

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Charleston, SC
September 16-20, 2019

The Committee approved minutes from the June 2019 meeting and the agenda for the September 2019 Committee meeting.

Status of Commercial and Recreational Catches for Species under ACLs

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southeast Regional Office (NMFS SERO) updated the Committee on the status of commercial landings of snapper grouper species and species complexes relative to their respective ACLs. Commercial landings were presented through September 11, 2019.

Status of Amendments under Formal Review

SERO staff briefed the Committee on the status of the following amendments:

- Amendment 42 (Sea Turtle Release Gear and Framework Modifications) – proposed rule published on September 17, 2019 with a comment period through October 17, 2019.
- Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 (Commercial) – proposed rule package at NMFS headquarters
- Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 (Recreational) – proposed rule package at NMFS headquarters
- Regulatory Amendment 30 (Red Grouper) – under review at SERO

Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Report (from August 19-21 SSC/Marine Recreational Information Program Workshop)

Dr. George Sedberry summarized recommendations from the August 19-21, 2019 workshop. The workshop convened invited experts from the NMFS Office of Science and Technology, the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and state agency staff involved in MRIP data collection and processing. Participants reviewed background information on the development and implementation of the Fishing Effort Survey (FES) calibrated MRIP estimates (including the calibration for the new APAIS design) of recreational fisheries landings. SSC recommendations and consensus statements included:

- The SSC agrees that the FES design is an improvement over the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) and considers it Best Scientific Information Available.
- The SSC endorses using the FES estimates to track ACLs that will be set using the FES data.
- Existing ACLs set using CHTS estimates should continue to be tracked using CHTS-like estimates.
- The SSC endorses the use of the fully calibrated estimates (for both FES and Access Point Angler Intercept Survey) from 2017 back to the beginning of the time series, and those produced by the FES methodology from 2018 going forward, for use in stock assessments in the South Atlantic.

- The SSC endorses using the new FES estimates, including the calibrated historical time series as they are, in current assessments--with the understanding that evaluation of “outliers” would still occur.
- SEDAR use its best practices working group to address a systematic way of identifying and dealing with outliers in the data used to inform stock assessments.

In addition, the SSC made several research recommendations. The SSC report can be found [HERE](#).

The Committee voiced their appreciation for a well-run and very productive workshop and directed staff to draft letters to thank the presenters. The Committee also discussed the next steps relative to MRIP data. They mentioned that the MRIP survey wasn’t designed to track quotas. The Committee felt the Recreational Accountability Measures Amendment is a place to start on taking steps to think about MRIP data usage.

Regulatory Amendment 29 (Best Fishing Practices & Powerheads)

The amendment includes actions to consider best fishing practices (i.e., venting tools, descending devices, circle hooks) intended to improve survivorship of released snapper grouper species and an action to address consistency in regulations pertaining to powerheads.

The Committee reviewed the purpose and need statement, current actions and preferred alternatives and draft Council conclusions. The Committee approved the following motions:

MOTION #1: REMOVE “DISCARDS AND” FROM THE NEED FOR ACTIONS.

The *purpose* is to modify gear requirements for the snapper grouper fishery to promote best fishing practices and to ensure consistent regulations for the dive component of the snapper grouper fishery.

The *need* is to reduce ~~discards and~~ discard mortality of snapper grouper species and to decrease the burden of compliance with differing regulations for the dive component of the snapper grouper fishery while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #2: APPROVE THE FOLLOWING DEFINITION OF DESCENDING DEVICE FOR INCLUSION IN ACTION 1:

For the purpose of this requirement, “descending device” means an instrument to which is attached a minimum of a 16-oz weight and a length of line that will release the fish at the depth from which the fish was caught or a minimum of 50-feet. The descending device attaches to the fish’s mouth or is a container that will hold the fish. The device **MUST** be capable of releasing the fish automatically, by the actions of the operator of the device, or by allowing the fish to escape on its own. Since minimizing surface time is critical to increasing survival, descending devices shall be readily available for use while engaged in fishing.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #3: APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29 FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY

AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND RE-DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

The Committee also discussed an outreach plan for best fishing practices and prioritized the following:

- A brochure on best fishing practices and the requirements contained in Regulatory Amendment 29.
- Working with influencers to promote best fishing practices.
- Beginning discussions on incentivizing fishermen to use best fishing practices.

The Committee also requested a document summarizing current and past outreach efforts in the South Atlantic and their results.

Abbreviated Framework 3 (Blueline Tilefish)

The amendment would adjust the ABC and ACL for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction, including the area north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. At their April 2019 meeting, the SSC reaffirmed their previous ABC recommendations from SEDAR 50 and those of the blueline tilefish ABC Workgroup.

The Committee approved the following motion:

MOTION #4: MOVE TO REVISE THE ACL AND RECREATIONAL ACT FOR BLUELINE TILEFISH TO REFLECT THE ACTIONS IN THE DECISION DOCUMENT AND MAINTAIN AS AN ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK AND RETURN TO THE DECEMBER COUNCIL MEETING.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Wreckfish ITQ Review

The Committee reviewed the final version of the 2019 Wreckfish ITQ Review. They received a presentation that outlined work done since the June 2019 meeting and outlined the Conclusions and Recommendations from the review. The Council approved the review as written and directed staff to begin the develop a plan amendment to modernize the Wreckfish ITQ Program and include actions that address all of the conclusions and recommendations from the Wreckfish ITQ Review that can be addressed through a plan amendment. The Committee approved the following motion:

MOTION #5: ACCEPT THE 2019 WRECKFISH ITQ REVIEW AS FINAL AND BEGIN A PLAN AMENDMENT FOR THE WRECKFISH FISHERY.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Regulatory Amendment 33 (Red Snapper Seasons Modifications)

The amendment includes actions to modify the days of the week that are open to recreational harvest of red snapper starting in 2020, should harvest be allowed, to allow more flexibility in

the event of bad weather. Other actions include removing the provision that does not allow harvest (commercial or recreational) of red snapper should the predicted opening be three days or fewer, and modifying the start dates of the commercial and recreational seasons. The Council reviewed an options paper at the June 2019 meeting and approved the amendment for public hearings, which were held in August 2019. Staff provided a summary of public comment and an overview of the actions/alternatives and preliminary qualitative analysis.

The Committee approved the following motions:

MOTION #6: ACCEPT THE IPT'S EDITS TO ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 1 AND SELECT AS PREFERRED

Action 1. Remove the minimum number of days for the South Atlantic red snapper seasons

Alternative 1 (No Action). If the projected commercial or recreational fishing season is determined by the National Marine Fisheries Service to be three days or less then the commercial or recreational fishing season will not open for that fishing year.

Alternative 2. Remove the requirement specifying the red snapper commercial and recreational seasons in the South Atlantic would not open if projections indicate the commercial or recreational season would be three days or less fewer.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

It was clarified during discussion of this action that under both current and proposed regulations, recreational and commercial harvest of red snapper operate independently of each other; that is, harvest for one sector can open without the other.

MOTION #7: MOVE ACTIONS 2 & 3 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX

Action 2. Modify the start date for the recreational red snapper season

Action 3. Revise the days of the week recreational harvest of red snapper would be allowed during an open season

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #8: MODIFY ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER ACTION 4 FOR A MAY 1ST START DATE AND SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 AS PREFERRED

Action 4. Modify the start date for the red snapper commercial season

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial red snapper season begins on the second Monday in July, unless otherwise specified.

Alternative 2. Modify the commercial red snapper season start date to start the second Monday in on May 1, unless otherwise specified.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #9: ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS UNDER ACTION 4 AND MOVE ALTERNATIVE 4 TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX

Action 4. Modify the ~~start date for~~ the red snapper commercial season

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial red snapper season begins on the second Monday in July, unless otherwise specified.

Alternative 2. Modify the commercial red snapper season start date to ~~start the second Monday in~~ May 1, unless otherwise specified.

Alternative 3. Modify the commercial red snapper season ~~start date~~ to ~~start~~ the second Monday in June, unless otherwise specified.

Alternative 4. ~~Modify the commercial red snapper season start date to start May 1. Commercial harvest would not be allowed during July and August.~~

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION #10: APPROVE SUGGESTED EDITS TO THE PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT:

The purpose and need of this framework amendment is to ~~modify the structure of~~ ~~remove the minimum number of days to allow commercial or recreational harvest of red snapper in the South Atlantic~~ and ~~modify the start date of the~~ red snapper commercial ~~and recreational fishing seasons~~ to increase the socio-economic benefits to fishermen and fishing communities while minimizing discard mortality.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Regulatory Amendment 34 (SMZs in NC and SC)

The process to designate artificial reefs as Special Management Zones (SMZs) was established in the Snapper Grouper FMP in 1983 to *increase biological production and/or create fishing opportunities that would not otherwise exist*. The amendment proposes designation of 30 artificial reef sites in the EEZ off North Carolina and 4 sites in the EEZ off South Carolina where gear restrictions for snapper grouper species would be put in place.

The Committee provided the following guidance:

- The IPT would serve as the “monitoring team” (called for in the SMZ designation protocol in the Snapper Grouper FMP).
- National Standard 5 encourages use of efficient gear so language regarding “efficiency” should be carefully considered. The intent of regulating the type of fishing gear that can be used in SMZs is to curtail the capacity of certain fishing gear to exploit the resource.
- Analyses to satisfy NEPA requirements may require some site-specific information for proposed artificial reef sites.
- It would not be problematic for the USCG to enforce a site defined as a radius around a central point.
- Rename SC SMZs on maps using “PA” (Permitted Area) notation instead of reef names.
- Conduct scoping hearings (three via webinar/listening stations) in North Carolina and one in South Carolina before the December Council meeting. Council staff to coordinate with states on dates and locations.
- Revise timing to approve for formal review in March 2020.

The Committee approved the following motions:

MOTION #11: APPROVE INCLUSION OF ACTION 1 IN REGULATORY AMENDMENT 34.

1. Establish Special Management Zones in the Exclusive Economic Zone off North Carolina

Option 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. 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 artificial reefs in federal waters off North Carolina.

Option 2. Establish 30 special management zones at state permitted artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina (**Table 1 and Figures 1-3**). Within the special management zones, harvest of snapper grouper species would 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 #12: APPROVE INCLUSION OF ACTION 2 IN REGULATORY AMENDMENT 34 AND SELECT OPTION 2 AS PREFERRED.

2. Establish Additional Special Management Zones in the Exclusive Economic Zone off South Carolina

Option 1 (No Action). There are currently 29 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. Allowable gear within the special management zones includes handline, rod and reel, and spear (without powerheads), and all harvest of snapper grouper species is limited to the recreational bag limit. Do not implement new restrictions on fishing gear used to harvest snapper grouper species on designated artificial reefs in federal waters off South Carolina.

Option 2. Establish four additional Special Management Zones at permitted artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina (**Table 2 and Figures 4-5**). Within the special management zones, harvest of snapper grouper species would only be allowed with handline, rod and reel, and spear and harvest would be limited to the applicable recreational bag limit.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

GUIDANCE THAT STATES WILL CONDUCT MONITORING AND ENFORCEMENT OF ARTIFICIAL REEFS SO NO NEED FOR COUNCIL TO DEVELOP SMP

Guidance for Snapper Grouper AP October 2019 Meeting

The Committee reviewed a list of topics for inclusion in the AP's agenda. The AP is scheduled to meet in Charleston, SC, on October 9-11, 2019. The approved list of agenda topics is below:

- Presentation on the economic performance of the Snapper Grouper commercial fishery (Council received this in June)

- Presentation on electronic reporting from the commercial sector (Council received in June and will get update in September)
- Recommendations for developing SG amendments:
 - Regulatory Amendment 33 (red snapper seasons)
 - Regulatory Amendment 34 (SMZs in NC and SC)
- SEDAR: update and request for participation
- Citizen Science Update including FISHistory/Zooniverse Demo
- Presentation on Draft EIS to modify boundary and update regulations in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
- Fishery Performance Report for Scamp
- MyFishCount presentation – update on project and upcoming activities
- Update on fishery-independent survey (Southeast Reef Fish Survey)?

The committee chair can work with staff to narrow this list down if the list is still too long for the time on the agenda.

FMP Objectives and Vision Blueprint Guidance

The Committee received an overview of the objectives in the Snapper Grouper FMP and those included in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the fishery. The Committee provided the following guidance:

- Include Vision Blueprint objectives in next amendment to the Snapper Grouper FMP
- Continue addressing objectives adopted under the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint instead of drafting and adopting a revised timeline for 2021-2026.

Possible Regulatory Changes to Address Retention of Lionfish

SERO staff updated the Committee on an amendment from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to the Exempted Fishing Permit that they received in November 2018.

SERO staff also presented an information document including possible regulatory changes to address targeting and retention of lionfish in authorized trap fisheries and possible impacts. Instead of taking regulatory action now, NMFS recommends waiting for results of the research the FWC is conducting under an EFP to test modified wire spiny lobster traps to determine their effectiveness for attracting and collection invasive lionfish.

Other Business

There were no items discussed

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION #13: DIRECT STAFF TO COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING TASKS:

- SEND LETTERS TO THANK PARTICIPANTS WHO DELIVERED PRESENTATIONS DURING THE SSC/MRIP WORKSHOP.
- PROVIDE SUMMARY OF OUTREACH EFFORTS TO DATE ON DESCENDING DEVICES AT THE DECEMBER 2019 MEETING.

- PREPARE ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK 3 (ACL ADJUSTMENT FOR BLUELINE TILEFISH) FOR REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION FOR FORMAL APPROVAL AT THE DECEMBER 2019 COUNCIL MEETING.
- INITIATE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AMENDMENT TO THE SNAPPER GROUPER FMP BASED ON MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WRECKFISH ITQ REVIEW.
- CONDUCT SCOPING WEBINARS WITH LISTENING STATIONS FOR REGULATORY AMENDMENT 34 (3 IN NORTH CAROLINA AND ONE IN SOUTH CAROLINA) BEFORE THE DECEMBER 2019 COUNCIL MEETING.
- CONTINUE WORKING ON REGULATORY AMENDMENT 34
- PREPARE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 33 (MODIFICATIONS TO RED SNAPPER SEASONS) FOR CONSIDERATION FOR FORMAL REVIEW AT THE DECEMBER 2019 MEETING.
- SUBMIT REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29 FOR FORMAL REVIEW APPROVED BY COUNCIL