

Overview

Snapper Grouper Committee

Double Tree by Hilton Atlantic Beach Oceanfront
2717 West Fort Macon Road
Atlantic Beach, NC

December 7-8, 2016

The committee will: (1) receive reports on the status of commercial and recreational landings of snapper grouper species relative to their respective ACLs; (2) receive a status report on amendments under Secretarial review; (3 & 4) receive reports from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Chair and the Scientific and Statistical Committee Chair; (5) receive a presentation on recompression of deepwater groupers; (6) review commercial discard data for red grouper; (7) discuss Amendment 41 (mutton snapper); (8) discuss the annual evaluation of the Vision Blueprint; (9 & 10) discuss recreational and commercial amendments addressing the Vision Blueprint; (11) receive a presentation on red snapper landings by county in Florida; (12) discuss Amendment 43 (red snapper & reporting); (13) discuss golden tilefish; and (14) address other business as appropriate.

1. Status of Landings for Snapper Grouper Species Under ACLs (*Attachments 1a & 1b*)

The Committee will receive an update on the status of commercial and recreational landings for snapper grouper species relative to their ACLs. At their June 2016 meeting, the Council approved only receiving updates on recreational landings during their March and December meetings.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

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
- Amendment 36 (Spawnign SMZs) – sent to NMFS on 8/30/16
- Amendment 37 (hogfish) – sent to NMFS on 9/23/16

3. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Report (*Attachment 2*)

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) met in Charleston on October 31 and November 1, 2016. Mr. Kenneth Fex, AP Chair, will deliver 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.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

4. Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Report (on Dec 2016 BB webpage)

The SSC met in Charleston on October 18-20, 2016. Dr. Marcel Reichert, SSC Chair, will deliver 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. The SSC Report contains discussion and recommendations on other Council managed species that will be reviewed by different Committee's. Therefore, the report is not being duplicated as an attachment on multiple committee agendas but will be available on the December 2016 Briefing book web page or at the following link:

http://d2isapt1vd0y4i.cloudfront.net/download/Briefing%20Book%20Dec%202016/SSCReport_11_21_2016_FINAL.pdf

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

5. Evaluating the efficacy of descender devices in increasing the survival of deepwater groupers using telemetry (Attachment 3)

Discard mortality rates of deepwater (>100 m) groupers have long been assumed to be at or near 100% because these species experience severe barotrauma upon capture. An effective technique to mitigate barotrauma and increase survival rates of discarded deepwater groupers may help in maintaining or rebuilding populations of these species. The authors used acoustic telemetry tags (with acceleration and depth sensors) and submersible receivers to monitor activity of 19 deepwater groupers caught in ~100 m depth and released in the water column after forced recompression using a descender device. The deepwater groupers were speckled hind, snowy grouper, and scamp. Acceleration and depth data were used to assign fates to detected fish. Survival of the 19 recompressed groupers was between 63% and 94%, depending on the method of fate assignment. Descender devices appear to be a very promising tool for increasing survival of discarded deepwater groupers.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

6. Red Grouper Commercial Discards Presentation (Attachment 4)

At the September 2016 Council meeting, Council staff delivered an overview of the Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report for red grouper. During the discussion it was noted that commercial discards increased sharply after 2012 whereas landings were very low for 2013-2015, some of the lowest in the time series. Council members requested a more detailed examination of the discard data to explore whether the increase in discards could be due to undersized fish, which could indicate a year class about to be recruited into the fishery. A request was made to the SEFSC to prepare a report on the issue for the December Council meeting.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

7. Snapper Grouper Amendment 41 (Mutton Snapper; Attachments 5a & 5b)

Amendment 41 updates biological benchmarks and fishing levels based on the update assessment (SEDAR 15A Update 2015) and considers modifying existing management measures. The Council is scheduled to finalize any needed changes to the amendment and approve for formal review.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss, provide guidance to staff, deem the codified text, and approve for formal review.

8. Annual Review of Vision Blueprint (Attachment 6)

The Council's Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery (2016-2020), includes an evaluation plan with the following objectives:

- Ensure management actions (and others) that are developed are helping achieve the vision for the snapper grouper fishery.
- Allow flexibility to adapt management strategies (and others) to accommodate changes in the fishery.
- Continue stakeholder engagement with the Vision Blueprint process.
- Consider stakeholder support on short-term action items developed in 2016-2017 and how these actions have impacted stakeholders.
- Consider stakeholder feedback on how to approach long-term action items, items not considered in 2015 and emerging issues in the fishery.
- Allow new Council members to become familiar with the Vision Blueprint.

The evaluation plan calls for annual, biennial, and comprehensive reviews, the first of which would be undertaken during the Council's December 2016 meeting. In addition, the plan states that a webinar should be held to inform stakeholders of progress to date. Webinars will take place on Monday, November 21, 2016 at 10 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

9. Vision Blueprint Recreational Regulatory Amendment 26 (Attachments 7a & 7b)

In September 2016, the Council instructed staff to develop an options paper to finalize items that would be taken out for scoping in early 2017. The amendment includes actions that address the Council's vision for the snapper grouper fishery and are included in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint. Two amendments are being developed in parallel, one addressing management measures for the recreational sector and one including actions geared towards the commercial sector (see below). The options paper for Regulatory Amendment 26 (Recreational) includes 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). **Attachment 7b** presents average landings (pounds whole weight) data from 2011 through 2015 by species for the headboat, charter, and private recreational modes. The Committee requested this information to discuss possible modifications to recreational aggregate bag limits.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss, provide guidance to staff on modifications to scoping document, and approve for scoping.

10. Vision Blueprint Commercial Regulatory Amendment 27 (Attachment 8)

The Committee will review and discuss the options paper for Regulatory Amendment 27, which addresses items in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint that direct management of the commercial sector. The Committee will discuss items to be included in a scoping document. The options paper currently includes 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).

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss, provide guidance to staff on modifications to scoping document, and approve for scoping.

11. Red Snapper Landings by County In Florida (Attachment 9)

During discussion of Amendment 43 at the September 2016 Council meeting, Council members noted the need to use spatially explicit data to inform management options for red snapper. Besides using survey data from fishery-independent sampling, landings can be examined at a higher resolution to discern possible spatial patterns. To this end, a request was made to explore recreational landings of red snapper in Florida by county with the intent to resolve “hot spots” of abundance. SEFSC staff will deliver this presentation ahead of the Amendment 43 discussion.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and provide guidance to staff.

12. Snapper Grouper Amendment 43 (Red Snapper; Attachment 10)

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.). In September 2016, the Council provided further guidance to staff on possible actions and alternatives and requested that a scoping document be prepared for review at the December 2016 meeting. If approved, scoping hearings would be held in late January/early February 2017.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss, provide guidance to staff on modifications to scoping document, and approve for scoping.

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 table below shows fishing level recommendations from SEDAR 25 (2011) and SEDAR 25 Update (2016) in pounds gutted weight (lbs gw):

	SEDAR 25 (2011) (lbs gw)	SEDAR 25 Update (2016) (lbs gw)
MSY	596,643	560,000
OFL		
2017	804,000	377,000
2018	763,000	402,000
2019	730,000	426,000
ABC		
2017	608,000	233,000
2018	596,000	267,000
2019	586,000	302,000

Council members expressed concern over the large differences in biological benchmarks and fishing level recommendations from the 2016 update vs. SEDAR 25. It was noted that different methodologies were used in the update and several more years of data were added to the model. Both of these factors contributed to the large differences in the estimates. At their June 2016 meeting, the Council received the results of the update from the SSC. However, Council members requested that the SSC discuss specific items pertaining to the update during their fall 2016 meeting. Specifically, the Council requested the following:

1. REVIEW PRODUCTIVITY ESTIMATES OF PREVIOUS TILEFISH ASSESSMENTS, IDENTIFY UNCERTAINTIES THAT IMPACT PRODUCTIVITY ESTIMATES, AND COMMENT ON HOW WELL OVERALL STOCK PRODUCTIVITY IS DETERMINED AT THIS POINT IN TIME. IDENTIFY RESEARCH OR DATA NEEDS THAT COULD IMPROVE ESTIMATES OF PRODUCTIVITY FOR FUTURE ASSESSMENTS.
2. REVIEW APPLICATION OF THE P* TECHNIQUE TO THE TILEFISH UPDATE. PROVIDE AN EXPLANATION FOR THE APPARENT UNUSUALLY LARGE DIFFERENCE IN YIELD BETWEEN THE OFL (P* = 0.5) AND THE ABC (P* = 0.3). COMPARE THE BUFFER ESTIMATED FOR TILEFISH WITH THOSE FOR OTHER ASSESSMENTS WITH SIMILAR P* VALUES. IDENTIFY WHICH ASSESSMENT UNCERTAINTIES ARE “DRIVING” THE P* ANALYSIS AND THE HIGH BUFFER. CONSIDER WHETHER THE P* APPROACH IS APPROPRIATE FOR THIS ASSESSMENT, AND WHETHER BASING ABC ON YIELD AT 75% FMSY AND OFL ON YIELD AT FMSY IS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE.
3. REVIEW THE PERFORMANCE, ACCURACY, AND RELIABILITY OF TILEFISH ASSESSMENT PROJECTIONS FROM PAST ASSESSMENTS. THE COUNCIL IS CONCERNED WITH THE IMPACT OF THE HIGH AGE OF FISHERY SELECTIVITY COMBINED WITH THE LACK OF FISHERY INDEPENDENT INFORMATION FOR YOUNGER FISH ON STOCK PROJECTIONS. IDENTIFY RESEARCH OR DATA NEEDS THAT COULD IMPROVE FUTURE PROJECTIONS.

