

**SUMMARY REPORT
FROM THE SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE MEETING
Jekyll Island, GA
March 4th & 5th, 2008**

The Snapper Grouper Committee met on March 4th and 5th, 2008 in Jekyll Island, GA. The committee received the following presentations:

1. Amendment 16, Gregg Waugh (SAFMC Staff), Dr. Jack McGovern (NMFS-SERO)

Dr. Jack McGovern presented comments from the Snapper Grouper AP on the Post Quota Bycatch Mortality (PQBM) analysis. Using feedback from the AP, the committee designated preferred fishing behavior scenarios that will be used to estimate the PQBM.

The committee refined options and chose preferred alternatives for measures to end overfishing of gag and vermilion snapper for inclusion in Amendment 16. A preferred alternative was also chosen for the action requiring (a) use of venting and dehooking tools and (b) use of non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks when using natural baits to fish for snapper grouper species. The committee also developed options where adjustments would be made to the vermilion snapper management measures based on the outcome of the new benchmark assessment. The committee approved the amendment for public hearings. Locations and dates for the public hearings will be scheduled as follows:

May 7; Homestead, Florida
May 9; Cape Canaveral, Florida
May 12; Brunswick, Georgia
May 13; N. Charleston, South Carolina
May 15; New Bern, North Carolina

All meetings will be scheduled from 3 to 7 P.M.

2. Amendment 15B, Rick DeVactor (SAFMC Staff)

Staff summarized comments received through the public hearing process and presented changes to the amendment made following the December Council meeting. The committee recognized the uncertainty in using weights for the recreational allocation and recommended that the recreational allocation be converted to numbers using a conversion factor provided by the Southeast Science Center. The committee directed the team to alter the language of the alternatives specifying the snowy grouper allocations to reflect that the allocation will be tracked in numbers based on best available information at the time in terms of snowy grouper weight-numbers conversions.

The committee was provided with a recent analysis of the North Carolina trip ticket program outlining landings and revenue information from those fishermen without the federal snapper grouper commercial permit. The team is developing a similar analysis using data from Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. This information will be available for the June Council meeting. NMFS indicated that the team economist will complete the analysis of economic and social effects of the action to modify the sales provision by the June Council meeting. The committee decided to delay the approval of the amendment for submittal for Secretarial Review until the June Council meeting when the action will be fully analyzed.

3. Amendment 17, Rick DeVictor (SAFMC Staff)

Staff presented the committee with a summary of the comments received during the scoping period. The committee reviewed the options paper. The committee moved various actions either to future amendments or to the Considered But Rejected Alternatives Appendix in order to focus the amendment on Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures for snapper grouper species undergoing overfishing and extending the Council's regulations on snapper grouper species to the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's jurisdiction. The schedule is to approve the amendment for public hearings at the September Council meeting.

In terms of ACLs, the SSCs will provide overfishing level recommendations (OFL) and ABCs at their June meeting. The committee would like the SSC to develop OFLs and ABCs for the species undergoing overfishing on an individual basis and ones for a shallow water grouper unit and a deepwater snapper grouper unit.

In terms of accountability measures, the committee directed the team to develop alternatives similar to the ones outlined in the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's proposed rule for Amendment 30A. These accountability measures will apply to a shallow water grouper unit, a deepwater snapper grouper unit, and to each of the remaining species undergoing overfishing (individually).

The committee was provided with the Summary Report from the red snapper assessment. The assessment results indicate that the stock is undergoing overfishing and is overfished. The SSC will review the assessment results at their June meeting. The committee decided to move any actions pertaining to red snapper out of Amendment 17 and into a separate amendment. The committee directed staff to schedule additional scoping meetings for such actions.

4. Gray's Reef Research Area Update, Becky Shortland (NOS NMFS)

Becky Shortland of Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary presented an update of a proposed research area within Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary, in addition to recent information concerning spearfishing in the sanctuary. Any proposed changes to the spearfishing requirements in the sanctuary will be presented to the Council at a future date.

The committee approved the following motions:

Amendment 16

MOTION #1. Adopt Alternatives 2, 3 and 5A as preferred.
Approved by Committee

Alternative 2. Establish a gag spawning season closure January through April that applies to both the commercial (20% reduction) and recreational (31% reduction) sectors; no fishing for and/or possession of gag would be allowed. In addition, no fishing for and/or possession of the following species would be allowed: black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, tiger grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney.

Alternative 3. Directed Commercial Quota. Establish the following directed quota (quota after PQBM has been subtracted) for 2009 onwards until modified. *Different PQBM scenarios were presented to the Council and SSC at the 2007 Council meeting; Jack McGovern will contact Snapper Grouper AP members and others to verify the most likely level of PQBM. PQBM is a function of many different factors including magnitude of harvest reduction and management measures needed to end overfishing.* After the commercial quota is met, all purchase and sale of the following species is prohibited and harvest and/or possession is limited to the bag limit: gag, black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, tiger grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney.

