

Overview

Snapper Grouper Committee

Sawgrass Marriott
1000 PGA Tour Boulevard
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL
June 2014

The Committee will: (A) receive reports from SERO on the status of commercial and recreational catches versus the respective ACLs for snapper grouper species; (B) receive a status report from SERO staff on snapper grouper amendments under Secretarial review; (C) receive a report from SERO on the estimated ACL for red snapper in 2014 based on total removals and estimated dead discards; (D) receive a report on the April 2014 Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel meeting; (E) receive a report on the April 2014 SSC meeting; (F) receive a report from Council staff on recommendations from the Oculina Experimental Closed Area Evaluation Team; (G) receive a presentation on 2013 fishery-independent surveys in the South Atlantic; (H) receive an update on the status of analyses for Regulatory Amendment 16 (black sea bass pot closure); (I) receive an update on the status of Amendment 22 (recreational harvest tag program); (J) receive an overview of Amendment 29 and approve for formal review; (K) receive an overview of Amendment 32 (blueline tilefish) and approve for public hearings; (L) receive an overview of Regulatory Amendment 20 (snowy grouper) and approve for public hearings; (M) receive an overview of the SSC's recommendations on wreckfish and gag and take action as appropriate; (N) receive an overview of Regulatory Amendment 17 (MPAs), discuss an alternative approach, and approve for scoping; (O) discuss renewal of Corps permits for artificial reef construction off the coast of NE Florida; (P) receive an overview of issues being addressed through the South Florida Management Issues Group, discuss development of Amendment 35 to remove species from the Snapper Grouper FMU, and approve for scoping; (Q) discuss loophole that allows golden tilefish longline endorsement holders to fish with hook-and-line gear after the longline quota has been met; and (R) address other issues as appropriate.

A. Status of landings for quota-managed snapper grouper species (*Attachments 1a & 1b*)

The Committee will receive an update on the status of landings (commercial and recreational) for snapper grouper species under ACLs. In addition, the Committee will receive an explanation of the 2014 overage of the commercial quota for the golden tilefish longline sector. The current commercial quota for the longline sector is 405,971 lb gw. Commercial landings reached 538,885 lb gw for that sector resulting in a 33% overage as of 5/5/14. The longline fishery was closed on March 5, 2014. The Council implemented separate quotas for the longline and hook-and-line portions of the golden tilefish commercial fishery through Amendment 18B, effective May 23, 2013. In addition, a trip limit for the longline sector was set at 4,000 lb gw and an endorsement program was put in place that capped the number of vessels allowed to use longline gear to fish for golden tilefish at 23. Currently, the number of endorsements on the SERO website is 19. Under the quota monitoring system, NMFS SEFSC

can forensically determine what caused the overage (new dealers, late reports, etc.). If the overage was due to late reports, the Council may want to discuss what law enforcement actions can be requested.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

B. Status of Amendments Approved for Secretarial Review

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

- A. Regulatory Amendment 14/EA (Multiple Species) – sent to NMFS 1/15/14; proposed rule published 4/25/14 with comments due by 5/27/14.
- B. Emergency Rule (Blueline Tilefish) – sent to NMFS 12/17/13; temporary rule/emergency action published 4/17/14 and is effective 4/17/14 through 10/14/14; and comments were accepted through 5/19/14. If the Council wants to extend the temporary rule, action would need to be taken at the September 2014 meeting.
- C. Regulatory Amendment 21 (MSST) – sent to NMFS 4/1/14.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

C. Red Snapper Removals and 2014 ACL (*Attachments 1c-1e*)

Amendment 28, which became effective on July 24, 2013, specified: (1) a process to determine if a fishing season will occur each year, which would include specification of the allowable harvest and season lengths for the commercial and recreational sectors; (2) an equation to determine the annual catch limit amount for each sector; and (3) management measures if fishing is allowed.

SERO staff will present the 2013 estimates of the total removals (landings and dead discards) of red snapper in the South Atlantic. SERO staff will indicate if there will be a fishing season for 2014 and what the commercial and recreational ACLs might be. A fishing season can occur in 2014 if the total removals (landings and dead discards) from the previous year do not exceed the ABC for that year. If there can be a fishing season, the ACL determination will be based on the equation in Amendment 28.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

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

The Snapper Grouper AP met in Charleston on April 8-11, 2014. The AP addressed several issues and provided recommendations for the Council to consider. Robert Johnson stepped down as AP Chair and Jim Atack, former AP Vice-Chair was elected to serve as Chair for the next two years. Kenny Fex was elected Vice Chair of the AP. Kenny will be providing the AP report to the Committee.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Consider the AP's recommendations and take action as necessary.

E. Scientific and Statistical Committee Report (*Attachment 3*)

The SSC met in Charleston on April 29 - May 1, 2014. Dr. Luiz Barbieri, SSC Chair, will present the SSC's recommendations to the Committee.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Consider the SSC's recommendations and take action as necessary.

F. Oculina Experimental Closed Area Evaluation (Attachment 4)

In April 2004, regulations were implemented through Amendment 13A that extended the bottom fishing restrictions for the Oculina Experimental Closed Area (OECA) for an indefinite period. The amendment was developed to address the 10-year sunset provision for the closure of the area to snapper grouper fishing. In addition to extending the closure, the amendment required that the size and configuration of the OECA be reviewed within three years of the implementation date of Amendment 13A and that a 10-year re-evaluation be conducted. The Council also developed an Evaluation Plan to address needed monitoring and research, outreach, and enforcement efforts. The Council approved the OECA Evaluation Plan in March 2005. The Plan contains goals and objectives in three broad areas: Outreach, Law Enforcement, and Research/Assessment.

To accomplish the 10-year re-evaluation, a series of breakout groups were convened via webinar during March 2014 to discuss the research, outreach, and law enforcement portions of the Evaluation Plan. Council staff will present the OECA Evaluation Team's report and recommendations to the Committee.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review, modify, and approve the Evaluation Report; determine if any changes are necessary to the Oculina Experimental Closed Area; and provide guidance to staff.

G. Annual report on South Atlantic fishery-independent surveys (Attachment 5)

Dr. Marcel Reichert will give a presentation summarizing data collected through the Marine Monitoring, Assessment, and Prediction (MARMAP) Program, the Southeast Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP), and the Southeast Fishery Independent Survey (SEFIS).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

H. Regulatory Amendment 16 (black sea bass pot closure; Attachments 6a & 6b)

Council staff will update the Committee on the progress of the amendment since the March 2014 Council meeting. The amendment includes one action to modify the November 1 – April 30 annual closure on the use of black sea bass pots to protect ESA-listed whales. The bulk of needed data and analyses are being provided by the Protected Resources Division of SERO and will not be ready until the September 2014 meeting. The Council was scheduled to approve for public hearings at the June 2014 meeting and staff is recommending that this be changed to December 2014, with public hearings taking place in January 2015.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss timing of amendment development and provide guidance to staff.

I. Update on Amendment 22 (recreational harvest tag program; Attachment 7)

At the March 2014 meeting, Monica Smit-Brunello informed the Committee that NOAA GC had begun developing guidelines that could be applied nationally to determine whether proposed programs fit the criteria of Limited Access Privilege Programs (LAPPs). Monica indicated that more information was needed to make that determination for the program proposed in

Amendment 22 and stated that state directors would be contacted directly and more details would be provided to the Committee and Council at the June 2014 meeting.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as necessary.

J. Amendment 29 (ORCS & gray triggerfish; Attachments 8a – 8c)

Council staff will provide an overview of the actions and alternatives in the amendment and any updated analyses since the March 2014 Council meeting. The Committee will review the amendment, modify the document as necessary, and approve the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Modify the amendment as necessary, approve the codified text, and approve the amendment for formal review.

K. Amendment 32 (Blueline Tilefish; Attachments 9a & 9b)

Council staff will present an overview of Amendment 32 and request guidance from the Committee. The amendment includes actions to adjust the ABC/ACL for blueline tilefish according to the results of the latest stock assessment. Actions to adjust management measures to end overfishing are also included. The Emergency Rule that adjusted the blueline tilefish ACL to 224,100 pounds whole weight (lb ww) was implemented on April 17, 2014 and will be effective for 180 days with the option to renew for an additional 186 days. The Emergency Rule also temporarily removed blueline tilefish from the Deepwater Complex and adjusted the Deepwater Complex ACL accordingly. The commercial and recreational ACLs for blueline tilefish are 112,207 and 111,893 pounds whole weight, respectively.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review actions and alternatives and select preferreds as appropriate, modify the amendment as necessary, and approve for public hearings.