4. COMMENT ON THE BIOLOGICAL RISK AND THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF A PHASED-IN APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING THE REDUCED CATCH LEVELS FOR TILEFISH, SUCH THAT THE ABC IS SET EQUAL TO OFL IN YEAR 1 AND THEN ABC IS SPECIFIED THROUGH THE STANDARD APPLICATION OF THE CONTROL RULE IN LATER YEARS. ALSO CONSIDER PROVIDING A CONSTANT ABC FOR LATER YEARS, SPECIFIED IN 3-YEAR BLOCKS.

As requested, the SSC discussed the items above during their October 2016 meeting but made no change to the biological benchmarks and ABC recommendations. The SSC did not offer comment on item #4 above, however, since NOAA General Counsel advised (during the SSC meeting) that such a phased-in approach would first have to be incorporated into the Council’s ABC Control Rule in order to be implemented (this according to recent revisions to the National Standard 1 Guidelines).

Commercial and recreational landings of golden tilefish from 2010 through 2015 in pounds whole weight (lbs ww) and pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) are shown below. Average landings for the time period were 512,268 lbs gw and 574,143 lbs ww. The recommended ABC for 2017 (233,000 lbs gw) would represent a 55% reduction in harvest from average 2010-2015 landings, a 62% reduction from average 2014-2015 landings, and a 56% reduction from 2015 landings.

Golden Tilefish Landings (lbs gw)			
Year	Commercial	Recreational	Total
2010	365,527	9,636	375,162
2011	361,401	18,888	380,289
2012	517,282	11,513	528,795
2013	537,950	14,040	551,990
2014	704,617	4,520	709,137
2015	514,054	16,341	530,395
Average	500,139	12,490	512,268

Golden Tilefish Landings (lbs ww)			
Year	Commercial	Recreational	Total
2010	409,390	10,792	420,182
2011	404,769	21,154	425,923
2012	579,356	12,895	592,251
2013	602,504	15,724	618,228
2014	789,171	5,062	794,233
2015	575,741	18,302	594,043
Average	560,155	13,988	574,143

COMMITTEE ACTION:

OPTION 1. REQUEST THAT NMFS TAKE EMERGENCY ACTION TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO FISHING LEVELS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH TO END OVERFISHING

This option would most likely not result in changes that would affect the 2017 longline season but could affect the hook-and-line season. The changes would, however, be in effect prior to the start of the January 2018 fishing year. The Council would have to be working on an amendment to replace any emergency rule within 1 year.

OPTION 2. UTILIZE THE EXPEDITED FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE TO ADOPT NEW FISHING LEVELS FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH TO END OVERFISHING.

The expedited framework procedure could be used to adjust fishing levels but not to modify/implement management measures. If approved in March or June 2017, regulations would only affect the hook-and line sector in 2017 and both the longline and hook-and-line sectors in 2018.

OPTION 3. INITIATE DEVELOPMENT OF A REGULATORY AMENDMENT TO IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO FISHING LEVELS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR GOLDEN TIELFISH TO END OVERFISHING.

Adjustments to management measures would need to be done through a regulatory amendment. A regulatory amendment would need to be approved in June 2017 for regulations to be in place by January 2018 and the Council would need to reprioritize other snapper grouper items.

OPTION 4. INITITATE 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

This option would require a full year to develop, and the Council would need to work with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to modify the ABC Control Rule to address the new phased-in approach. Regulations would affect the 2019 fishing season and would need to reprioritize other snapper grouper items.

OPTION 5. OTHERS??

14. Other Business

The Committee will address other business as appropriate.