

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Jekyll Island, GA
March 4, 2020

The Committee approved minutes from the December 2019 meeting and the agenda for the March 2020 Committee meeting.

Status of Commercial Catches for Species under ACLs

National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office (NMFS SERO) staff updated the Committee on the status of commercial landings of snapper grouper species and species complexes relative to their respective ACLs. SERO expects that the golden tilefish longline fishery will re-open this year. Projections to determine how much of the ACL has been caught are being prepared. Upon receipt, SERO will announce the additional number of days that vessels with longline endorsements will be allowed to harvest golden tilefish in the South Atlantic.

Status of Amendments under Formal Review

NMFS SERO staff updated the Committee on the status of amendments under review or recently submitted. Final rules were published on four Snapper Grouper amendments and two (Regulatory Amendment 29 and Abbreviated Framework 3) are still undergoing rulemaking.

Update on modifications to Red Snapper seasons: Regulatory Amendment 33 and the 2020 Red Snapper season

NMFS SERO staff provided an update on the status of Regulatory Amendment 33 and the expected duration of the 2020 recreational Red Snapper season. Regulatory Amendment 33 would remove the restriction on the minimum number of days that harvest of Red Snapper is allowed. Currently, harvest of Red Snapper does not take place in the South Atlantic if projections indicate the season (either commercial or recreational) would last three days or less. SERO anticipates that the amendment would become effective in time for the scheduled opening of red snapper harvest in July 2020. The amendment would remove the three-day restriction.

SERO staff delivered a presentation summarizing recreational catches of Red Snapper during the 2019 season and the expected duration of the 2020 season. The recreational catch of Red Snapper in the South Atlantic in 2019 exceeded the recreational ACL and resulted in a daily catch rate that can only support three days of recreational harvest in 2020.

Committee members expressed frustration at their current inability to make changes to Red Snapper management since a stock assessment has not yet been conducted. A discussion ensued on how to expedite completion of the stock assessment, which is scheduled to get underway in 2021. The SEFSC director explained that the Statement of Work (SOW) submitted by the SSC could potentially be trimmed down to complete the assessment sooner. The Committee made edits to the SOW but and sought feedback from the FWRI stock assessment team. FWRI assessment scientists reviewed the proposed edits and concurred with the modifications. In

addition, Dr. Luiz Barbieri would be available to provide an update to the Council at their June meeting on research being conducted on Red Snapper. A request will also be made for an update to be delivered at the June meeting on Red Snapper abundance as monitored by the Southeast Reef Fish Survey.

MOTION #1: APPROVE THE STATEMENT OF WORK FOR THE RED SNAPPER ASSESSMENT AS MODIFIED APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Regulatory Amendment 34 (Special management zones off North and South Carolina)

Council staff reviewed scoping comments obtained in fall 2019 and provided an overview of proposed actions in the amendment. The Committee made the following motions:

MOTION #2: APPROVE THE PURPOSE AND NEED AS MODIFIED BELOW:

Purpose: Designate artificial reefs sites in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina and South Carolina as special management zones and restrict fishing gear use within the areas.

Need: Reduce adverse effects to snapper grouper species and ~~increase~~ OPTIMIZE fishing opportunities at the artificial reef sites.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION: MOVE NEW ALTERNATIVE 2 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX

SUBSTITUTE MOTION #3: ACCEPT IPT'S EDITS TO ALTERNATIVES 1-3 AND SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 1

Action 1. Designate artificial reefs in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina as special management zones

Alternative 1 (No Action). ~~There are currently no special management zones in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina at permitted artificial reef sites. Do not establish new special management zones in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina at permitted artificial reef sites.~~ There are currently no artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina designated as special management zones. The allowable gear for the snapper grouper fishery management plan for the commercial and recreational sectors are handline, rod and reel, spear, bandit gear, powerhead, pot, and longline (the last two are commercial sector only). Do not implement new restrictions on fishing gear used to harvest snapper grouper species ~~on designated~~ from artificial reefs in ~~federal waters~~ the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina.

NEW Alternative 2. Designate 30 artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina as special management zones. Within the special management zones, harvest of snapper grouper species would only be allowed with handline, rod and reel, and spear. All harvest would be limited to the applicable recreational bag limit.

Alternative 2 3. ~~Establish 30 special management zones at state permitted artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina.~~ Designate 30 artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina as special management zones. Within the special management zones, harvest of snapper grouper species would ~~only~~ be allowed with handline, rod

and reel, and spear. All harvest by spear would be limited to the applicable recreational bag limit.

SUBSTITUTE BECOMES MAIN MOTION
MAIN MOTION APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #4: ACCEPT SUGGESTED EDITS TO ACTION 2 AND ALTERNATIVES 1-3
AND MAINTAIN ALTERNATIVE 2 AS PREFERRED

Action 2. Designate additional artificial reefs in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina as special management zones

Alternative 1 (No Action). There are currently 28 artificial reefs sites in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina designated as special management zones ~~at permitted artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina. Do not establish additional special management zones in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina at permitted artificial reef sites.~~ The allowable gear for the snapper grouper fishery management plan for the commercial and recreational sectors are handline, rod and reel, spear, bandit gear, pot, and longline (the last two are commercial sector only). Do not implement new restrictions on fishing gear used to harvest snapper grouper species ~~on designated from~~ artificial reefs in ~~federal waters~~ the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina.

Preferred Alternative 2. ~~Establish four additional special management zones at permitted artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina.~~ Designate four additional artificial reefs in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina as special management zones. Within the special management zones, harvest of snapper grouper species would only be allowed with handline, rod and reel, and spear. All harvest would be limited to the applicable recreational bag limit.

NEW Alternative 3. Designate four additional artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina as special management zones. Within the special management zones, harvest of snapper grouper species would only be allowed with handline, rod and reel, and spear. All harvest by spear would be limited to the applicable recreational bag limit.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #5: APPROVE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 34 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

GUIDANCE TO CONDUCT HEARINGS VIA WEBINAR (2 WEBINARS)

Snapper Grouper AP Topics for April 2020

The Snapper Grouper AP is scheduled to meet in Charleston, SC on April 15-17, 2020 to discuss items relevant to the snapper grouper fishery and provide recommendations, as appropriate. The Committee directed staff to include the following items on the AP's agenda:

- Provide recommendations on Regulatory Amendment 34 (Special Management Zones off NC and SC)

- Provide input for the development of Fishery Performance Reports on Gag and Snowy Grouper
- Discuss unassessed species that have been recommended for ecosystem component designation by the SSC (Cubera Snapper, Margate, Sailor’s Choice, Coney, Yellowfin Grouper, and Saucereye Porgy)
- Feedback on other amendments/topics that are on the Council’s priority list but work has been suspended or not yet begun
- Updates:
 - Spawning SMZ work
 - SEDAR
 - Citizen Science
 - MyFishCount
- Presentations:
 - HMS presentation on shark depredation
 - Ecosystem Status Report

Other Business

Council staff delivered a brief update on outreach campaign activities for best fishing practices and upcoming events.

Timing and Tasks

MOTION #6: Approve the following timing and tasks:

- Prepare Regulatory Amendment 34 for public hearings
- Hold webinar public hearings for Regulatory Amendment 34 prior to the June 2020 Council meeting
- Begin work on white paper to determine need for conservation and management for the following species: Cubera Snapper, Margate, Sailor’s Choice, Coney, Yellowfin Grouper, and Saucereye Porgy. Bring back to Council in June.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL