

Overview

Snapper Grouper Committee

The King and Prince
201 Arnold Road
St. Simons Island, GA

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) discuss items for inclusion in Amendment 37 and provide guidance on development and timing; (D) receive an update on Amendment 22 (recreational harvest tag program), discuss further development of the amendment, and provide guidance on timing; (E) receive a report on the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team meeting; (F) receive an overview of changes to Regulatory Amendment 16 (black sea bass pot closure) and revisions to analyses, review and modify the amendment as needed, and choose preferred alternatives for all actions; (G) receive an overview of changes to Amendment 36, modify the actions/alternatives as appropriate, approve alternatives, and approve for public hearings; (H) receive an overview of the draft System Management Plan for Deepwater MPAs and provide guidance to staff; (I) receive an overview of public comments on Amendment 35 (removal of species and golden tilefish endorsements), modify the amendment as needed, and approve all actions; (J) discuss landings of blueline tilefish north of the Council's jurisdiction and possible management options; and (K) address other business as appropriate.

A. Status of landings for snapper grouper species under ACLs (*Attachments 1a & 1b*)

The Committee will receive an update on the status of landings (commercial and recreational) for snapper grouper species under ACLs.

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. Amendment 29 (ORCS)
- B. Amendment 32 (Blueline Tilefish)
- C. Regulatory Amendment 20 (Snowy grouper)
- D. Regulatory Amendment 22 (Gag & Wreckfish)
- E. Amendment 33 (Fillets)
- F. Amendment 34 (Comprehensive AMs)

C. Amendment 37 (Short-term items from Visioning, hogfish, Jacks Complex, almaco jack trip limits, size limits on deepwater species, and red grouper; *Attachment 2*)

Council staff will present options for items to include in Amendment 37 based on the Council's guidance to date.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee should discuss which items should remain in the amendment and provide guidance to staff on timing and development.

D. Amendment 22 (Harvest tag program; Attachment 3)

The Council initiated development of Amendment 22 to address annual harvest levels of snapper grouper species with exceptionally low recreational annual catch limits (ACLs). The Council requested that an amendment be developed to create a recreational tag program for these species. Recreational fishery participants would be issued tags through a pre-determined process. Tags issued to individuals or entities would allow the tag holder to harvest a set number of fish from federal waters in the South Atlantic Region.

The Council reviewed a revised Options Paper at their December 2013 meeting but suspended further development of the amendment pending NOAA CG's input on several issues, including whether a recreational harvest tag program would be considered a Limited Access Privilege Program (LAPP) and thus be subject to specific requirements. NOAA CG provided further guidance to the Council at their September 2014 meeting. At the December 2014 meeting, the Council received a presentation from the NC Division of Marine Fisheries' Catch Card Program for Highly Migratory Species. Due to time constraints, the Committee did not make any decisions regarding the continued development of Amendment 22. Council staff will update the Committee on progress to date and request guidance on whether to continue development of the amendment in 2015.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Determine whether to continue development of a harvest tag program and provide guidance to staff on actions/alternatives and timing.

E. Report on ALWTRT meeting (Attachment 4)

The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) met in Providence, RI on January 12-14, 2015. Kari MacLauchlin, Council staff, briefed the ALWTRT on the Council's actions under consideration and will present an overview of discussions relevant to Regulatory Amendment 16.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: discuss and take action as appropriate.

F. Regulatory Amendment 16 (black sea bass pot closure; Attachments 5a-5d)

The Committee will receive an overview of changes to the amendment since the December 2014 Council meeting including revisions to the analyses based on SSC and Council guidance. The analyses simulate the potential landings of black sea bass pot endorsement holders during a winter season under each of the proposed alternatives. Factoring in landings by other gears, the date the ACL would be met under each scenario is predicted. The analyses also consider the seasonal distribution of black sea bass pot gear and North Atlantic right whales to compare the relative potential for right whale entanglements under each of the proposed spatial closure alternatives. The Council is scheduled to approve the amendment for public hearings at their June 2015 meeting. Public hearings would be held in August 2015.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Select preferred alternatives and provide guidance to staff on modifications to the amendment.

G. Amendment 36 (Spawning SMZs; Attachment 6)

Amendment 36 considers using Spawning SMZs to provide additional protection to species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit, including speckled hind and warsaw grouper.

During the December 2014 meeting, the Committee provided guidance on modifications to the amendment and timing. Council staff will give an overview of those changes and discuss the timing for public hearings, etc.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: review actions/alternatives, modify as needed, select alternatives for detailed analyses, and approve for public hearings.

H. System Management Plan for Deepwater MPAs (*Attachment 7*)

At the September 2013 meeting, the Council directed Council staff/IPT to work on a System Management Plan (SMP) for the existing 8 MPAs. An outline was presented at the September 2013 meeting. An updated draft will be presented to the Committee.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss and provide guidance.

I. Amendment 35 (Removal of Species and Golden Tilefish Endorsements; Attachments 8a-8c)

Council staff conducted an informational webinar and public hearings were held in Florida (Key West & Cocoa Beach) and South Carolina (Georgetown). Council staff will give an overview of public comments. The Council is scheduled to approve the amendment for formal review at the June 2015 meeting.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Consider public comment, modify the amendment as necessary, and approve all actions.

J. Blueline Tilefish Landings north of North Carolina (*Attachments 9a-9c*)

In a letter dated January 30, 2015 addressed to Chairman Hartig (*Attachment 9b*), Rick Robins, Mid-Atlantic Council Chair, expresses concern over the existence of “a regulatory loophole that poses an immediate risk to the blueline tilefish resource in the Mid-Atlantic region.” The letter states that recent commercial landings of blueline tilefish in states north of the South Atlantic Council’s jurisdiction are near the current ACL for that species in the South Atlantic. Furthermore, Mid-Atlantic states (other than VA and MD) have no regulations on the harvest of blueline tilefish. Hence, the Mid-Atlantic Council approved a motion at their December 2014 meeting to send letters to Mid-Atlantic state directors (see *Attachment 9b*) to request that states adopt commercial and recreational management measures to prevent the “unmanaged expansion” of the blueline tilefish fishery. To inform the Snapper Grouper Committee discussion, Dr. Jack McGovern will present commercial and recreational landings of blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic regions (*Attachment 9a*), Monica Smit-Brunello (NOAA GC) will provide legal guidance, and Council staff will present a Decision Document (*Attachment 9c*) containing background information and options for moving forward to address continued overfishing of blueline tilefish.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: consider emergency action and provide guidance to staff on amendment development and timing.

K. Other Business

The Committee will address other items as appropriate.