

# **SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

## **SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE**



### **SSC Meeting Overview**

**April 25-27, 2017**

**Town & Country Inn**

**Charleston, SC**

**VERSION**  
**Briefing Book, Revised**  
**April 18, 2017**

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## Documents:

- Attachment 1. Minutes of the October 2016 meeting
- Attachment 2. Minutes of the November 2016 webinar meeting
- Attachment 3. Landings update presentation\*
- Attachment 4. Landings trends 1986-2015
- Attachment 5. Vermilion Snapper Project Schedule
- Attachment 6. Draft Vermilion Snapper ToRs
- Attachment 7. SEDAR Research Track Background
- Attachment 8. SEDAR Research Track Presentation
- Attachment 9. Long Term Assessment Plan and Tilefish Assessment Info
- Attachment 10. Golden Tilefish Projections Report
- Attachment 11. SEDAR 53 SAR, Red Grouper
- Attachment 12. Projections from SEDAR 19
- Attachment 13. Assessment Overview Presentation\*
- Attachment 14. ABC Control Rule
- Attachment 15. ABC Control Rule Decision Document
- Attachment 16. RG Fishery Performance Report Outline
- Attachment 17. Cobia Fishery Performance Report Outline
- Attachment 18. Dolphin Fishery Performance Report Outline
- Attachment 19. SEDAR 41 RS Base Run Correction Erratum
- Attachment 20. SEDAR 41 RS Base Run Correction Presentation\*
- Attachment 21. Red Snapper Guidance Request
- Attachment 22. Amendment 43 Options Paper
- Attachment 23. Index Based ABC Options Paper
- Attachment 24. Letter from SAFMC to NOAA
- Attachment 25. Draft 2017 Research and Monitoring Plan
- Attachment 26. SA Research Plan Source document
- Attachment 27. Draft Stock Assessment Improvement Plan
- Attachment 28. SERFS Report Presentation\*
- Attachment 29. Scope of Work document
- Attachment 30. SEP Agenda
- Attachment 31. Citizen Science Blueprint
- Attachment 32. SAFMC Work Plan, April 2017
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**\* Indicates documents not available for the Briefing Book. These will be distributed as they become available.**

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## **SAFMC PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS**

### Written comment:

Written comment on SSC agenda topics is to be distributed to the Committee through the Council office, similar to all other Council briefing materials. Written comment to be considered by the SSC shall be provided to the Council office no later than one week prior to an SSC meeting. For this meeting, the deadline for submission of written comment is 12:00 pm Tuesday, April 18, 2017. Submit written comments to:

SAFMC – SSC Comments  
4055 Faber Place Drive  
Suite 201  
North Charleston, SC 29405

### Verbal comment:

Two opportunities for comment on agenda items will be provided at set times during SSC meetings. The first will be at the beginning of the meeting, and the second near the conclusion. Those wishing to comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, who will then recognize individuals to provide comment.

An opportunity for comment on specific agenda items will also be provided as each item come up for discussion. Comments will be taken after all the initial presentations are given and before the SSC starts the discussion of the agenda topic. As before, those wishing to comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, who will then recognize individuals to provide comment. All comments are part of the record of the meeting.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Documents

Agenda

Attachment 1. Minutes of the October 2016 meeting

Attachment 2. Minutes of the November 2016 webinar meeting

### 1.2. Action

- Introductions
- Review and Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes

## 2. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public will be provided an opportunity to comment on SSC agenda items as they are being discussed during the meeting. Comments will be taken after any initial presentations are given on a particular topic, but before the SSC begins their discussion of the topic. There will also be an opportunity for comment at the start and end of the meeting. Those wishing to make comment should indicate their desire to do so to the Committee Chair.

## 3. 2016-2017 LANDINGS AND ACLS

### 3.1. Documents

Attachment 3. Landings update presentation\*

Attachment 4. Landings trends 1986-2015

### 3.2. Presentation

Landings and ACLs: Mike Larkin, SERO, via Webinar

### 3.3. Overview

The SSC will be provided an update on 2016 and preliminary 2017 landings, catch limits, and application of accountability measures.

### 3.4. Action

- Review and comment, with attention toward any ABC recommendation updates.
  - Emphasis should be placed on Level 4 and 5 stocks which have concerning landings trends as compared to their ABC values.
- Consider assessment schedule and research plan implications

## 4. SEDAR ACTIVITIES

### 4.1. Documents

Attachment 5. Vermilion Snapper Project Schedule

Attachment 6. Draft Vermilion Snapper ToRs

Attachment 7. SEDAR Research Track Background

Attachment 8. SEDAR Research Track Presentation

Attachment 9. Long Term Assessment Plan and Tilefish Assessment Info

### 4.2. Overview

SEDAR Projects statuses are summarized below. Specific action items are noted with each project.

SEDAR 48, Black Grouper: In progress. A benchmark assessment of Black Grouper will be prepared during 2017 with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission providing the analytical team. This is a jointly managed stock with the GMFMC so both Councils made appointments and approved the schedule and Terms of Reference. The SAFMC made appointments and provided approvals in December 2016. The Data Workshop was held March 15-17, 2017 in St. Petersburg, FL. The Assessment Workshop is scheduled for June 27-29, 2017 and the Review Workshop November 14-16, 2017. The assessment will be considered by the SAFMC SSC in April 2018 and recommendations will be provided to the Council in June 2018.

### ACTION

Dr. Luiz Barbieri, FL FWCC, recently informed SEDAR that this assessment will be halted due to data issues. Further details will be provided to the SSC as they become available.

- Review and comment on schedule and priority changes
- Suggest alternatives for addressing black grouper

SEDAR 56, Black Sea Bass: In progress. A standard assessment was requested to allow consideration of new video data and to reconsider the use of length and age data. The terminal year is 2015 and the assessment will be developed through a series of five webinars held between February and August 2017. The assessment will be submitted to the SSC for review in October 2017 and recommendations provided to the Council in December 2017. Note that the timing of this assessment does not allow including revised MRIP data. The new estimated timeframe for when revised MRIP estimates will become available is mid-2018.

SEDAR 50, Blueline Tilefish: In progress. A benchmark assessment has been underway since mid-2016. Significant events to date include a recommendation from the August 2016 Age Workshop that age determinations are not reliable and should not be used in the assessment; and a recommendation from the June 2016 Stock ID workshop that the

biological stock extends from the Mid-Atlantic through the Gulf of Mexico. Following discussion of the stock ID recommendation, the SEDAR Steering Committee recommended a joint SSC review of the stock ID findings; this review was held October 28, 2016. The Steering Committee recommended a regional science and management leadership level review of the joint SSC findings to provide TOR guidance, conducted during a conference call on November 14, 2016. The Council-Agency leadership group recommended conducting the SEDAR 50 assessment with a Gulf-South Atlantic stock dividing line at the Gulf-South Atlantic Council boundary. The SAFMC passed a motion in December 2016 to modify the TORs in accordance with this recommendation. The Data Workshop was held January 23-27, 2017, the Assessment Process will be a combination of in-person workshop on May 23-26, 2017 and a series of webinars held between April and July 2017, and the Review Workshop will be August 29-31, 2017. The assessment will be considered by the SSC in October 2017 and recommendations provided to the Council in December 2017.

Stock ID and Meristics Workshop: Postponed Indefinitely. The Data Best Practices workshop in 2015 recommended a workshop devoted to addressing Stock ID and Meristics issues for upcoming assessments. Initial planning began in 2016 for a workshop and independent peer review in 2017. However, due to budget concerns for 2017, this workshop was cancelled in December 2016. Stock ID for upcoming research track assessments of Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic Scamp and Atlantic Cobia will be addressed through the Research Track Process.

Given that stock ID has become particularly challenging with recent assessments, and there is considerable confusion regarding how such decisions should be made and for which stocks past decisions should be reconsidered, a general discussion of stock ID determinations, including both the process and the stocks to review, is under consideration for a possible joint meeting of the SAFMC and GMFMC SSCs. This will be discussed further under the MRIP uncertainty topic.

MRIP Revision Assessments: Requested stocks for revision assessments are Red Snapper, Red Grouper, Blueline Tilefish, and Black Seabass. Revision assessments will include an update of the MRIP data, based on calibrations applied to address the effort survey change. No additional changes or data will be considered, and the terminal year of the assessment will not be advanced. Revision assessments were initially scheduled for development in late 2017 for SSC review in April 2018. Due to delays in the calibration process and recommendations from the calibration team and Council to include the full 3 years of side-by-side survey information (2015-2017), the Council has requested the revision assessments be prepared in 2018.

SEDAR 55, South Atlantic Vermilion Snapper: Planning Underway. A standard assessment was requested to allow consideration of new video index data and to reconsider error distributions for fitting age and length composition data. The terminal year will be 2016 and assessment webinars will be held in late 2017 and early 2018. Preliminary scheduling provides the assessment for SSC consideration in April 2018 and Council consideration in June 2018. The Council will be asked to make appointments for the assessment panel and approve the schedule and TORs at the June 2017 meeting.



### ACTION

- The SSC is asked at this meeting to review TORs and schedule and recommend participants for this assessment.
- The SSC should consider how the delay in calibrated MRIP estimates based on the effort survey change may affect the planned vermilion snapper assessment.

Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Scamp: Early planning stages. A Research Track assessment is tentatively scheduled to start in 2018. Schedule and Terms of Reference will be developed in the upcoming months.

Atlantic Cobia: Early planning stages. A Research Track assessment is tentatively scheduled to start in 2018. Schedule and Terms of Reference will be developed in the upcoming months.

### SEDAR Research Track Process

In September 2017 the SEDAR Steering Committee reviewed a proposed change in the SEDAR assessment process, suggested by the SEFSC, to replace the existing assessment categories with “Research Track” and “Operational” assessments. The change is intended to improve assessment models and increase productivity. The research track approach would be somewhat similar to the existing benchmark process, although the resulting model would not include the most recent information and would not be used to provide stock status. Instead, the process would focus on developing a robust assessment model and greater exploration of issues and uncertainties related to the modelling effort. Once the framework so developed is peer reviewed by an independent panel and evaluated by the SSC, it would be updated with the most recent information through an “Operational Assessment” which would provide management advice and be reviewed by the SSC.

The Steering Committee recommended applying the research track approach to the upcoming Gulf of Mexico/South Atlantic Scamp and Atlantic Cobia assessments. SEDAR staff is working with the SEFSC data and assessment team leads to define the research track process. Further discussion is planned for the Steering Committee meeting on May 5, 2017 and again in September 2017.

### ACTION

- Review the process and provide guidance and suggestions for consideration by the Council SEDAR Steering Committee representatives.

### Assessment Priorities

The Council reviewed the SSCs application of the NMFS Stock Assessment Prioritization Tool in December 2016 and March 2017. For the March 2017 SAFMC meeting, Council staff provided an evaluation of the scoring metrics (Attachment 9), and

the Council recommended several changes in the primary assessment and data stocks listing:

- Add Cobia, Hogfish, and Gray Snapper to the primary data collection species.
- Continue to support a White Grunt assessment in 2021.
- Add Atlantic Spadefish and Silk Snapper to the secondary data collection species.
- Identify Almaco Jack, Lane Snapper, and Wahoo as top priorities among the secondary species.
- Identify Dolphin as a special data collection stock due to its life history and stock unit challenges.
- Provide separate rankings for assessed and unassessed stocks for future assessment priority evaluations.

The proposed priority changes are also discussed under the research plan topic.

In March the Council requested a standard assessment of golden Tilefish be developed in the space now filled by the MRIP revision assessments in 2017. This is discussed in detail under topic 5.

Planned assessments through 2020 are shown in Table 1, and future priorities in Table 2. Current projects and priorities through 2019 will be reviewed by the SEDAR Steering Committee in May 2017, and priorities for 2020 and 2021 will be determined in September 2017.

#### ACTION

- Provide guidance on future assessment priorities
- The SSC is asked consider how the delay in the revised MRIP data, and the MRIP revisions assessments, will affect future assessment plans.
  - Which of the 2018 assessments should be delayed to accommodate the MRIP revisions?

Table 1. SAFMC SEDAR Projects April 2017

Plan Year	SEDAR #	Stock	Approach	Terminal Data	Assessment Complete	Lead Agency
2017	50	Blueline Tilefish	Benchmark	2015	October 2017	SEFSC
	55	Vermilion Snapper	Standard	2016	April 2018	SEFSC
	56	Black Sea Bass	Standard	2015	Oct 2017	SEFSC
	48	Black Grouper	Benchmark	2015	Jan 2018	FL FWCC
	R	MRIP Revisions1	Revision	2016	June 2018	SEFSC
2018	B	Yellowtail Snapper	Benchmark	2016	Spring 2019	FL FWCC
	RT	Scamp, Gulf + SA	Research Track	2016	Mid-2019	SEFSC
	RT	Atlantic Cobia	Research Track	2016	Mid-2019	SEFSC
	S	Greater Amberjack	Standard	2017	Jan 2019	SEFSC
	S	Red Porgy	Standard	2017	Jan 2019	SEFSC
	B	King Mackerel	Benchmark	2016	Mid 2019	SEFSC
2019	S	Snowy Grouper	Standard	2017	Late 2019	SEFSC
	S	Spanish Mackerel	Standard	2017	Late 2019	SEFSC
	S	Gag	Standard	2018	Early 2020	SEFSC
2020	O	Scamp, Gulf + SA	Operational	2018	Late 2020	SEFSC
	O	Atlantic Cobia	Operational	2019	Late 2020	SEFSC

Table 2. Currently identified future assessment priorities.

Year	Stock	Approach
2020	Red Snapper	TBD
	Tilefish	Research Track
	Red Grouper	Update (Operational)
2021	White Grunt	Research Track
	Gray Triggerfish	Research Track

#### 4.3. Action

- Provide guidance on Black Grouper
- Provide guidance on addressing the MRIP revisions assessment delay.
- Review the ToRs and schedule for Vermilion Snapper and recommend changes or additions as appropriate.
- Identify SSC representation for Vermilion Snapper.
- Provide comments and recommendations on the SEDAR Research Track Proposal.
- Recommend assessment priorities for 2020 and beyond.

## 5. UPDATE ON SEFSC RESEARCH EFFORTS

### 5.1. Documents

None.

### 5.2. Overview

The Committee will be updated on research projects currently ongoing within the SEFSC, with a particular focus on those directly affecting stock assessments.

### 5.3. Action

- No specific actions required.

## 6. GOLDEN TILEFISH ABC

### 6.1. Documents

Attachment 10. Golden Tilefish Projections Report

### 6.2. Presentation

Tilefish Projections Overview: Dr. Erik Williams, SEFSC

### 6.3. Overview

At their December 2016 meeting, the Council expressed interest in having more flexibility in selecting the risk of overfishing within the ABC Control Rule. In anticipation of this, the Council requested that the SEFSC provide projections for Tilefish at P\* levels of 0.40 and 0.45 for consideration at their March 2017 meeting (Attachment 10).

Those projections were provided to the Council at the March 2017 meeting and a discussion ensued regarding changes in the golden Tilefish fishery that were not known at the time of the SEDAR 25 update. Specifically, the longline fishery began targeting larger fish in recent years. This was seen in the composition data, but the assumption of a single selectivity pattern was made for the entire time series, causing the model to assume larger fish were also selected for back in time. This had the effect of reducing the estimated stock biomass and productivity.

Another issue that has arisen since the SEDAR 25 update for Tilefish was completed is the adequacy of the approach for fitting composition data. The Tilefish update, as well as SEDAR 41 (Red Snapper) and SEDAR 36 (Snowy Grouper), used a robust multinomial distribution to fit the composition data. Studies published since the SEDAR 25 update for Tilefish have found that using any multinomial distribution to fit composition data is

inappropriate and may lead to biased model results. Therefore, SEDAR 53 for Red Grouper used a very different approach for fitting composition data. It appears that the fitting approach using the robust multinomial distribution had the same effect in all South Atlantic assessments in which it was used: productivity and overall stock biomass was reduced.

Due to these uncertainties, the Council has asked the SSC to consider an interim ABC value for Tilefish using the yield at 75%  $F_{MSY}$  in lieu of projections at any  $P^*$  value until a new assessment can be conducted. The Council requested a SEDAR standard assessment of Tilefish in late 2017, provided to the SSC for consideration in April 2018, with a terminal year of 2016. This request will be considered by the SEDAR Steering Committee at its May 5, 2017 meeting.

The Council also expressed interest in requesting that NMFS issue an interim rule to address overfishing of Tilefish. Under the provisions of the MSA, the Council has 2 years to develop a management response to overfishing of Tilefish, starting from December 2016 when NMFS provided the status determination to the Council. The interim rule will enable the Council to reduce the harvest levels and reduce overfishing while management measures are developed and implemented to address the ABC recommendation.

Below is the full request of the Council.

*REQUEST THE SSC TO CONSIDER ESTABLISHING AN INTERIM ABC FOR TILEFISH BASED ON THE PROJECTED YIELD AT 75%  $F_{MSY}$ , AND COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE RISKS AND UNCERTAINTY WITH ESTABLISHING THE ABC FOR TILEFISH AT THE 75%  $F_{MSY}$  YIELD VERSUS THAT PROVIDED BY THE  $P^*$  APPROACH. THE INTERIM ABC WOULD BE IN EFFECT UNTIL A NEW TILEFISH ASSESSMENT IS PREPARED TO ADDRESS:*

- *MULTIPLE SELECTIVITY PERIODS TO ACCOUNT FOR A SELECTIVITY SHIFT IN THE LONGLINE FISHERY, TOWARD LARGER (PRESUMABLY OLDER) FISH OVER TIME, AS SUPPORTED BY BOTH THE TESTIMONY OF TILEFISH FISHERMEN AND THE SELECTIVITY PATTERN USED IN THE 2016 UPDATE ASSESSMENT.*
- *THE LATEST BEST SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION MODEL FITTING ALGORITHMS AS APPLIED IN THE RED GROUPE STOCK ASSESSMENT UPDATE.*
- *AN ADVANCEMENT OF THE TILEFISH TERMINAL YEAR, GIVEN THAT:*
  - (1) *THE MOST RECENT PROJECTIONS INCORPORATE A 5 YEAR LAG BETWEEN THE ASSESSMENT TERMINAL YEAR AND CHANGES IN MANAGEMENT,*
  - (2) *THE SEFSC MEMO REGARDING RED SNAPPER PROJECTIONS INDICATED THAT PROJECTION UNCERTAINTY IS “GENERALLY HIGH AFTER 3-5 YEARS”, AND*

(3) *THE UNCERTAINTY IN TILEFISH IS EXACERBATED BY THE 7 YEAR LAG OF ESTIMATED RECRUITMENT DEVIATIONS IN THE TILEFISH ASSESSMENT, DUE TO THE HIGH AGE OF SELECTIVITY FOR TILEFISH AND THE LACK OF ANY ABUNDANCE INFORMATION FOR AGES BELOW THE AGE OF FISHERY SELECTIVITY, THAT RESULTS IN 2006 BEING THE LAST YEAR CLASS INFORMED BY DATA IN THE ASSESSMENT.*

#### 6.4. Action

- Review the updated Tilefish projections and further consider fishing level recommendations.
- Compare and contrast the risks and uncertainties with establishing an ABC for Tilefish at the yield at 75%  $F_{MSY}$  vs. that provided by the  $P^*$  analysis.

## 7. RED GROUPER ASSESSMENT REVIEW

### 7.1. Documents

Attachment 11. SEDAR 53 SAR, Red Grouper  
 Attachment 12. Projections from SEDAR 19  
 Attachment 13. Assessment Overview Presentation\*  
 Attachment 14. ABC Control Rule

### 7.2. Presentation

Assessment Overview: Dr. Kyle Shertzer, SEFSC

### 7.3. Overview

The Committee is asked to review the Red Grouper Standard assessment prepared through SEDAR 53 and provide fishing level recommendations (Attachment 11).

Red Grouper was assessed in SEDAR 19, and was determined to be overfished and experiencing overfishing. This led to the Council developing a rebuilding plan in Amendment 24. Rebuilding began in 2011 and ends in 2020. The SSC set ABC equal to the yield at the  $F$  value which results in a 70% chance of the stock rebuilding to  $SSB_{MSY}$  by 2020 ( $F_{Rebuild}$ ). The Council chose the yield at 75% of  $F_{MSY}$  for the rebuilding plan since this value was below  $F_{Rebuild}$ . The yield at  $F_{MSY}$  was set as the OFL for the stock. The projections for Red Grouper in SEDAR 19 predicted the stock rebuilding to  $SSB_{MSY}$  with a 50% probability by 2016 and an 81% probability by 2020 under the chosen rebuilding strategy (Attachment 12).

#### 7.4. Action

- Review assessment
  - Does the assessment address the ToRs to the SSCs satisfaction?
  - Does the assessment represent Best Scientific Information Available?
  - Does the assessment provide an adequate basis for determining stock status and supporting fishing level recommendations?
- Identify and discuss assessment uncertainties
  - Are key uncertainties identified, and if not, indicate additional uncertainties and comment on their possible impacts on the assessment and fishing level recommendations
  - Are risks and consequences of uncertainties identified and evaluated? Summarize the major uncertainties.
  - Are methods of addressing uncertainty consistent with SSC expectations?
  - List and comment on the effects of those uncertainties that most contribute to risk and impact status determinations and future yield predictions.
  - Is adequate rebuilding progress being made? Comment on reasons why progress differs from projections.
- Provide fishing level recommendations
  - Apply the ABC control rule and complete the fishing level recommendations table.
- Provide advice on monitoring the stock until the next assessment
  - What indicators or metrics should the council monitor and could the SSC evaluate to evaluate the stock until the next assessment?
  - Is there a recommended trigger level for these metrics? How should the Council respond if a trigger is activated?
- Provide research recommendations and guidance on the next assessment
  - Review the included research recommendations, and indicate those most likely to reduce risk and uncertainty in the next assessment.
  - Provide any additional research recommendations the SSC believes will improve future stock assessments.
  - Provide guidance on the next assessment, addressing its timing and type.

**SSC RECOMMENDATION:**

Table 3. Red Grouper Recommendations

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Deterministic</b>		<b>Probabilistic</b>	
Overfished evaluation (SSB/SSB <sub>MSY</sub> )				
Overfishing evaluation				
MFMT (F <sub>MSY</sub> )				
SSB <sub>MSY</sub> (Units)				
MSST (Units)				
MSY (1000 lbs.)				
Y at 75% F <sub>MSY</sub> (1000 lbs.)				
ABC Control Rule Adjustment				
P-Star				
M				
<b>OFL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>				
Year	Landed LBS	Discard LBS	Landed Number	Discard Number
<b>ABC RECOMMENDATIONS</b>				
Year	Landed LBS	Discard LBS	Landed Number	Discard Number

**8. MODIFICATIONS TO THE ABC CONTROL RULE****8.1. Documents**

- Attachment 15. ABC Control Rule Decision Document
- Attachment 16. RG Fishery Performance Report Outline
- Attachment 17. Cobia Fishery Performance Report Outline
- Attachment 18. Dolphin Fishery Performance Report Outline

**8.2. Presentation**

Overview and Update: John Carmichael, SAFMC Staff

**8.3. Overview**

In October 2014, the SSC convened a workshop to evaluate the effectiveness of the current CR and consider any modifications. A review of the workshop findings in April



2015 determined no changes to the CR were warranted at that time due to the lack of information to evaluate the effectiveness of the CR. However, the SSC suggested some future modifications to add flexibility to the CR and formed the ABC CR Workgroup to begin working on this topic. The Workgroup reported its findings to the SSC in May 2016. Although there still existed a lack of progress on information to evaluate the current CR, they did suggest that stock status be removed from the current CR because it is NMFS that makes that determination, which often happened after the SSC calculates the P\* value.

In June 2016, the Council also recommended removing stock status from the CR for two reasons. The first mirrors the reasoning given by the Workgroup. The second is because status is an outcome of the assessment and not a characteristic of it that affects uncertainty. Status is more appropriately used when the Council is determining its risk tolerance.

In October 2016, the SSC reviewed proposed revisions to the CR and made the following recommendations:

- *Stock status is determined by NMFS, and is a factor that the SSC considers appropriate for the Council to consider when determining the acceptable risk of overfishing. As such, the SSC recommends removing stock status from the ABC control rule.*
- *The Productivity and Susceptibility Assessment (PSA) information is also a factor that the SSC recommends the Council should consider when determining the acceptable risk of overfishing. The SSC recommends removing the PSA consideration from the ABC control rule. However, the SSC recommends that the current PSA information should be updated and reviewed by the SSC if the Council wishes to use it to establish risk levels.*
- *Modifications to the ABC control rule as a result of the above recommendations will require changes to the overall scoring system. The SSC requests that staff work with the SSC leadership to develop some possible options for modifying scores to maintain the range of adjustments.*
- *The SSC recommends that P\* values based on the existing ABC control rule be compared to recommendations based on the modified ABC control rule.*

For this meeting, Council staff revised the ABC Control Rule decision document (Attachment 15) to address the recommendations of the SSC and Council, and incorporate changes allowed under the recent National Standard 1 revisions. The SSC is asked to review the document and consider the ABC control rule changes and revisions it proposes.

#### 8.4. Action

- Review the Decision Document
- Comment on Action 1: Simplifying the CR to 3 Categories

- Comment on Action 2: Details and Criteria for Category 1
- Comment on Action 3: Criteria considerations for Category 2
- Comment on Action 4: Approaches for the Council's consideration of evaluation of risk
- Comment on Action 5: Allowing multi-year specification of a fixed ABC
- Comment on Action 6: Allowing phase-in of catch changes based on revised ABC recommendations
- Comment on Action 7: Clarify ABC control rule application to rebuilding stocks
- Comment on Action 8: Allowing carry over of unused or unharvested ABC
- Comment on Action 9: Clarify that the SSC may deviate from the ABC control rule
- Review the draft Fishery Performance Reports and comment on their utility.
  - Are the discussion questions appropriate to elicit the information required by the SSC?
  - Is there any other information that should be included in these reports?

## 9. SNAPPER GROUPE AMENDMENT 43

### 9.1. Documents

Attachment 19. SEDAR 41 RS Base Run Correction Erratum  
Attachment 20. SEDAR 41 RS Base Run Correction Presentation\*  
Attachment 21. Red Snapper Guidance Request  
Attachment 22. Amendment 43 Options Paper  
Attachment 23. Index Based ABC Options Paper

### 9.2. Presentation

RS Assessment Correction Presentation: Dr. Erik Williams, SEFSC  
Red Snapper Amendment Overview: Dr. Chip Collier, SAFMC Staff  
Index Based ABC: Dr. Chip Collier, SAFMC Staff

### 9.3. Overview

During the March 2017 Council meeting, Dr. Bonnie Ponwith (SEFSC) addressed the Council's request for Red Snapper ABC projections under a discards-only scenario. Dr. Ponwith explained that the SEFSC was not able to provide those projections due to the length of time since the completion of the assessment, uncertainty in the landings since most landings are coming from discards, and the change in MRIP methodology for estimating landings and discards. Attachment 19 contains the SEFSC's reply to the

Council's request. At the same meeting, Dr. Roy Crabtree went on record stating that the Council has likely taken sufficient actions to address overfishing of red snapper in the South Atlantic and should focus on developing a methodology to obtain an ABC for red snapper (Attachment 19). Council staff was directed to continue work on Amendment 43 but focus on best fishing practices items pending resolution on obtaining an ABC for red snapper. Therefore, Actions 1-5 and 11 have been temporarily removed from this amendment until a new ABC can be developed. The remaining items in Amendment 43 include options for Red Snapper bag, trip, and size limit and seasons for recreational and commercial sectors as well as potential area and season combination. Actions 9 and 10 are actions that could establish a permit and reporting requirements for private recreational fishermen. Action 12 includes alternatives for best fishing practices. Included in this will be a new estimation for discard mortality for Red Snapper using the same approach developed in SEDAR 41 and consideration for decreasing discard mortality due to the use of descending devices and venting.

Due to the issues laid out by the SEFSC, the Council requested that the SEFSC and the SSC collaborate to explore approaches to arrive at an ABC for Red Snapper. The Council also made the following requests of the SEFSC:

- 1. The SEFSC concur with our determination that alternative methods are necessary to specify ABC and MSY for red snapper and that SEDAR 41 (original and revised) cannot be used to specify ABC or MSY for 2017 and beyond for the reasons outlined in your memo to Michelle Duval dated February 15, 2017. This is necessary to inform the SSC on the status of its existing ABC recommendation and to determine which sources of information used in the SEDAR 41 assessment can be considered for future ABC recommendations.*
- 2. The SEFSC provide an evaluation of data limited techniques that can be considered by the SSC to develop an index-based ABC.*
- 3. The SEFSC provide additional details on the proposed evaluation of the effect of MRIP changes on the Red Snapper assessment, particularly the types of evaluations to be considered and when they will be available for SSC review.*

*Given that the SEFSC will be providing the SSC a revised SEDAR 41 Red Snapper assessment to correct errors with some of the headboat data, it is critical that a response to these issues also be provided to the SSC. This will help inform the SSC on how to review the revised assessment.*

#### 9.4. Action

- Actions 9 and 10 are designed to improve landings and discard estimates from private recreational fishermen. Review and provide comments on potential issues with permits and reporting requirements.
- Action 12 will include a new estimation of Red Snapper Discard Mortality caught from headboats and charter boats. Additionally, descending

devices and venting are alternatives to reduce discard mortality. Review and provide comments on estimation methods.

- Review and provide comments on approaches for obtaining a Red Snapper ABC.

## 10. UNCERTAINTY AND OUTLIERS IN MRIP ESTIMATES

### 10.1. Documents

Attachment 24. Letter from SAFMC to NOAA

### 10.2. Overview

The uncertainty in the Recreational estimates of landings and discards is not a new issue. The Council has been faced with this problem since ABCs and ACLs were first implemented. However, recent trends in landings outliers and fisheries closures have brought this issue to the forefront of the Council's agenda. Examples of recent events include the closure of the Hogfish fishery in 2015 when an estimate of landings of 228,494 lbs. (3.8 times the entire annual ACL) was derived for Wave 2. Given that from 1986 to 2014, the annual landings of Hogfish exceeded 100,000 lbs. 4 times, the 2015 Wave 2 estimate seems like an outlier.

The uncertainty in the MRIP estimates is one of the reasons cited for why the value of  $F/F_{MSY}$  could not be accurately determined in SEDAR 41 for Red Snapper and also why the projections of a discard only fishery were not considered BSIA by the Science Center. At the October 2016 meeting, the SSC was asked by the Council to evaluate the MRIP estimates for Red Snapper and determine if they are reliable and adequate for management.

In the Snapper Grouper fishery, 45% of the stocks have an annual PSE value for landings above 50% and 64% of the stocks have an annual PSE value for landings above 40% (on average from 2014-2016). At the Wave level, which is how we monitor a stock when we close it in-season, there are almost no Snapper Grouper stocks with average PSE values below 50% in any given Wave.

One of the reasons why PSEs for federally managed species tend to be so high is because trips in federal waters only make up about 8% of the total effort surveyed by MRIP. The Council now recognizes that no generalized survey, such as MRIP, is capable of providing accurate and robust estimates of these "rare event" species in a cost effective manner.

At the October 2015 meeting, MRIP staff provided a presentation that outlined several alternative approaches for estimating catch and effort for rare recreational species for use in comparing to ACLs to determine when closures should take place. The SSC considered the alternatives reasonable and appropriate and able to provide estimates with

increased precision. There was also discussion regarding efforts to develop precision standards within the MRIP program. In order to get this effort started, the Council has written a letter to NMFS requesting that MRIP staff participate in a joint meeting of the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Council's Scientific and Statistical Committees, devoted to this topic, that the South Atlantic Council has requested be held later this year (Attachment 21). The Council also emphasized that it would be critical for MRIP/Center to provide outputs of various methods for review prior to the Joint SSC meeting. Having MRIP/Center representatives at the Joint SSC meeting to present these outputs would greatly improve the efficiency of developing alternative methods for recreational ACL tracking.

At this meeting, the SSC is asked to consider the Council's request to hold a joint Gulf-South Atlantic SSC meeting to address MRIP issues and propose regional solutions.

### 10.3. Action

- Provide comments on the proposed joint meeting with the GMFMC SSC to address MRIP issues and the stock ID process.
  - Does the SSC support this approach?
  - Could the meeting be held in conjunction with the Fall SSC meeting (e.g., 2.5 days of SSC meeting and 2.5 days of joint meeting) at a central location such as Atlanta?
  - What information would be useful in the briefing documents?
  - Are there any suggested participants, in addition to MRIP and SEFSC representatives?

## 11. RESEARCH AND MONITORING PLAN REVIEW

### 11.1. Documents

Attachment 25. Draft 2017 Research and Monitoring Plan  
Attachment 26. SA Research Plan Source document

### 11.2. Overview

The Committee is provided an opportunity to review the research and monitoring plan, as well as the source document. The Council will consider the research plan at its June 2017 meeting.

### 11.3. Action

- Review and provide comments and recommendations on the plan and source document.

## **12. STOCK ASSESSMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN REVIEW**

### 12.1. Documents

Attachment 27. Draft Stock Assessment Improvement Plan

### 12.2. Overview

The Committee is provided an opportunity to review the NMFS draft Stock Assessment Improvement Plan. NMFS presented their latest Stock Assessment Improvement Plan at the February 2017 Council Coordination Committee and Councils have been allowed until June 15 to provide comments.

### 12.3. Action

- Review and provide comments and recommendations on the plan.

## **13. SOUTHEAST REEFFISH SURVEY UPDATE**

### 13.1. Documents

Attachment 28. SERFS Report Presentation\*

### 13.2. Presentation

SERFS Sampling Update: Joey Ballenger, SC DNR

### 13.3. Overview

The Committee will receive an update on SERFS sampling efforts and results through 2016.

### 13.1. Action

- No specific actions required.

## **14. UPDATE ON NATIONAL SSC EFFORTS**

### 14.1. Documents

None.

### 14.2. Overview

The Committee will be updated on the progress of the Scientific Coordination Subcommittee (SCS), who are responsible for planning the upcoming National SSC Workshop VI.

### 14.3. Action

- No specific actions required.

## 15. METHODS FOR REVIEWING A NEW BAG AND SIZE LIMIT ANALYSIS

### 15.1. Documents

Attachment 29. Scope of Work document

### 15.2. Overview

The new bag and size limit analysis was presented to the Committee at their May 2016 meeting. Several recommendations were made and work has continued and is ongoing on this analysis. Since this is a very complex analysis and is to be used in amendments and to make management decisions, it is being suggested as a candidate for the Committee's Complex Analysis Review process.

### 15.3. Action

- Determine whether this analysis would be a good candidate for the Complex Analysis Review process.
- Assign a workgroup to work with the analyst before bringing this analysis back to the full SSC for review, if applicable.

## 16. GUIDANCE ON NATURAL MORTALITY ESTIMATION

### 16.1. Documents

None.

### 16.2. Overview

At the April 2016 meeting, the Committee reviewed SEDAR 41 for Red Snapper and Gray Triggerfish. Each of these assessments had large uncertainties related to Natural Mortality (M). Then et al. (2014) had recently published a paper updating the Hoenig estimator of M using maximum age, which unexpectedly shifted the estimates of M for certain species. The Committee had asked to have Drs. Then or Hoenig come and discuss the methodology of this new analysis; however, staff was unclear as to the intent of the Committee.

### 16.3. Action

- Provide guidance on the future review of natural mortality estimation.

- Indicate information the SSC would like to receive in presentation by Dr. Then or Dr. Hoenig.
- Clarify any SSC concerns with current methods of estimating natural mortality, and what type of response the SSC may consider taking to address those concerns
- Clarify the possible role of the SAFMC SSC, versus other regional resources, such as SEDAR and the SEFSC in addressing natural mortality estimation in stock assessments.

## **17. SOCIO-ECONOMIC PANEL REPORT**

### 17.1. Documents

Attachment 30. SEP Agenda

### 17.2. Overview

The SEP will meet prior to this SSC meeting on April 24-25, 2017. A general report will be given on the meeting, while specific recommendations will be discussed under the appropriate SSC agenda item. Any additional items from the SEP report not previously covered under other agenda items will be discussed here.

## **18. UPDATE ON CITIZEN SCIENCE EFFORTS**

### 18.1. Documents

Attachment 31. Citizen Science Blueprint

### 18.2. Overview

The Committee will be updated on the progress of the Scientific Coordination Subcommittee (SCS), who are responsible for planning the upcoming National SSC Workshop VI.

### 18.3. Action

- No specific actions required.

## **19. COUNCIL WORKPLAN UPDATE**

### 19.1. Documents

Attachment 32. SAFMC Work Plan, April 2017

Attachment 33. SAFMC Amendments Overview, April 2017



### 19.2. Overview

These documents are provided at each meeting to keep the Committee informed of Council activities. Regular detailed reviews of each amendment are no longer requested of the SSC as amendments are developed; instead the Committee is asked to comment on specific technical items that may arise. However, members are welcome to review any ongoing amendments and to provide comments and suggestions directly to staff. Current versions of each amendment are included in the Council Briefing Books distributed to SSC members. Questions or comments about specific items should be addressed to the staff assigned to each FMP, as summarized below.

- Coastal Migratory Pelagic – Kari MacLauchlin
- Corals – Chip Collier
- Fishery Ecosystem Plan – Roger Pugliese
- Snapper Grouper – Myra Brouwer
- Snapper Grouper Amendment 36 (Spawning SMZs) – Gregg Waugh
- Snapper Grouper Amendment 43 (Red Snapper) – Chip Collier
- Snapper Grouper Commercial and Recreational Visioning Amendments – Myra Brouwer
- Spiny Lobster – Kari MacLauchlin
- Golden Crab – Brian Chevront
- Dolphin-Wahoo – John Hadley
- South Atlantic For-Hire Reporting Amendment – John Carmichael

### 19.3. Action

- No specific actions required

## 20. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is provided an additional opportunity to comment on SSC recommendations and agenda items.

## 21. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS REVIEW

The Committee is provided an opportunity to review its report and final recommendations.

The Final SSC report will be provided to the Council by 9 am on Tuesday, May 23, 2017 for inclusion in the first briefing book for the June Council meeting.

## **22. NEXT MEETINGS**

### **22.1. SAFMC SSC MEETINGS**

#### 2017 Meeting Dates

October 24 – 26, 2017 in Charleston, SC

### **22.2. SAFMC Meetings**

#### 2017 Council Meetings

June 12 - 16, 2017 in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

September 11-15, 2017 in Charleston, SC

December 4-8, 2017 in Atlantic Beach, NC

## **ADJOURN**