

Overview

Snapper Grouper Committee

Westin Jekyll Island
110 Ocean Way
Jekyll Island, GA

March 7-8, 2017

The committee will: (1) receive a status report on amendments under Secretarial review; (2) receive reports on the status of commercial landings of snapper grouper species relative to their respective ACLs; (3) review discussion paper on re-opening criteria and provide guidance to NMFS SERO regarding re-opening criteria when projected landings are close to the ACL; (4) review scoping comments on Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 (Recreational Management Measures), review scoping/decision document, and provide guidance to staff; (5) review scoping comments on Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 (Commercial Management Measures), review scoping/decision document, and provide guidance to staff; (6) discuss discards-only projections for red snapper, review information on descending devices and release mortality of red snapper, review scoping comments on Amendment 43 (Red Snapper Management and Recreational Reporting), review Amendment 43 Options Paper, and provide guidance to staff; (7) review public hearing comments on Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper Allocations), review Decision Document, and provide guidance to staff; (8) discuss options for Amendment 45 (ABC Control Rule Revisions and Golden Tilefish Management) and provide guidance to staff and the SSC; (9) discuss white paper on limited-entry for the for-hire sector and provide guidance to staff; and (10) address other business as appropriate.

1. Status of Amendments Approved for Secretarial Review

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

- Amendment 36 (Spawnign SMZs) – sent to NMFS on 8/30/16
- Amendment 37 (hogfish) – sent to NMFS on 9/23/16
- Amendment 41 (Mutton Snapper)

2. Status of Commercial Landings for Snapper Grouper Species Under ACLs **(Attachment 1a)**

The Committee will receive an update on the status of commercial 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 June and December meetings.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

3. Guidance on re-opening criteria when projected landings are close to the ACL **(Attachment 1b)**

During the December 2016 Council meeting, the Regional Administrator requested guidance from the Council to help SERO determine when to re-open harvest when a species' projected landings are close to the ACL. The request came subsequent to discussing the status of

commercial landings relative to the vermilion snapper ACL. Commercial harvest for vermilion snapper was closed on October 11, 2016; however, it was later determined that only 95% of the commercial ACL had been harvested. Council guidance dating back from 2012 stated that harvest should resume when 95% or less of the ACL had been landed. Hence, NMFS re-opened commercial fishing for vermilion snapper for two days on December 14, 2016. Re-opening harvest when landings are so close to an ACL, however, is risky and different criteria may be needed to determine whether it is a prudent action for some species. The discussion that ensued at the December 2016 Council meeting prompted a request to develop a framework-type or “decision tree” approach that would allow NMFS to make a determination on how re-opening should be conducted when situations such as that with vermilion snapper arise in the future. **COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and take action as necessary.

4. Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 - Recreational Management Measures (Attachments 2a & 2b)

Scoping hearings were conducted via webinar on January 12, 2017. Additional in-person hearings were conducted at 4 locations in Florida during the week of January 23, 2017; two locations in South Carolina and one location in Georgia during the week of January 30; and at three locations in North Carolina during the week of February 6, 2017. The Committee will review scoping comments (*Attachment 2a*) and provide guidance on actions that will continue to be developed in the amendment during 2017.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Consider scoping comments and provide guidance to staff and actions and timing.

5. Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 - Commercial Management Measures (Attachments 3a & 3b)

Scoping hearings were conducted via webinar on January 12, 2017. Additional in-person hearings were conducted at 4 locations in Florida during the week of January 23, 2017; two locations in South Carolina and one location in Georgia during the week of January 30; and at three locations in North Carolina during the week of February 6, 2017. The Committee will review scoping comments (*Attachment 3a*) and provide guidance on actions that will continue to be developed in the amendment during 2017.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Consider scoping comments and provide guidance to staff on actions and timing.

6. Amendment 43 (Red Snapper & Recreational Reporting; Attachments 4a-4f)

The Committee will discuss projections provided by the SEFSC under a discards-only scenario (*Attachment 4a*), a literature review on red snapper release mortality (*Attachment 4b*), and presentation on Southeast Barotrauma Workshop (*Attachment 4c*). The Committee will then review scoping comments on Amendment 43 (*Attachment 4d*). A Question & Answer webinar for Amendment 43 was conducted on January 17, 2017. In-person scoping hearings were conducted at 4 locations in Florida during the week of January 23, 2017; two locations in South Carolina and one location in Georgia during the week of January 30; and at three locations in North Carolina during the week of February 6, 2017. The Committee will consider public input and provide guidance on actions to be analyzed and timing for amendment development.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and provide guidance to staff on actions and timing.

7. Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper; Attachments 5a-5d)

Amendment 44 contains two actions: manage yellowtail snapper harvest under a single ABC and ACL for the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions, and consider modifications to sector allocations to avoid in-season closures. The former action was added to the amendment during the December 2016 Council meeting when the amendment was approved for public hearings. A Question & Answer webinar for Amendment 44 was conducted on January 17, 2017. Listening stations were held in Key West and Marathon, Florida, on January 18 and 19, 2017, respectively. Additional in-person hearings were conducted at 4 locations in Florida during the week of January 23, 2017. Comments were also solicited at in-person hearings in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. The Committee will consider public comment (*Attachments 5a & 5b*) and provide guidance on appropriate modifications to the actions and alternatives. In addition, the Committee will discuss timing of amendment development (*Attachments 5c & 5d*) in light of the Gulf Council moving forward with an amendment to their Reef Fish FMP to also consider a single ABC and ACL for yellowtail snapper spanning across the Councils' jurisdictions.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and provide guidance to staff on actions/alternatives and timing.

8. Amendment 45 (ABC Control Rule Revisions & Golden Tilefish; Attachments 6a & 6b)

During their December 2016 meeting, the Council received a presentation from NMFS regarding revisions to the National Standard 1 (NS 1) guidelines that provide guidance to Councils on how to prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield. While the 2016 revisions do not require Councils to revise their FMPs, they provide added flexibility to address management issues within the current statutory framework. Among the features that would impart more flexibility and stability to managed fisheries are (1) phasing-in changes to catch levels, (2) carrying over unused quota from one fishing year to the next, and (3) multi-year overfishing status determinations. In order to apply these approaches to managed stocks, changes must first be made to the ABC Control Rule. Hence, the Council directed staff to begin developing an amendment that would revise the South Atlantic ABC Control Rule to adopt the approaches in the revised NS 1 guidelines. In addition, the Council has expressed interest in modifying the current ABC Control Rule to allow more flexibility in selecting the risk of overfishing. At its April 2017 meeting, the SSC will be asked to consider ABC control rule modifications that address the NS 1 provisions regarding phase-in, carry-over, and multi-year status determinations.

Once the ABC Control Rule is modified, the Council would like to apply the more flexible approach to revising the catch levels of golden tilefish (that must be modified in response to the latest stock assessment update) and specifying the risk of overfishing. In anticipation of the latter change taking pace, the Council requested projections from the SEFSC at P* levels of 0.40 (*Attachment 6a*) and 0.45 (*Attachment 6b*).

The table below shows fishing level recommendations from SEDAR 25 (2011) and SEDAR 25 Update (2016) in pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) a P*=0.30:

	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

COMMITTEE ACTION: Provide guidance to inform SSC discussions regarding revisions to the ABC Control Rule and options to implement catch levels for golden tilefish. Provide guidance on timing of amendment development.

9. Discussion on limited-entry for the for-hire component of the snapper grouper fishery (Attachments 7a & 7b)

At recent meetings, the Council discussed some issues with the for-hire sector of the snapper grouper fishery that could be addressed through limiting the number of for-hire permits in the fishery, and some potential benefits to improve the for-hire component. The potential challenges that the Council could address include limiting the number of for-hire vessels interacting with red snapper thereby lowering discard mortality, data quality issues, compliance with existing (headboats) and upcoming (charter vessel) reporting requirements, lack of stability for businesses to plan, and overcapacity in the for-hire fleet (too many boats, not enough fish). The issue of limiting the number of for-hire (Charter/Headboat) permits was raised by the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) (most recently at their November 2016 meeting), and in the visioning process public comments the Council received in 2014-2015. At their December 2016 meeting, the Council requested that a white paper be developed to better inform further discussion on the issue.

COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and provide guidance to staff

10. Other Business

The Committee will address other business as appropriate.