L. Regulatory Amendment 20 (Snowy grouper; Attachments 10a & 10b)

The SSC reviewed the snowy grouper assessment at their April 2014 meeting. The Council needs to adjust biological benchmarks and fishing levels as appropriate, for snowy grouper based on the stock assessment projections and the SSC's recommendations. Council staff will provide and overview of the amendment.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Revise actions and alternatives as needed and approve for public hearings.

M. Gag & Wreckfish (Attachment 11)

An assessment of the wreckfish stock in the South Atlantic was recently completed and reviewed through the SAFMC peer review process. The SSC reviewed the assessment during their April 2014 meeting and approved it as constituting the best available science and suitable for management. The SSC recommended a P* level (probability of overfishing) of 27.5%. The SSC also reviewed the stock assessment update for gag. The SSC was asked to apply the ABC control rule and provide fishing level recommendations. Gag was last assessed in 2006 through SEDAR 10. The stock was found to be undergoing overfishing and approaching an overfished condition. The SSC approved the assessment as the best scientific information available and suitable for management of the gag resource. The stock was found to be undergoing overfishing but was not overfished. The SSC recommended using the projected landings at P*=0.3 for the ABC and the projected landings at P*=0.5 as the OFL.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review, approve approach to implement recommended changes, approve alternatives and provide guidance on timing.

N. Regulatory Amendment 17 (MPAs; Attachments 12a – 12c)

The Council received a series of presentations on outreach, enforcement, and research/monitoring of the existing MPAs at the December 2013 meeting and asked that the AP receive the same presentations. The Snapper Grouper AP received these reports and additional reports at their April 2014 meeting. In addition, Council staff presented an alternative approach to protect spawning. The Snapper Grouper AP recommended the Council take the alternative approach to scoping. Council staff will review the decision document and the alternative approach. The Committee and Council will determine which approach to take to scoping.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: review, modify, and approve document for scoping.

O. Renewal of Corps permits for artificial reef construction (Attachment 13)

The Corps of Engineers permit for artificial reef construction in northeast Florida is up for renewal. Council staff will review a draft letter the Committee/Council may want to send in support of renewal. Placement of artificial reef material is a component of the alternative approach to protect spawning and so it is critical that this permit be renewed.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: review and modify letter; consider sending letter requesting renewal

P. South Florida Management Issues (Attachments 14a & 14b)

Council staff will review work completed by the South Florida Management Issues Council Committee. A draft scoping document for Snapper Grouper Amendment 35 (Species Removal) is included as **Attachment 14a**. The Committee/Council will review, revise, and approve for scoping to be done in August 2014.

Council staff will review the options developed for the Joint Generic Amendment (SA & GM) included as **Attachment 14b**. The Committee/Council will review, revise and provide guidance.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review, revise, and approve SG Amendment 35 for scoping. Review, revise, and provide guidance on options for the Joint Generic Amendment (SA & GM).

Q. Golden Tilefish Longline Endorsements Issue

Amendment 18B established a longline endorsement program for the commercial golden tilefish fishery and set separate quotas for the longline and hook-and-line sectors (75% of the commercial ACL for longline and 25% for hook-and-line). In addition, a commercial trip limit of 4,000 lb gw was established for the longline sector and a trip limit of 500 lb gw for the hook-and-line sector. The amendment and the Final Rule clarified that longline endorsement holders were not eligible to fish the 500-lb hook-and-line trip limit. Moreover, the regulations specify that after the commercial quota for the longline component is reached or is projected to be reached, golden tilefish may not be fished for or possessed by a vessel with a golden tilefish longline endorsement.

The amendment specifies “the golden tilefish longline endorsement must be associated with a valid South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit in order for it to be effective. Each

golden tilefish longline endorsement would be assigned a unique number and endorsements would be issued with an expiration date to coincide with the expiration date of the South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit issued to the same vessel.” However, this protocol seems to have been ignored during implementation. Snapper Grouper Unlimited Permits are renewable on the permittee’s birthday; however, fishermen can wait to renew their longline endorsement until the beginning of the longline season, which effectively allows them to fish under the 500-lb hook-and-line trip limit after the longline quota has been met because they technically do not have a valid longline endorsement on their vessel.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and take action as appropriate.

R. Other Business

The Committee will address other items as appropriate.