

**Snapper Grouper Committee Final Report
December 2013**

Hilton Wilmington Riverside
Wilmington, NC

The Committee received reports from SERO on the status of commercial and recreational catches versus the respective ACLs for snapper grouper species. Staff pointed out that the recreational ACL for black sea bass is now being reported in whole weight, not gutted weight. SERO staff also gave an update of the status of snapper grouper amendments under Secretarial review. The comment period on the Proposed Rule for Amendment 27 ended on November 18. The final rule package for the amendment is currently under review at NMFS headquarters.

The Committee received reports from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP). The SSC Chair discussed several topics including the SSC's recommendation for determining the Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) for stocks with low natural mortality and P* recommendation for blueline tilefish.

Council staff reviewed the deliverables identified in Snapper Grouper Amendment 13A as they pertain to the Oculina Experimental Closed Area. The Committee received an update on timing for the 2014 re-evaluation of the Oculina Experimental Closed Area, to be undertaken by the Evaluation Team. The Committee provided guidance on recommendations for new members to serve on the Evaluation Team. Additionally, the Committee received a number of presentations providing updates on outreach (Kim Iverson), research and monitoring (Stacey Harter, SEFSC), and law enforcement (Rich Chesler, NOAA OLE) efforts in the Experimental Closed Area since the 2007 evaluation.

The Committee received reports from Council staff, law enforcement representatives (USCG and OLE), the SEFSC and MARMAP/SEFIS on outreach, enforcement, and research/assessment activities in the Deepwater MPAs, respectively.

Regulatory Amendment 17 (MPAs)

The Committee received the following presentations on accomplishments to meet the needs identified in Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 that established the existing 8 MPAs:

1. Outreach – Kim Iverson, Council Staff
2. Law Enforcement – NOAA OLE & Florida – Otha Easley, NOAA OLE
3. Law Enforcement – Coast Guard – LT Morgan Fowler, Coast Guard
4. Research/Assessment – Stacey Harter, SEFSC
5. MARMAP/SEAMAP/SEFIS – Dr. Marcel Reichert/Tracey Smart, MARMAP

The Committee discussed the results and noted that almost all of the outreach items had been addressed. Law enforcement continues to be a challenge especially given the level

of funding and recent cuts. Research/monitoring accomplishment were highlighted and given the level of funding available, much remains to be done. Potential impacts of including in MARMAP monitoring sites in an MPA were discussed. The Committee gave direction to staff to work on the System Management Plan to evaluate what needs have been met, which needs remain, and to bring their recommendations on priorities to the Council in 2014.

Council staff reviewed Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 17. The Committee received the following presentations on work done in the proposed sites (on a state by state basis) and recommendations from the MPA Expert Work Group for the potential sites in Regulatory Amendment 17:

1. Research/Assessment – Stacey Harter, SEFSC
2. Research/Assessment – Dr. Marcel Reichert/Tracey Smart, MARMAP/SEAMAP/SEFIS
3. MPA Expert Workgroup Recommendations & Potential Impacts – Dr. George Sedberry, Chair Expert Workgroup

Council staff reviewed the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel’s minutes and the AP Chair and Vice Chair also participated in the discussions. The Committee discussed the results and expressed concern about potential impacts to the visioning process if Regulatory Amendment 17 was taken to scoping in January. The committee gave direction to staff to have the same presentations given to the Snapper Grouper AP at their April 2014 meeting and to have Will Heyman present his approach to choosing MPA sites. Any additional presentations on work in the South Atlantic and/or Gulf that would be helpful should also be considered. The Committee also directed staff to prepare charts with the catch by logbook grid (similar to those presented to the committee) for use at the Snapper Grouper AP meeting.

The Committee made the following motions:

MOTION: POSTPONE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 17 UNTIL AFTER THE RESULTS FROM VISIONING ARE AVAILABLE AND THE COUNCIL DEVELOPS THEIR VISION

DISAPPROVED

MOTION: TAKE ALL ALTERNATIVES TO SCOPING IN AUGUST AND HAVE THE AP RECEIVE THE PRESENTATIONS AND PROVIDE THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL AT THE COUNCIL’S JUNE 2014 MEETING

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Regulatory Amendment 16 (black sea bass pot closure)

The Committee reviewed the actions and alternatives and made the following motion:

MOTION: APPROVE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 16 FOR PUBLIC SCOPING
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Amendment 31 (blueline tilefish)

Council staff briefly went over the scoping document and scoping comments on the amendment. Staff gave a presentation to clarify the stock assessment projections for blueline tilefish and present options for setting the ACL. The Committee discussed following regarding blueline tilefish:

- Request that the SSC review the blueline tilefish projections as soon as possible.
- Request that the SSC consider the fact that the new MRIP methodology was implemented in 2013 and may have influenced the estimate of recreational landings.
- The fishing mortality that the assessment model estimated for recent years is not realistic and an update to the assessment should be done as soon as possible to determine whether a strong year class is moving through the fishery. Dr. Ponwith stated she would inform the Council whether an update is feasible in 2014 during the Council Session.
- If an update cannot be completed in 2014, an ageing study should be attempted to determine the age composition of the 2012 & 2013 catches.
- Request that the SEFSC provide a projection with the 2014 catch level at $ACL=75\%SSB_{msy}$.
- Removal of blueline tilefish from the Deepwater Complex and establishment of management measures have to be done through a plan amendment (Amendment 31).
- Dr. Crabtree indicated the Council would be receiving a letter from the agency in the near future to inform them of the overfishing status of blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic.

The Committee made the following motions:

MOTION: DIRECT STAFF TO DEVELOP A REGULATORY AMENDMENT TO MODIFY THE DEFINITION OF MSST FOR BLUELINE TILEFISH AS WELL AS ANY OTHER APPROPRIATE SNAPPER GROUPEER SPECIES WITH SIMILAR LOW NATURAL MORTALITY AND BRING TO THE COUNCIL FOR REVIEW AND APPROVAL IN MARCH 2014.
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: ACCEPT THE ALTERNATIVES BELOW AS PROPOSED BY STAFF
AND GIVE THEM LATITUDE TO ADD ALTERNATIVES AS NEEDED
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

INTENT TO ADD 50%SSBmsy if needed*

Action 1. Re-define Minimum Stock Size Threshold for Select Species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain the current definition of minimum stock size threshold (MSST) for species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit (FMU). For golden tilefish, red grouper, and snowy grouper, MSST equals 75% of SSB_{MSY} . For the remaining species in the snapper grouper FMU, MSST equals $SSB_{MSY} * (1 - M \text{ or } 0.5, \text{ whichever is greater})$.

Alternative 2. The MSST for select species in the snapper grouper FMU will automatically change to 75% of SSB_{MSY} if the estimation of the natural mortality rate (M) is changed following a peer-review report (e.g. a SEDAR stock assessment).

Sub-alternative 2a. Change MSST if the estimation of M is 0.15 or lower.

Sub-alternative 2b. Change MSST if the estimation of M is 0.20 or lower.

Sub-alternative 2c. Change MSST if the estimation of M is 0.25 or lower.

MOTION: ADD A MANAGEMENT MEASURE ALTERNATIVE TO AMENDMENT 32 THAT WOULD SET A COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT FOR BLUELINE TILEFISH OF 100 POUNDS FROM JANUARY TO APRIL AND 2000 POUNDS FROM MAY ONWARDS. WHEN 80% OF THE ACL IS CAUGHT, THE TRIP LIMIT WOULD BE REDUCED TO 100 POUNDS.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

GUIDANCE TO DEVELOP A RANGE OF TRIP LIMIT ALTERNATIVES: 1,500 LBS, 2,500 LBS FOR MAY ONWARDS*

MOTION: REQUEST AN EMERGENCY RULE TO IMPLEMENT THE FOLLOWING ACLs FOR BLUELINE TILEFISH AND THE REMAINDER OF THE DEEPWATER COMPLEX AS SHOWN BELOW:

1. Blueline tilefish ACL = yield at 75%Fmsy = 224,100 pounds whole weight (Source: SEDAR Assessment)
2. Deepwater Complex ACL without Blueline Tilefish = 79,684 pounds whole weight.
3. It is the Council's intent that these values be implemented as soon as possible in 2014 in order to prevent catches from exceeding these levels.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Amendment 22 (Recreational harvest tag program)

Staff presented an overview of the Options Paper and updated the Committee on discussions with state representatives regarding each state's ability to administer a recreational harvest tag program, etc. NOAA GC indicated it is still unclear whether such a program would be considered a Limited Access Privilege Program (LAPP). If so, the design of the program would have to adhere to established LAPP requirements. The Committee's recommendation is to suspend development of this amendment until NOAA CG has provided the needed information.

Amendment 29 (ORCS and gray triggerfish)

Council staff reviewed the Decision Document for this amendment and requested guidance under each action. The Committee made the following motions:

MOTION: APPROVE PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of Amendment 29 is to: **update** the South Atlantic Council's Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule to incorporate methodology for determining the ABC of "Only Reliable Catch Species" (ORCS); adjust ABCs for the affected species; and establish management measures for gray triggerfish in federal waters of the South Atlantic region.

The need for this amendment is to: adopt the recommendations of the South Atlantic Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to **amend** update the ABC Control Rule and adjust ABCs for "ORCS" **based on the revised ABC Control Rule, lengthen the commercial season for gray triggerfish to diminish and/or prevent derby conditions**, and ensure that overfishing does not occur pending a new assessment of the gray triggerfish stock in the South Atlantic region.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: APPROVE RE-STRUCTURING OF ACTIONS 1 AND 2 AS SUGGESTED BY THE IPT

Action 1. Amend the South Atlantic Council's ABC Control Rule.

Action 2. Apply the Revised ABC Control Rule to select unassessed snapper grouper species.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

*****GUIDANCE TO ADD COLUMN TO TABLES UNDER ACTION 2 SHOWING THE OVEREXPLOITATION SCALAR******

MOTION: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 1 AS PREFERRED

Alternative 2. Adopt the SSC's recommended approach to determine ABC values for Only Reliable Catch Stocks (ORCS). This approach will become Level 4 of the ABC Control Rule and the existing Level 4 will be renumbered as Level 5.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2B UNDER ACTION 2 AS PREFERRED

Alternative 2. Assign a Risk Tolerance scalar to stocks deemed by the SSC to be under Low Risk of Overexploitation.

Sub-alternative 2b. Apply a Risk Tolerance scalar of 0.90

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 3B UNDER ACTION 2 AS PREFERRED

Alternative 3. Assign a Risk Tolerance scalar to stocks deemed by the SSC to be under Moderate Risk of Overexploitation:

Sub-alternative 3b. Apply a Risk Tolerance scalar of 0.80

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 4A UNDER ACTION 2 AS PREFERRED

Alternative 4. Assign a Risk Tolerance scalar to stocks deemed by the SSC to be under Moderately High Risk of Overexploitation:

Sub-alternative 4a. Apply a Risk Tolerance scalar of 0.70

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: REMOVE HOGFISH FROM ACTION 2 IN AMENDMENT 29

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: ACCEPT THE IPT'S RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO THE LANGUAGE OF ACTION 3

Alternative 1 (No Action). Currently, the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish is specified in inches total length (TL) in federal waters off east Florida only. In Florida state waters, the minimum size for gray triggerfish is specified in inches fork length (FL). The minimum size limit is 12 inches TL in federal waters off east Florida and 12 inches FL in east Florida state waters.

Alternative 2. Specify a minimum size limit for gray triggerfish of 12 inches fork length (FL) in federal waters off east Florida.

Alternative 3. Specify a minimum size limit for gray triggerfish of 12 inches

fork length (FL) in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 UNDER NEW ACTION 3 AS PREFERRED

Alternative 3. Specify a minimum size limit for gray triggerfish of 12 inches **fork length** (FL) in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: ADD ALTERNATIVE 4 TO SET THE MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT FOR GRAY TRIGGERFISH AT 14 INCHES FL

Alternative 4. Specify a minimum size limit for gray triggerfish of 14 inches fork length (FL) in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: ACCEPT THE IPT'S RECOMMENDATION TO ADD ALTERNATIVE 3 TO NEW ACTION 4

Alternative 3. Allocate the directed commercial gray triggerfish ACL XX% to the period January 1 through June 30 and XX% to the period July 1 through December 31. Any remaining ACL from season 1 would transfer to season 2. Any remaining ACL from season 2 would not be carried forward.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: ACCEPT THE IPT'S RECOMMENDATION TO ADD ALTERNATIVE 3 TO NEW ACTION 5

Alternative 3. When 75% of the gray triggerfish commercial ACL is met or is projected to be met, the trip limit is reduced to

Sub-alternative 3a. 200 pounds

Sub-alternative 3b. XXX pounds

Sub-alternative 3c. XXX pounds

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

GUIDANCE TO INCLUDE 200 TO 750 POUNDS

MOTION: APPROVE AMENDMENT 29 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Comprehensive Allocations & Accountability Measures Amendment

Council staff presented a broad overview of the amendment. Some Committee members expressed concern over addressing the issue of allocations during a time when the Council is addressing controversial issues, such as MPAs, and undergoing a visioning process for the snapper grouper fishery. Based on those concerns, the Committee made the following motion:

MOTION: DELAY PUBLIC SCOPING FOR ALLOCATIONS FOR SNAPPER GROUPER SPECIES UNTIL AFTER VISIONING AND UNTIL AFTER THE MPA DISCUSSIONS ARE COMPLETED. RETAIN ACTION ON DW ALLOCATIONS AND SNAPPER GROUPER AND GOLDEN CRAB ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: DIRECT STAFF TO INCLUDE AN ACTION IN THE APPROPRIATE AMENDMENT TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF TRANSPORTING SG FILLETS FROM THE BAHAMAS

GUIDANCE TO CONSTRUCT THE ACTION SIMILARLY TO THAT IN DW AMENDMENT 7

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: COUNCIL CONSIDER ESTABLISHING A MORATORIUM ON THE ISSUANCE OF FOR-HIRE PERMITS IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC WITH A CONTROL DATE OF SEPTEMBER 2010.

DISAPPROVED BY COUNCIL

GUIDANCE TO INCLUDE QUESTION(S) DURING VISIONING PROCESS TO GAUGE INTEREST ON A LIMITED ACCESS PROGRAM FOR THE FOR-HIRE INDUSTRY

TIMING & TASK MOTION:

PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING GUIDANCE TO STAFF:

1. Oculina Experimental Closed Area (OECA) 10-year evaluation – convene the Oculina Evaluation Team conduct the evaluation and bring a final report to the Council at the June 2014 meeting.
2. Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 17
 - a. The committee gave direction to staff to work on the System Management Plan to evaluate what needs have been met, which needs remain, and to bring their recommendations on priorities to the Council in 2014.
 - b. The committee gave direction to staff to have the same presentations given to the Snapper Grouper AP at their April 2014 meeting and to have Will Heyman present his approach to choosing MPA sites. Any additional presentations on work in the South Atlantic and/or Gulf that would be helpful should also be considered. The committee also directed staff to

prepare charts with the catch by logbook grid (similar to those presented to the committee) for use at the Snapper Grouper AP meeting.

3. Regulatory Amendment 21 – initiate development to redefine MSST for snapper grouper species with low natural mortality, including blueline tilefish.
4. Amendment 32 (formerly Amendment 31) – proceed with development once the SSC has reviewed the projections and recommended an ABC for blueline tilefish. Include actions to establish management measures for blueline tilefish.
5. Request that the SSC review the blueline tilefish projections as soon as possible and recommend appropriate changes based on their evaluation.
6. Request that NMFS take emergency action to set the blueline tilefish ACL at 75%Fmsy for 2014.
7. Request that the SEFSC provide a projection for blueline tilefish with a 2014 catch level at 75%Fmsy.
8. Regulatory Amendment 16 – conduct scoping in January 2014.
9. Amendment 22 – suspend work on the amendment pending NOAA GC feedback.
10. Amendment 29 – conduct public hearings in January 2014.
11. Request that the SEFSC provide feedback as to whether existing data are sufficient to support the use of the economic efficiency analysis/net benefit analysis.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL