

FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

Snapper Grouper Committee

Atlantic Beach, NC

December 7-8, 2016

1. Status of Landings for Snapper Grouper Species Under ACLs

Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff updated the Committee on the status of commercial and recreational landings for snapper grouper species relative to their ACLs.

The Committee discussed whether a re-opening of commercial harvest for vermilion snapper was warranted. Currently, 94% of the commercial ACL has been landed and SEFSC projections indicate that a two-day re-opening would allow fishermen to land the entire ACL. NMFS requested guidance on criteria that the agency could use to determine whether to re-open a fishery. Previous Council guidance was that harvest should be allowed until 95% of the ACL has been landed. However, fishery closures are based on landings projections that are inherently uncertain and late reporting among dealers is still an issue making a re-opening risky for exceeding the ACL. The Committee noted that 5% of an ACL left unharvested could be very different depending on the species. While a roll-over provision would be an option the Council would consider in some cases, it would first need to be incorporated into the FMP through an amendment. The Committee requested that staff develop a discussion paper for modifications to the framework (or a new framework) that would specify criteria for handling re-openings when projected landings are close to the ACL.

Regarding recreational landings, the following remarks were made:

- 2015 – Blueline tilefish, golden tilefish, and hogfish were over their ACLs.
- 2016 – Blueline tilefish, golden tilefish, and hogfish were over their ACLs. Jacks were closed but additional data allowed a reopening.
 - Porgies also closed in 2016 and snowy closed due to fixed season but no overage.
 - Greater amberjack closed with landings at 98% of the recreational ACL
 - Gag has been below ACL since ACL was set in 2011
 - Mutton has been under ACL for past few years as has yellowtail snapper.
 - Blueline tilefish – season opened in July with implementation of Regulatory Amendment 25 -- only two months under a higher bag limit in 2016 yet the recreational ACL was exceed by a large amount. The majority of harvest is coming from NC. Would be good for Council to have flexibility to adjust bag limits in-season to prevent overages.
 - Asked why it took so long for NMFS to reopen the Jacks Complex, SEFSC replied that it had to do with the sample size needed to obtain average weight and how the average weight affects the estimate of landings. Driver species was almaco jack.
 - The Mid-Atlantic representative stated that there has been an observed shift in the distribution of black sea bass northward and this has affected recreational season length. The distributional shift of certain species in response to climate change may be affecting the level of landings and length of seasons in the South Atlantic.

2. Status of Amendments Approved for Secretarial Review

The Committee will receive a status report from SERO staff on the following amendments:

- Regulatory Amendment 16 (BSB pot closure) – sent to NMFS on 3/4/16: final rule package under review.
- Amendment 36 (Spawnign SMZs) – sent to NMFS on 8/30/16: SERO working on Proposed Rule package.
- Amendment 37 (hogfish) – sent to NMFS on 9/23/16: Proposed Rule package under review at HQ.

3. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Report

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) met in Charleston on October 31 and November 1, 2016. Mr. Kenneth Fex, AP Chair, delivered a summary report and recommendations. The AP discussed several items pertaining to the management of the snapper grouper fishery including amendments to address items in the Vision Blueprint, Amendment 43 (red snapper), Amendment 44 (yellowtail snapper allocations), and options for a for-hire limited entry program.

4. Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Report

The SSC met in Charleston on October 18-20, 2016. Dr. Marcel Reichert, SSC Chair, presented a summary report of the Committee's discussions and recommendations. The SSC discussed several items related to management of the snapper grouper fishery including stock assessment prioritization, the golden tilefish update assessment, Amendment 43 (red snapper), optimization of black sea bass pot gear, and modification to the ABC Control Rule:

ABC Control Rule (CR):

- SSC recommends removing stock status and PSA (Productivity and Susceptibility Assessment) from ABC CR. Stock status is determined by NMFS.
- SSC to continue discussing changes to CR and compare scoring between old and revised CR.
- Also use economic and social indicators of stock abundance.
- New NS1 guidelines will be considered as well (carry overs, phased in approach to end overfishing, etc.). Council supportive of SSC incorporating NS1 guidelines into revisions of CR.

Goliath Grouper Assessment – SSC did not consider Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA) and does not recommend for use in management. SSC agreed with review panel's research recommendations.

Black Sea Bass gear optimization study -- SSC considered to constitute BSIA and appropriate for use in management.

Golden Tilefish:

- Unusually strong year class close to the terminal year in previous stock assessment (SEDAR 25) was influential to stock status. High uncertainty was extensively discussed. This uncertainty was carried forward in the ABC CR.
- Most influential modifications in update – use of robust multinomial likelihood function (to fit age and length composition data) and added new data. Many other key parameters were the same in SEDAR 25 and the 2016 update.

- Applying the robust multinomial likelihood function to the age composition data resulted in the most robust results and the SSC considered this approach to constitute BSIA.
- Data from years following SEDAR 25 did not support strong year class & additional data changed selectivity of handline gears to greater selectivity for older year class.
- Severity of overfishing experienced by full stock may have been exaggerated by use of apical fishing mortality (F). SSC recommended looking at other methods to assess fishing mortality.
- Magnitude of buffer between OFL and ABC was not surprising given the uncertainty and low sample size in the assessment. High uncertainty should result in a large buffer. It was similar to that of S25. There continue to be low sample sizes for tilefish and not enough fishery independent survey data covering a large geographic area.
- SSC reiterated their recommendation of the P-star (P*) approach for golden tilefish.
- Market categories – may not be possible to use market categories across entire stock but may be informative in geographically localized areas. If consistency and size resolution is sufficient, cohorts could be tracked.
- SSC did not offer a recommendation on the phase-in approach to end overfishing because the recent NS1 guidance is to first amend the ABC CR to incorporate that approach. If the Council chooses to implement a phased-in approach to end overfishing of golden tilefish, they should consider recent ACL overages and uncertainty in management. ACL should not exceed 90% of OFL in year one. Also new projections would be needed.

Red snapper:

- SSC discussed MRIP estimates used in the stock assessment and considered them BSIA. It would be good, however, if survey efforts were more focused on offshore component. Studies to improve (validate) discard estimates are needed.
- ABC should be specified in total yield (landings + discards).
- The SSC saw no compelling reason to change proxy for MSY. Differences in yield at different SPR levels were small.
- The SSC knows of no new data that would justify a revision of fishing level recommendations.

The Committee stated the following regarding red snapper:

- Need discard-only projections to account for different selectivities of landed catch and discards.
- Guidance to request discard-only projection from SEFSC for red snapper.
- Since discards are high and updates to recreational landings estimates are forthcoming as a result of changes to the effort component of the MRIP survey, it is likely that the results of update assessments will be quite different.

5. Evaluating the efficacy of descender devices in increasing the survival of deepwater groupers using telemetry

Brendan Runde, NCSU, presented results of a study that explored use of a descender device to mitigate barotrauma and increase survival rates of discarded deepwater grouper (snowy grouper, scamp, speckled hind). Descender devices appear to be a very promising tool for increasing survival of discarded deepwater groupers. The Committee expressed interest in exploring the use of descender devices to decrease mortality of red snapper discards.

6. Red Grouper Commercial Discards Presentation

This item was postponed to a future meeting.

7. Snapper Grouper Amendment 41 (Mutton Snapper)

Amendment 41 updates biological benchmarks and fishing levels based on the update assessment (SEDAR 15A Update 2015) and considers modifying existing management measures. Myra Brouwer, Council staff, reviewed modifications to the amendment since the September 2016 Council meeting. The Committee made the following motions:

MOTION # 1: ACCEPT IPT SUGGESTED EDITS TO ACTIONS 5, 6 AND 8 IN AMENDMENT 41

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION # 2: APPROVE AMENDMENT 41 FOR FORMAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE THE IPT EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE CHANGES TO THE AMENDMENT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR LICENSE TO RE-DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

8. Annual Review of Vision Blueprint

Amber Von Harten, Council staff, delivered a presentation showing progress to date on actions identified in the Vision Blueprint that would be addressed in 2016-2017. The Committee provided additional guidance on action items where further guidance was needed.

9. Vision Blueprint Recreational Regulatory Amendment 26

Myra Brouwer, Council staff, presented an options paper for Regulatory Amendment 26 (Recreational) including actions to re-consider the aggregate bag limits, re-evaluate the shallow water grouper closure, modify the minimum size limit for black sea bass, and remove minimum size limits for deepwater species (silk snapper, queen snapper, and blackfin snapper). The Options Paper also included recommendations on each topic from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel. The Committee provided additional guidance on the topics below:

Aggregate Bag Limits:

- DEVELOP ALTERNATIVE FOR A 20-FISH AGGREGATE THAT WOULD INCORPORATE AND MAINTAIN SPECIES IN THE CURRENT 10-SNAPPER AGGREGATE.
- INCLUDE AN ALTERNATIVE FOR A 3-GROUPER DEEPWATER AGGREGATE WITH SEASON MATCHING WHAT IS CURRENTLY IN PLACE FOR SNOWY AND BLUELINE
- INCLUDE BACKGROUND ON HOW VISIONING PRIORITIES ARE ALSO BEING ADDRESSED IN AMENDMENT 43
- INCLUDE ALTERNATIVE TO ADD VERMILION SNAPPER TO THE SNAPPER AGGREGATE
- INCLUDE ALTERNATIVE TO ESTABLISH A 10-FISH BAG LIMIT WITHIN THE 20-FISH AGGREGATE FOR GRAY TRIGGERFISH AND ADD AN ACTION TO MODIFY THE MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT OF GRAY TRIGGERFISH IN FEDERAL WATERS OFF FLORIDA TO 12 INCHES FL
- INCLUDE CONSIDERATION OF SPECIFYING A BAG LIMIT FOR ATLANTIC SPADEFISH
- REQUEST INPUT ON JACKS COMPLEX AND SPECIFICATION OF INDIVIDUAL BAG LIMITS