Alternative 5a. Reduce the 5-grouper aggregate bag limit to a 3-grouper aggregate bag limit, reduce the existing bag limit from 2 gag or black grouper to 1 gag or black grouper within the grouper aggregate bag limit, and exclude the captain and crew on for-hire vessels from possessing a bag limit for **groupers**. This plus the January through April spawning closure would be sufficiently close to the required 37% recreational reduction.

MOTION #2. Change Alternative 4 to indicate quotas will be tracked by dealer reporting and remove state trip ticket and logbook tracking.
Approved by Committee

Alternative 4. Divide the directed commercial quota into two regions: Allocate 63.3% to North and South Carolina (224,044 pounds gutted weight) and 36.7% to Georgia and Florida (129,896 pounds gutted weight). Each region's directed quota (after adjustment for PQBM) would be monitored from state trip ticket and logbook data based on state of landing. After the commercial quota is met in either region, all purchase and sale is prohibited in that region and harvest and/or possession is limited to the bag limit in that region.

MOTION #3. Adopt Alternative 2 as preferred.
Approved by Committee

Alternative 2. Directed Commercial Quota. Establish a directed commercial quota based on an interim allocation of 68% commercial and 32% recreational (Table 4-41). *Different PQBM scenarios were presented to the Council and SSC at the 2007 Council meeting; Jack McGovern will contact Snapper Grouper AP members and others to verify the most likely level of PQBM. PQBM is a function of many different factors including magnitude of harvest reduction and management measures needed to end overfishing.* After the commercial quota is met, all purchase and sale is prohibited and harvest and/or possession is limited to the bag limit.

MOTION #4. Adopt Alternative 3A as the preferred.
Approved by Committee

Alternative 3a. Allocate the directed commercial quota 50% to the period January 1st through June 30th and 50% to the period July 1st through December 31st (Table 42). Any remaining quota from period 1 would transfer to period 2. Any remaining quota from period 2 would not be carried forward.

Table 4-42. Commercial quotas for January-June (50%) and July-December (50%) taking into consideration estimate of PQBM.

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Commercial quota | 385,002 |
| Jan-June 50% | 192,501 |
| PQBM | 24,000 |
| Directed quota Jan-June | 168,501 |
| July-Dec 50% | 192,501 |
| PQBM | 37,000 |
| Directed quota July-Dec | 155,501 |

Notes: Different values of PQBM could be used in the future. PQBM is rounded to the nearest 1,000 lbs. Weight is in lbs gutted weight.

MOTION #5. Adopt Alternative 4D but extend the closure through May 15th as the preferred.
Approved by Committee

Alternative 4. Adjust recreational bag/size limit and establish a recreational closed season; no fishing for and/or possession of vermilion snapper would be allowed during the closed season; and captain crew on for-hire vessels would not be able to retain vermilion snapper.

Alternative 4d. Reduce the bag limit from 10 to 4 vermilion snapper (45% reduction) and a season closure (no fishing for and/or possession) of October through April (32% reduction) (Total reduction = 63%).

MOTION #6: Adopt Alternative 5C as preferred.
Approved by Committee

Alternative 52. Reduce recreational and commercial bycatch mortality by requiring the following for a person on board a vessel to fish for snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic EEZ: (a) use of venting and dehooking tools and (b) use of non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks when using natural baits to fish for snapper grouper species in one of the following South Atlantic EEZ fisheries:

Alternative 5c. Both commercial and recreational snapper grouper fisheries.

MOTION #7: Approve Amendment 16 for public hearing.
Approved by Committee

Amendment 17

MOTION #8: Retain Alternatives 5A through 5D in the amendment.
Approved by Committee

Alternative 5. Reduce bycatch and fishing mortality in deepwater snapper grouper fishery through consideration of any of the following sub-alternatives.

Sub-alternative 5A. Establish six month seasonal closure for snowy grouper or deepwater snapper grouper unit during winter months.

Sub-alternative 5B. Establish regional quotas for snowy grouper or deepwater snapper grouper unit.

Sub-alternative 5C. Restrict the number of hooks in the deepwater recreational fishery.

Sub-alternative 5D. Limit retention of deep water snapper grouper species to one fish per vessel.

MOTION #9: Remove Alternative 5A from Amendment 17.
Approved by Committee

Alternative 5. Reduce bycatch and fishing mortality in deepwater snapper grouper fishery through consideration of any of the following sub-alternatives.

Sub-alternative 5A. Establish six month seasonal closure for snowy grouper or deepwater snapper grouper unit during winter months.

MOTION #10: Exclude sub-alternative 5D from Amendment 17.
Approved by Committee

Alternative 5. Reduce bycatch and fishing mortality in deepwater snapper grouper fishery through consideration of any of the following sub-alternatives.

Sub-alternative 5D. Limit retention of deep water snapper grouper species to one fish per vessel.

MOTION #11: Delete Alternative 4 (BSB Pots) from Amendment 17.
Approved by Committee

Alternative 4. Limit the number of sea bass tags and pots.

Sub-alternative 4A. Require that each black sea bass pot in the water or at sea on a vessel in the South Atlantic EEZ have an attached valid identification tag issued by NMFS. Limit the black sea bass pot tags annually to 100 per holder of Federal Snapper Grouper vessel permits. NMFS will issue new identification tags each fishing year that will replace the tags from the previous fishing year.

Sub-alternative 4B. Require that each black sea bass pot in the water or at sea on a vessel in the South Atlantic EEZ have an attached valid identification tag issued by NMFS. Limit the black sea bass pot tags annually to 50 per holder of Federal Snapper Grouper vessel permits. Require that new identification tags be issued each fishing year.

Sub-alternative 4C. Require that each black sea bass pot in the water or at sea on a vessel in the South Atlantic EEZ have an attached valid identification tag issued by NMFS. Limit the black sea bass pot tags annually to 25 per holder of Federal Snapper Grouper vessel permits. Require that new identification tags be issued each fishing year.

Sub-alternative 4D. Require that each black sea bass pot in the water or at sea on a vessel in the South Atlantic EEZ have an attached valid identification tag issued by NMFS. Limit the black sea bass pot tags annually to 100 per holder of Federal Snapper Grouper vessel permits in year 1, 50 in year 2, and 25 in year 3 and onwards until modified. Require that new identification tags be issued each fishing year.

Sub-alternative 4E. Require that each black sea bass pot in the water or at sea on a vessel in the South Atlantic EEZ have an attached valid identification tag issued by NMFS. Limit the black sea bass pot tags annually to 100 per holder of Federal Snapper Grouper vessel permits in year 1 and 50 in year 2 and onwards until modified. NMFS will issue new identification tags each fishing year that will replace the tags from the previous fishing year.

Sub-alternative 4F. Require that each black sea bass pot in the water or at sea on a vessel in the South Atlantic EEZ have an attached valid identification tag issued by NMFS. Limit the number of black sea bass pots fished annually to 50 per holder of Federal Snapper Grouper vessel permits for (a) any fishermen that is currently using an average of less than 55 pots (based on average number of pots fished on trips between 1/1/05 and 12/31/06) and (b) and fishermen entering the fishery after 1/1/07. For any fishermen currently using an average of 55 or more pots (based on average number of pots fished on trips between 1/1/05 and 12/31/06), limit the number of black sea bass pots annually to their average less as reduced by 10%. Limit the maximum number of pots allowed per holder of Federal Snapper Grouper vessel permits to 125. Limit the number of black sea bass pot tags issued annually each holder of Federal Snapper Grouper vessel permits to the number of pots allowed plus 10% for damage and loss; however, each permit holder may only fish the number of pots allowed. The number of pots fished will be determined from snapper grouper logbooks that have been submitted to NMFS on or before 3/8/07.

MOTION #12: Move red snapper actions from Amendment 17 into another amendment. Hold scoping meetings in conjunction with public hearings for Amendment 16.
Approved by Committee

MOTION #13: Remove the measures under Section 2.2.2.3 from Amendment 17.
Approved by Committee

2.2.2.3 Measures to Monitor Progress of a Fishery and Reduce Chance of Exceeding ACL

Alternative 1 (no action). Do not change methods to monitor commercial and recreational landings.

Alternative 2. Commercial sector – track landings using logbooks, dealer reports & trip tickets; close fishery when quota projected to be met; incorporate PQBM.

Alternative 3. Recreational sector – track landings using MRFSS & Headboat; change regulations and/or close fishery when allocation projected to be met; incorporate PQBM.

Alternative 4. Improve recreational catch data – for-hire logbooks; private recreational logbooks.

Alternative 5. Improve biological sampling – specify numbers of sample by species to be collected and analyzed with deadlines based on SEDAR assessment schedule.

Alternative 6. Improve bycatch data – fully implement ACCSP.

Alternative 7. Improve fishery independent surveys.

Alternative 8. Others?

MOTION #14: Move the action intended to remove species from the FMU to the second ACL document.
Approved by Committee

In addition, the committee provided the following guidance and/or made the following requests:

Amendment 16

The committee provided guidance to the team in terms of preferred alternatives and the range of alternatives.

Amendment 15B

The committee believes that the recreational allocation for snowy grouper should be converted to numbers and instructed the team to add analysis associated with bag limit sales.

Amendment 17

The committee wants the action to limit the number of black sea bass pots tags distributed annually and/or modify the attendance requirements to be included in a future amendment that will be developed in the short-term.