For-hire Permit Moratorium (*Attachment 7*)**

**Description:** In June 2017, the Council directed staff to start work on an amendment to establish a moratorium on federal snapper grouper for-hire permits. In December 2017, Council staff gave an overview presentation to recap Council guidance to-date on the topic. The Committee began revisions to the draft purpose and need statements and subsequently engaged in lengthy discussion. The Committee did not approve this topic for public scoping. Instead, the Committee instructed staff to prepare a simplified version of the options paper to discuss at the March 2018 meeting. Council staff will provide an overview of the revised options paper.

**Status of amendment:** The Committee has not yet decided to send this topic out for public scoping.

**Required Committee Action:** Provide guidance to staff on amendment development and timing. If amendment development is to proceed in 2018, the Committee needs to approve it for public scoping.

**9. Red Grouper Rebuilding (*Attachments 8a and 8b*)**

**Description:** The red grouper assessment (SEDAR 53) indicated that the stock is undergoing overfishing and is not making adequate progress towards rebuilding, which is supposed to take place by 2020 under the current rebuilding plan. When a stock is found to be overfished and undergoing overfishing, the Council must implement management changes to reduce overfishing immediately and implement a rebuilding plan within two years of receiving notification of the stock's status. The Council was formally notified of the red

grouper stock status via a letter from NMFS dated September 17, 2017. The Council has moved to end overfishing through the revised ABC and ACL for red grouper that will be implemented via Abbreviated Framework Amendment 1 but has not yet revised the red grouper rebuilding plan. Hence, the Council will need to begin development of an amendment to revise the current rebuilding plan before the next red grouper assessment is completed (currently scheduled as a standard assessment in 2021) in order to meet the statutory deadline of September 17, 2019.

The timing of several confounding factors necessitate further guidance on how the Council will need to move forward. Among these factors are projections in the most recent stock assessment that indicate low recruitment for red grouper and that the stock likely will not rebuild with a fishery present until after 2030. Additionally, revised estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), which will become available in July 2018, are expected to be significantly different from prior catch estimates and will likely affect how the recreational portion of the ACL is accounted for in the immediate near-term. These revised estimates will trigger assessment updates for multiple stocks, including red grouper, to incorporate the recalibrated data. Finally, there are restrictive measures being considered in Snapper Grouper Vision Blueprint Amendments 26 and 27 that may decrease fishing mortality for red grouper as well as additional protection that was provided by the recently implemented Amendment 36, which established spawning special management zones, one of which was located in an area to protect spawning red grouper.

Given that the most recent assessment indicated that the stock will not rebuild by the 2020 deadline due to low recruitment, NMFS has determined that adequate rebuilding progress is not being made and recommended revising the rebuilding plan. Considering the aforementioned relative uncertainty surrounding future red grouper projections, clarification is needed on how the Council should proceed. The choice is whether the Council will start work immediately on an amendment to change the rebuilding schedule using the current projections or wait to include the revised MRIP estimates in a new rebuilding evaluation (with new projections) and then revise the schedule. As such, the Committee will discuss the recent and anticipated changes for red grouper and how they relate to the current rebuilding schedule as well as the timing of management actions that must be taken for rebuilding of the red grouper stock.

**Status of amendment:** The Committee has not yet instructed staff to begin work on an amendment pending further guidance from NOAA GC.

**Required Committee Action:** Provide guidance to staff on initiating amendment development and amendment timing.

#### **10. Regulatory Amendment 28 -- Golden Tilefish (*Attachments 9a-9c*)**

**Description:** This amendment will set the ACL for golden Tilefish beginning with the 2019 season. Additionally, the document may consider altering commercial trip limits for golden Tilefish and consider revising the fishing year for the hook and line sub-sector of the commercial sector. Between the December 2017 and March 2018 meetings, Council members were going to check with fishery participants to see if they want the Council to consider measures other than setting the ACL. If the amendment only sets the ACL, then the document can proceed as an abbreviated framework amendment. If other actions are

included, it would proceed as a regulatory amendment. In either case, the Council will need to take final action in June of 2018, so the ACL can be in place in January 2019.

**Status of Amendment:** Council directed staff to begin work on an amendment that would adjust the ACL for golden Tilefish beginning in January 2019. Other actions being considered include modifying trip limits and changing the start of the commercial hook and line fishing year for golden Tilefish.

**Required Committee Action:** Discuss and provide guidance to staff

#### **11. Wreckfish Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) Review (*Attachments 10a and 10b*)**

**Description:** The Council postponed discussion on this topic during their December 2017 meeting due to time constraints. The Committee will receive a presentation (*Attachment 10b*) on the status of the wreckfish ITQ review focusing on data issues, confidentiality, and document development.

**Status of review:** The Interdisciplinary Planning Team (ITP) is continuing to develop the review document and has resolved a number specific issues related primarily to data and confidentiality. Initial drafts of nearly all sections of the document are complete. The SSC weighed in on the data and confidentiality issues at their October 2017 meeting. The Socio-economic Sub-panel (SEP) reviewed a draft of the Wreckfish ITQ Review Document in February of 2018 and will report back to the SSC at their May 2018 meeting. Specific SEP comments and recommendations will be included in the May 2018 SSC report.

**Required Committee Action:** Provide guidance on the continued development of the review.

#### **12. Yellowtail snapper (*Attachments 11a and 11b*)**

**Description:** In 2016 and early 2017 the Council began developing Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 to consider modifications to jurisdictional and sector allocations as well as commercial trip limits for yellowtail snapper. In March 2017, the Council approved a motion to suspend work on Amendment 44 until revised MRIP data are available. At the June 2017 meeting, the Council approved sending a letter to the Gulf Council to get input on developing a joint amendment to combine ACLs for yellowtail snapper. The Gulf Council discussed the letter at their October 2017 meeting and sent a reply to the South Atlantic Council stating that they are willing to work jointly to develop solutions for yellowtail snapper. The South Atlantic Council postponed discussion on yellowtail snapper during their December 2017 meeting due to time constraints, with the intention of revisiting the topic at the March 2018 meeting.

**Status of amendment:** Work on Amendment 44 is currently suspended until revised MRIP data are available.

**Required Committee Action:** Discuss and provide guidance to staff.

#### **13. Vision Blueprint Review Guidance for December 2018 (*Attachment 12*)**

**Description:** The final Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery was adopted in December 2015. One year later, the Council reviewed and discussed progress to date and held webinars to update stakeholders. A biennial review of the Vision Blueprint is scheduled for December 2018 to evaluate progress on short-term items from each goal and determine what was accomplished during 2016-2018. According to the Evaluation Plan, public input is



to be solicited in August 2018, in conjunction with public hearings, which may be held in person or via webinar.

**Required Committee Action:** Provide guidance on timing and approach to solicit public input on Vision Blueprint short-term action items undertaken during 2016-2018

#### **14. System Management Plan Review Guidance (*Attachment 13*)**

**Description:** The Council has adopted system management plans for Spawning Special Management Zones (Amendment 36) and Deep-Water Marine Protected Areas (Amendment 14). The system management plans provide a framework to review the goals of the protected area(s), evaluate research and management, and provide recommendations for future management. The first review of the system management plan for Spawning Special Management Zones is scheduled to begin in 2018. A workgroup is currently being formed that will develop the review based on guidance from the Council. There are several formats for the review ranging from a broad overview to a detailed description of each research project conducted in the area. Another format for the review could be a scorecard for the protected area which would be used either by the workgroup, Council, or National Marine Fisheries Service.

**Required Committee Action:** Provide guidance on the format of the review document and information to include in the review.

#### **15. Modifications to Sea Turtle Release Gear and Snapper Grouper Framework (*Attachment 14*)**

**Description:** The NMFS Release Protocols for protected species were originally published in 2004. Revised editions were released in 2008 and 2010, and a new update is ready for publication. In the pending update, the SEFSC approved three additional turtle release gear types for use in handling and releasing incidentally caught sea turtles when fishing for reef fish. The new gear requires less space on vessels while still providing the necessary functionality; however, fishermen who participate in the snapper grouper fishery cannot use the approved gear until it is listed as acceptable gear in a fishery management plan and made a requirement in the regulations. Besides presenting information on the new SEFSC-approved release gear, the draft options paper also provides for modifications to the snapper grouper framework, so the Council may more quickly modify sea turtle and other protected resources release gear and handling requirements in the future. The framework was most recently updated in 2014 through Amendment 27 (SAFMC 2014), but it does not currently include changes in release gear requirements. Therefore, an amendment to the FMP is required to make these changes.

**Required Committee Action:** The Committee has not yet instructed staff to begin work on an amendment to address modifications to sea turtle release gear.

#### **Other Business**