

**FINAL**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**  
**SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE**  
**SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**  
**Stuart, FL**  
**June 11-12, 2019**

The Committee will approve minutes from the March 2019 meeting and the agenda for the June 2019 Committee meeting.

**Status of Commercial and Recreational Catches for Species under ACL**

National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office (NMFS SERO) updated the Committee on the status of commercial and recreational landings of snapper grouper species and species complexes relative to their respective ACLs. Commercial landings were presented through June 4, 2019. Recreational landings covered 2018 (without headboat landings since those have not yet been finalized) and Wave 1 of 2019. Of note was a 97% overage of the red grouper ACL in 2018 and a 554% overage of the recreational golden tilefish ACL through Wave 1 of 2019 based on 4 intercepts in Florida. The recreational ACL for golden tilefish is 2,316 fish.

**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) – sent to NMFS 4/24/19
- Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 (Commercial) – sent to NMFS 1/24/19
- Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 (Recreational) – sent to NMFS 4/17/19

Proposed rule packages have been prepared for these amendments and are going through the rulemaking process.

**Southeast Reef Fish Survey (SERFS) Update**

Dr. Marcel Reichert delivered a presentation on the latest observed trends in the fishery-independent SERFS for species in the Snapper Grouper Complex. The presentation included a comparison of trends in the distribution of sampled species over time between two 4-year periods: 1997-2001 and 2014-2018.

*Red Snapper* - relative abundance in the trap survey has continued to increase. Average nominal CPUE increased over 13 times between the two periods. Data suggest higher abundances of red snapper off Florida, but also off GA and southern SC, and north of Cape Lookout, NC.

*Gray Triggerfish* - 8<sup>th</sup> most abundant species in the survey and has generally increased in abundance since 2010, but with some variability in and a decline in the last 3 years.

*Vermillion Snapper* - continued to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> most abundant species in the traps in 2018. After an uptick after 2014, the recent abundance in the traps has hovered around the long-term average.

*Black Sea Bass* - Despite the recent decline in abundance, black sea bass remained the 2<sup>nd</sup> most abundant species in the trap survey. Standardized CPUE remained low at about half the long-time average in recent years and there have been no major changes in

distribution between the two periods. A recent diet study indicated that, although Black Sea Bass are included in the diet of Red Snapper but the latter does not disproportionately prey on Black Sea Bass.

*Gag* - not very common in the trap survey but relatively common in video survey.

Distribution has not changed between the two time periods.

*Scamp* – Based on trap catches, Scamp relative densities have remained low at well under half of the long-term average. Data show an increase in mean size from under about 21 inches TL in the 1990s to over about 24 inches in 2006 and beyond.

*Red grouper* - Relative CPUE remained low in the region, well under half of the long-term average. Due to the current low encounter rate of red grouper in the trap survey does not necessarily means that red grouper do not occur in areas sampled by the survey; however, that may be a reflection of the decline in abundance in the region.

### **Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) Report**

The Snapper Grouper AP met in Charleston on April 24-26, 2019. The AP discussed and provided recommendations, as appropriate, on items the Committee approved during their March 2019 meeting. Jimmy Hull, AP Chair, delivered a summary of the AP's comments and recommendations. The AP's report may be found [HERE](#).

### **Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Report**

The SSC met in Charleston on April 9-11, 2019. Dr. George Sedberry, SSC Chair, delivered a summary of the SSC's discussions and recommendations on items relevant to the snapper grouper fishery. The SSC provided recommendations on best fishing practices (Regulatory Amendment 29):

- Quantifying the benefit requires research and monitoring
- The effectiveness of descending devices depends on depth and species
- The Council should consider angler preferences regarding descending devices and venting tools
- Consider adding an alternative that requires *either* a venting *or* descending device
- Outreach and education could increase compliance and mitigate problems with devices:
- Improper venting can increase release mortality
- Reduced handling time is important with all devices
- It could take some time before benefits to release mortality can be applied to stock assessments. A large amount of information needs to be collected after these requirements are implemented.

The April 2019 SSC's summary report may be found [HERE](#).