Shallow Water Grouper Closure:

- REQUEST INPUT ON RED GROUPER AND SCAMP AND MODIFYING SEASONAL CLOSURE FOR THOSE SPECIES

The Committee approved the following motion:

MOTION # 3: APPROVE VISION BLUEPRINT REGULATORY AMENDMENT 26 FOR SCOPING

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

10. Vision Blueprint Commercial Regulatory Amendment 27

Myra Brouwer, Council staff, walked the Committee through the options paper for Regulatory Amendment 27, which addresses items in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint that direct management of the commercial sector. The options paper included actions that would establish split seasons for deepwater species and red porgy, establish/modify trip limits and step-downs, re-evaluate the shallow water grouper closure, and modify the fishing year for golden tilefish (hook-and-line only). The Committee provided the following guidance on each topic:

Commercial Split Seasons:

- INCLUDE BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL VARIABILITY IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF DEEPWATER SPECIES THAT AFFECTS ACCESS.
- INCLUDE BACKGROUND ON WHY HARVEST OF RED PORGY WAS PROHIBITED IN JAN-APRIL

- INCLUDE OPTION FOR COMMERCIAL SPLIT SEASON FOR THE REST OF DEEPWATER SPECIES
- INCLUDE OPTION FOR COMMERCIAL SPLIT SEASON FOR GREATER AMBERJACK

Commercial Trip Limits and Step-Dows:

- REMOVE OPTION TO LIMIT NUMBER OF TRIPS FOR BANDIT BOATS
- INCLUDE OPTION TO UTILIZE COMMERCIAL ANNUAL CATCH TARGET TO STEP DOWN TRIP LIMITS TO A BYCATCH ALLOWANCE
- REQUEST PUBLIC INPUT ON TRIP LIMIT FOR JACKS COMPLEX AS A WHOLE AND SPECIES WITHIN

The Committee approved the following motion:

MOTION # 4: APPROVE VISION BLUEPRINT REGULATORY AMENDMENT 27 FOR SCOPING

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

11. Red Snapper Landings by County In Florida

Dr. Bonnie Ponwith, SEFSC Director, presented landings of red snapper by FL county presentation ahead of the Amendment 43 discussion. The presentation was requested with the intent to obtain additional information on “hot spots” of abundance and inform discussions.

12. Snapper Grouper Amendment 43 (Red Snapper)

The Council requested that staff begin development of Amendment 43 in June 2016 to address items related to management of red snapper and other directly and indirectly related items that would ultimately result in an adaptive management approach and respond to items in the Vision Blueprint (i.e., recreational stamp, recreational season, time-area closures, etc.). Chip Collier, Council staff, provided an overview of the suite of actions and alternatives to consider for public scoping. The Committee had the following comments and provided the following guidance on how to proceed with public scoping, etc:

- PUT MORE EMPHASIS ON THE GENERAL PROBLEM INSTEAD OF SPECIFIC NUMBERS BECAUSE THOSE ARE VERY UNCERTAIN. RE-STRUCTURE SCOPING DOCUMENT TO REMOVE ACTIONS 1-5 OR PUT THOSE IN THE BACK AND MAKE IT CLEAR THAT NUMBERS AREN'T FINAL AND THERE WILL NOT BE FINALIZED NUMBERS FOR SOME TIME.
- SCOPING MEETINGS SHOULD BE IN-PERSON.
- EMPHASIS SHOULD BE ON REQUESTING INPUT ON HOW TO REDUCE DISCARDS AND IF POSSIBLE MEASURES TO HAVE SOME HARVEST.
- USE A TIERED APPROACH TO PRESENTING INFORMATION AND REQUESTING PUBLIC INPUT: FIRST WE NEED TO REDUCE DISCARDS AND SEE IF ANY HARVEST MIGHT BE ALLOWED. SECOND TIER IS HOW TO MANAGE A LIMITED HARVEST.

- REQUEST THAT STAFF PROVIDE INFORMATION ON RESEARCH REGARDING DESCENDING DEVICES TO REDUCE DISCARD MORTALITY OF RED SNAPPER FOR THE MARCH 2017 MEETING.
- SEFSC HAS HOSTED BAROTRAUMA WORKSHOPS BUT NO CERTIFICATION PROGRAM EXISTS IN THE REGION THAT ENDORSES ONE TYPE OF DEVICE OVER ANOTHER. THE SEFSC OFFERED TO REVIEW RESULTS OF WORKSHOPS, ETC. AND GET BACK TO COUNCIL AT THE MARCH 2017 MEETING REGARDING INFORMATION ON DESCENDING DEVICES IN THE REGION.
- MONICA TO CHECK WITH COUNTERPARTS IN OTHER REGIONS ON HOW REGULATIONS HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED FOR DESCENDING DEVICES AND PROVIDE UPDATE TO COUNCIL IN MARCH 2017.
- WILL NEED TO DETERMINE WHAT THE EXPECTED REDUCTION IN MORTALITY WOULD BE WITH A POSSIBLE REQUIREMENT OF DESCENDING DEVICES AND LOOK AT WHAT MIGHT BE A REASONABLE RANGE OF ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING COMPLIANCE, ETC. – COUNCIL STAFF TO WORK WITH SERO STAFF TO BRING THIS TO COUNCIL IN MARCH 2017.

The Committee approved the following motion and provided the guidance below:

MOTION # 5: APPROVE AMENDMENT 43 OPTIONS PAPER AS MODIFIED FOR SCOPING IN JANUARY 2017

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

13. Golden Tilefish

The status of the golden tilefish stock in the South Atlantic was assessed through SEDAR 25 (2011) and an update was conducted in 2016 with data through 2014 (SEDAR 25 update 2016). The update determined the golden tilefish stock is undergoing overfishing but is not overfished. The SSC reviewed the update during their May 2016 meeting and deemed it to represent Best Scientific Information Available and suitable for management. The Committee discussed how to proceed with implementing new fishing level recommendations. The Committee made the following motions:

MOTION # 6: SELECT OPTION 4 (IN THE SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE OVERVIEW) TO IMPLEMENT CHANGES TO GOLDEN TILEFISH:

OPTION 4. INITIATE DEVELOPMENT OF A PLAN AMENDMENT THAT WOULD MODIFY THE ABC CONTROL RULE TO IMPLEMENT A PHASED-IN APPROACH TO END OVERFISHING OF GOLDEN TILEFISH (AS PRESENTED IN REVISIONS TO THE NS 1 GUIDELINES):

Year 1: ACL = OFL in Year 1

Year 2: ACL = mid-point between the OFL and ABC in Year 2

Year 3: ACL = ABC

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION # 7: ASK THE SEFSC TO PROVIDE PROJECTIONS FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH AT P* OF 0.4 AND 0.45
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION # 8: APPROVE THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASK ITEMS:

1. DEVELOP A DISCUSSION PAPER FOR MODIFICATIONS TO THE FRAMEWORK (OR A NEW FRAMEWORK) THAT WOULD SPECIFY CRITERIA FOR HANDLING RE-OPENINGS WHEN PROJECTED LANDINGS ARE CLOSE TO THE ACL.
2. REQUEST DISCARD-ONLY PROJECTION FROM SEFSC FOR RED SNAPPER
3. PREPARE AMENDMENT 41 FOR FORMAL REVIEW
4. PREPARE REGULATORY AMENDMENTS 26 & 27 FOR PUBLIC SCOPING (TO BE CONDUCTED IN JANUARY 2017 VIA WEBINAR)
5. REQUEST SEFSC BRIEFING ON OUTCOME OF BAROTRAUMA WORKSHOPS IN SOUTHEAST REGION FOR MARCH 2017
6. REQUEST THAT NOAA GC PROVIDE UPDATE IN MARCH 2017 ON HOW OTHER REGIONS HAVE REQUIRED USE OF DESCENDING DEVICES
7. WORK WITH SERO STAFF TO DETERMINE WHAT THE EXPECTED REDUCTION IN DISCARD MORTALITY WOULD BE FOR RED SNAPPER WITH A POSSIBLE REQUIREMENT OF DESCENDING DEVICES AND LOOK AT WHAT MIGHT BE A REASONABLE RANGE OF ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING COMPLIANCE, ETC.
8. REQUEST THAT THE SEFSC PROVIDE PROJECTIONS FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH AT P* OF 0.4 AND 0.45

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Other Business

MOTION # 9: CONTACT BSB POT ENDORSEMENT HOLDERS TO REQUEST INPUT ON MODIFYING POTS TO HAVE 2.25 MESH ON EITHER THE BACK PANEL OR THE ENTIRE POT

APPROVED BY COUNCIL