### **Amendment 38 (Blueline Tilefish)**

Council staff presented background on catch level recommendations for blueline tilefish and options to implement these catch levels. Recommendations are based on results of the SEDAR 50 assessment and the acceptable biological catch (ABC) for the area between Cape Hatteras and the North Carolina/Virginia border. The Committee approved the following motion:

**MOTION #1: BEGIN DEVELOPMENT OF ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK  
AMENDMENT 3 TO ESTABLISH A NEW SOUTH ATLANTIC BLUELINE TILEFISH  
ACL.  
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

The Committee directed staff to bring a document to them in September 2019 for their consideration in September 2019 with the intent of approving it for public hearings in December 2019.

**Update on System Management Plans**

Council staff presented a [Story Map](#) on the Council’s Spawning Special Management Zones created in Amendment 36. This is intended as an outreach tool for the public to learn about the areas protected and the target species, the process to create and review the managed areas, the goals and objectives for the areas, and regulations in the areas. The Committee approved the following motion:

**MOTION #2:** APPROVE THE SPAWNING SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONES STORY MAP FOR REVIEW AND COMMENTS BY THE INFORMATION AND EDUCATION, LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND SNAPPER GROUPE ADVISORY PANELS.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**Options for Removing Jacks from the Snapper Grouper FMP**

During the March 2019 meeting, the Committee requested information to consider removal of greater amberjack, lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish from the Snapper Grouper FMP, possibly including in the Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP, or excluding them from certain management measures. The Committee stated that some of the management measures the Council is currently considering may not be appropriate for the “Jacks” species. Council staff presented options to address the issue. The Committee did not express intent to pursue modification to the placement of jacks in an FMP at this time.

**Regulatory Amendment 33 (Red Snapper Seasons Modifications)**

In March 2019 the Committee discussed possibly modifying 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. In addition, the Committee wanted to consider 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 to avoid the period of peak spawning.

Regarding the minimum number of days to allow recreational or commercial harvest of red snapper, the Committee discussed modifying/adding options to analyze but ultimately opted to only consider removing the provisions instead of reducing the minimum number of days (currently three).

**MOTION#3:** REMOVE OPTIONS 4 & 6 AND ALL SUB-OPTIONS (UNDER ALL OPTIONS) FOR ACTION 2

**SUBSTITUTE MOTION:** REMOVE OPTIONS 4, 6 & 7 FROM ACTION 2

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

**Option 4.** Modify the recreational red snapper season to start in August.

**Sub-option 4a.** First week

**Sub-option 4b.** Second week

**Sub-option 4c.** Third week

**Sub-option 4d.** Fourth week

**Option 6.** Modify the recreational red snapper season to start in October.

**Sub-option 6a.** First week

**Sub-option 6b.** Second week

**Sub-option 6c.** Third week

**Sub-option 6d.** Fourth week

**Option 7.** Modify the recreational red snapper season to start in May. Recreational harvest would not be allowed during July and August.

**Sub-option 7a.** First week

**Sub-option 7b.** Second week

**Sub-option 7c.** Third week

**Sub-option 7d.** Fourth week

SUBSTITUTE BECOMES MAIN MOTION

MAIN MOTION APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

The Committee directed staff add sub-alternatives under Action 3 to define “weekend”

**MOTION #4: REMOVE OPTIONS 4, 5, AND 6 FROM ACTION 4**

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

**Option 4.** Modify the commercial red snapper season start date to the second Monday in August, unless otherwise specified.

**Option 5.** Modify the commercial red snapper season start date to the second Monday in September, unless otherwise specified.

**Option 6.** Modify the commercial red snapper season start date to the second Monday in October, unless otherwise specified.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #5: ADD AN ALTERNATIVE TO ACTION 2 (RECREATIONAL SEASON) TO ALLOW HARVEST STARTING IN MAY FOR A PORTION OF THE PROJECTED DAYS AND RESUME HARVEST IN THE FALL IF ENOUGH ACL REMAINS.**

APPROVED BY COUNCIL (9-2-0)

The Committee directed staff to modify options to specify first day of the month.

**MOTION #6: APPROVE THE PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENTS AS MODIFIED**

The purpose and need of this framework amendment are to modify the structure of the South Atlantic red snapper commercial and recreational fishing seasons to increase the socio-economic benefits to fishermen and fishing communities while minimizing discard mortality and **providing protection for spawning red snapper.**

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #7:** APPROVE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 33 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS TO BE CONDUCTED VIA WEBINARS AND BRING THE DOCUMENT BACK TO THE COMMITTEE IN SEPTEMBER.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

\*\*\*GUIDANCE TO CONDUCT LISTENING STATIONS IN AUGUST\*\*\*

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**Regulatory Amendment 29 (Best Fishing Practices & Powerheads)**

Regulatory Amendment 29 includes actions to implement requirements for descending and/or venting devices, modifications to the circle hook requirement, and consideration of powerhead use in federal waters off South Carolina. Public hearings were conducted via webinar on April 30 and May 1, 2019. Council staff provided a summary of public comments and recommendations from Council advisors and reviewed modifications to the amendment since the March 2019 meeting.

- Council staff briefed the Committee how Washington state enforcement officials approach enforcement of the state’s descending device requirement. There have been no enforcement issues in that state under the current requirement that devices be on board the vessel and rigged for immediate use.
- Recent research discussed during the gray triggerfish assessment in the Gulf of Mexico suggest that the use of descending devices increases release mortality of this species. This is likely due to mouth morphology and longer handling time.
- Need to coordinate with southeast partner agencies to ensure the educational message on use of descending devices and venting tools is unified and consistent.
- USCG stated that requiring that venting tools be on board may increase search and rescue cases.
- The Gulf Council will be hosting a Release Mortality Workshop on October 7-9, 2019.
- Council staff indicated that specific guidance will be requested at the September meeting regarding outreach efforts.
- The next version of the draft amendment will include a description of homemade and commercially available devices that fit the definition of descending device used in the amendment.
- SERO staff expressed a request from the Office of Protected Resources to consider extending the circle hook requirements throughout the South Atlantic EEZ (excluding the yellowtail snapper fishery) to address terms and conditions in the 2016 Biological Opinion for the snapper grouper fishery.

The Committee approved the following motions:

**MOTION #8:** REMOVE “WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SNAPPER GROUPE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29” FROM ALTERNATIVES 2 AND 3 IN ACTION 1

*Action 1. Specify requirements for the use of descending devices\* and/or venting devices\*\* when fishing for or possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.*

**Preferred Alternative 2.** ~~Within six months of implementation of Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 29,~~ require a *descending device\** be on board a vessel fishing for or possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

**Preferred Sub-alternative 2a.** private recreational vessels.

**Preferred Sub-alternative 2b.** for-hire vessels.

**Preferred Sub-alternative 2c.** commercially permitted South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

**Alternative 3.** Within six months of implementation of Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 29, require a *venting device*\*\* be on board a vessel fishing for or possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

**Sub-alternative 3a.** private recreational vessels.

**Sub-alternative 3b.** for-hire vessels.

**Sub-alternative 3c.** commercially permitted South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #9:** MODIFY THE DEFINITION OF DESCENDING DEVICE AS FOLLOWS:

\* For the purpose of this requirement, “descending device” means an instrument, **SUFFICIENTLY WEIGHTED**, that will release fish at a depth sufficient for the fish to be able to recover from the effects of barotrauma, **A MINIMUM OF 33 feet (twice the atmospheric pressure at the surface) or greater AND ideally released at the same depth that it was caught.** The device can be, but is not limited to, a weighted hook, lip clamp, or box that will hold the fish while it is lowered to depth. The device should be capable of releasing the fish automatically, releasing the fish by 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 rigged and ready for use while fishing is occurring.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #10:** ACCEPT THE FOLLOWING EDITS TO ACTION 2, ALTERNATIVES 1 (NO ACTION), ALTERNATIVE 2, ALTERNATIVE 3, AND ALTERNATIVE 4:

**Action 2. Modify the requirement for the use of non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for and/or possessing snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear.**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Use of Non-stainless-steel circle hooks ~~is~~ **are** required ~~to be used~~ when fishing for ~~and/or possessing~~ species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit with hook-and-line gear and natural baits north of 28 degrees north latitude.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Require the use of *non-offset*, non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for ~~and/or possessing~~ species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit with hook-and-line gear and natural baits in the exclusive economic zone:

**Preferred Sub-alternative 2a.** north of 28 degrees north latitude (approximately 25 miles south of Cape Canaveral, Florida).

**Sub-alternative 2b.** throughout the extent of the South Atlantic Council’s jurisdiction (North Carolina/Virginia border through Key West, Florida), **except that other non-stainless steel hook types may be used when fishing for yellowtail snapper with natural baits.**

**Alternative 3.** Require *non-offset*, non-stainless-steel circle hooks be *on board* a vessel possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit when fishing **with hook-and-line gear and natural baits** in the exclusive economic zone:

**Sub-alternative 3a.** north of 28 degrees north latitude (approximately 25 miles south of Cape Canaveral, Florida).

**Sub-alternative 3b.** throughout the extent of the South Atlantic Council’s jurisdiction (North Carolina/Virginia border through Key West, Florida) **except that other non-stainless-steel hook types may be used when fishing for yellowtail snapper with natural baits.**

**Preferred Alternative 4.** Require the use of non-stainless-steel hooks when fishing for **and/or possessing** species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit **with hook-and-line gear and natural baits** in the exclusive economic zone.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #11: DE-SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2A AND SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2B AS PREFERRED**

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Require the use of *non-offset*, non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for **and/or possessing** species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit with hook-and-line gear and natural baits in the exclusive economic zone:

**Sub-alternative 2b.** throughout the extent of the South Atlantic Council’s jurisdiction (North Carolina/Virginia border through Key West, Florida), **except that other non-stainless steel hook types may be used when fishing for yellowtail snapper with natural baits.**

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

**MOTION FAILS**

(PREFERRED REVERTS BACK TO SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2A)

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Require the use of *non-offset*, non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for **and/or possessing** species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit with hook-and-line gear and natural baits in the exclusive economic zone:

**Preferred Sub-alternative 2a.** north of 28 degrees north latitude (approximately 25 miles south of Cape Canaveral, Florida).

### **Regulatory Amendment 30 (Red Grouper Management Measures)**

Regulatory Amendment 30 includes actions to revise the rebuilding schedule, modify the spawning season closure for red grouper off North and South Carolina, and implement a commercial trip limit for the South Atlantic region.

The Committee discussed rationale for why the proposed extension of the spawning closure does not include Georgia or Florida waters. Georgia representatives on the Committee stated that very minimal landings of red grouper in that state preclude the need to extend the closure in the EEZ off Georgia. Florida representatives maintained that the EEZ off that state is already closed to recreational and commercial harvest during 4 out of the 5 spawning months for red grouper. Based on the information presented on red grouper spawning activity in the South Atlantic Region, this is equitable to the proposed extended closure in the EEZ off the Carolinas, which would extend the closure in the Carolinas such that they would only be fishing during 4 out of 5 main spawning months.

The Committee discussed how the purchase and sale prohibition relates to the proposed extension of the spawning season closure off the Carolinas. The Committee clarified their intent that sale and purchase of red grouper harvested in the EEZ off the Carolinas by federally permitted vessels in May will be prohibited in all South Atlantic states. Sale and purchase of red grouper harvested in the EEZ off Georgia or Florida by federally permitted vessels during May will be allowed in all South Atlantic states.

The Committee discussed encouraging the use of the new scamp release app or a similar app to address any potential increase in red grouper discards in the Carolinas as a result of the proposed extension of the spawning closure.

The Committee approved the following motions:

**MOTION #12:** APPROVE THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS TO THE PURPOSE AND NEED.

***Purpose for Action***

The *purpose* of this **framework** amendment is to modify the rebuilding schedule for red grouper based on the results of the most recent stock assessment and extend protection for red grouper during the spawning season.

***Need for Action***

The *need* of this **framework** amendment is to rebuild the red grouper stock; and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #13:** APPROVE THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS IN ACTION 1.

*Action 1. Revise the Rebuilding Schedule for Red Grouper*

**Alternative 2.** Revise the rebuilding schedule to equal the shortest possible time period to rebuild in the absence of fishing mortality ( $T_{min}$ ). This would equal 5 years with the rebuilding time period ending in **2023 2024**. **2019 2020** would be Year 1.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION #14:** APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 30 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

**Wreckfish ITQ Review**

The Committee received a summary of work done to date and were presented with the preliminary conclusions and recommendations. The Committee requested that the IPT look at the section of the report that discusses why landings dropped in the late 1990s and 2000s and add more detail as appropriate. Overall, the Committee agreed with the conclusions and recommendations of the IPT, the Snapper Grouper and Law Enforcement APs, the Socio-



Economic Panel of the SSC, and the Wreckfish ITQ shareholders. The Committee had no additional conclusions or recommendations not already provided by these other groups. The Committee is expecting to see a final draft of the review in September of 2019 and the Council will vote on final approval at that time. In the future, the Council may discuss initiating an amendment to consider modifying the current Wreckfish ITQ program.

### **Economic Performance of the Snapper Grouper Fishery**

SEFSC staff delivered a presentation based on a NOAA technical memorandum titled *Economics of the U.S. South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper Fishery – 2016*. The tech memo provides summary information and economic estimates for the snapper grouper fishery, including estimates of net revenue and net cash flow that are potentially useful for better analyzing the economic effects of fishery management actions on the commercial sector. The presentation covered key points from the tech memo and provided a comparison of results between analysis of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic Region and the reef fish fishery in the Gulf of Mexico.

### **Other Business**

#### *Recreational deep-water species regional allocations*

Council staff requested guidance on the Committee's December 2018 request for a white paper on regional allocations for deep-water species. In March 2019 the Committee received results of a series of recreational workshops conducted in the South Atlantic region by the American Sportfishing Association and other sponsors. \*\*\*\*GUIDANCE TO RETAIN ITEM ON LIST FOR THE COUNCIL TO CONSIDER IN THE FUTURE\*\*\*\*\*

#### *Lionfish and traps issue*

SERO notified the committee that the General Prohibitions in the Code of Federal Regulations that specify the authorized gear types by fishery need minor corrections for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council section. In addition, SERO suggested that Council and SERO staff jointly develop an informational paper for the Council's review in September 2019 that considers the addition of authorized gear types for lionfish (non-FMP) to the regulations to authorize the retention of lionfish taken while legally fishing additional gear types. In addition, the informational paper would consider refining the fish trap definition to authorize the retention of lionfish incidentally taken in legally fished traps when that bycatch exceeds 25% of the trap's catch. The informational paper would outline any unintended consequences of taking these two actions. \*\*\*GUIDANCE TO WORK WITH STATE PARTNERS AND PREPARE THE WHITE PAPER FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER\*\*\*

**MOTION #15:** PREPARE A WHITE PAPER TO CONSIDER REMOVING ALMACO JACK FROM THE JACKS COMPLEX.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

### **MOTION #16:**

DIRECT STAFF TO COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING TASKS:

- INITIATE DEVELOPMENT OF ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK 3 TO ADDRESS CATCH LEVELS OF BLUELINE TILEFISH IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC
- CONDUCT PUBLIC HEARINGS ON REGULATORY AMENDMENT 33 (RED SNAPPER SEASONS) VIA WEBINAR AND LISTENING STATIONS AND

CONTINUE TO DEVELOP THE AMENDMENT FOR THE COUNCIL'S  
CONSIDERATION IN SEPTEMBER 2019

- FINALIZE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 30 (RED GROUPER) AND SUBMIT TO THE NMFS
- PREPARE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 29 (BEST FISHING PRACTICES) FOR THE COUNCIL TO CONSIDER FOR FINAL APPROVAL AT THE SEPTEMBER 2019 MEETING
- FINALIZE THE WRECKFISH ITQ REVIEW FOR THE COUNCIL TO CONSIDER FOR FINAL APPROVAL IN SEPTEMBER 2019.
- INCLUDE REVIEW OF THE SMP STORY MAP IN THE NEXT MEETINGS OF THE SNAPPER GROUPER, I&E, AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ADVISORY PANELS
- ASSIST SERO WITH WHITE PAPER ON LIONFISH AND TRAPS ISSUE TO BRING TO SEPTEMBER COUNCIL MEETING FOR CONSIDERATION
- PREPARE INFORMATION DOCUMENT (WHITE PAPER) ON REMOVING ALMACO JACK FROM THE JACKS COMPLEX AND BRING FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION AT THE DECEMBER 2019 MEETING.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL