

# **SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

## **SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE**



**SSC Meeting Report**  
**September 9, 2015**  
**1:00 – 3:00 pm**  
**MEETING VIA WEBINAR**

**VERSION**  
**FINAL**  
**September 15, 2015**

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## DOCUMENTS

Attachment 1. Prior Blueline Tilefish Projections

Attachment 2. June 3, 2015 SSC Report

Attachment 3. SAFMC Projection Request Memo June 2015

Attachment 4. Scientific concerns regarding SSC projection scenarios\*

Attachment 5. Revised projections August 2015

Attachment 6. SERO Request, further projection details August 2015

Attachment 7. SAFMC Request, corrected projection landings August 2015

Attachment 8. Revisions and landings update August 2015\*

Attachment 9. ABC Alternatives Discussion Document

\* Indicates documents not available for the initial briefing book distribution.

## WEBINAR ACCESS

**Registration is required to access the webinar. Registration is available through this link:**

<https://attendeegotowebinar.com/register/5009119157959079938>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

## **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 Wednesday, September 2, 2015.

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

### **Verbal comment:**

Two opportunities for comment on agenda items will be provided during SSC meetings. The first will be at the beginning of the meeting, and the second near the conclusion, when the SSC reviews its recommendations. Those wishing to comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, which may be through a show of hands or a written list if the number of interested parties is extensive, who will then recognize individuals to come forward and provide comment. All comments are part of the record of the meeting.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### 1.1. Documents

Agenda

### 1.2. Action

- Introductions
- Review and Approve Agenda

*The SSC meeting was called to order at 1:00p.m., as scheduled.*

*The agenda was adopted without change and the minutes of the June 2015 webinar meeting were adopted without further comment or changes. Member introductions were made. The Chair reviewed the agenda and outlined the general format and conduct of the meeting as discussed in the overview document.*

## **2. PUBLIC COMMENT**

The public will be provided two opportunities to comment on SSC agenda items during this meeting. The first at the start of the meeting, and the final will be provided at the end during the review of recommendations. Those wishing to make comment should indicate their desire to do so to the Committee Chair.

*Accordingly, at this point in the meeting the Chair opened the floor for the first opportunity for public comment. Comments were provided by several members of the public.*

## **3. BLUELINE TILEFISH STOCK PROJECTIONS**

### 3.1. Documents

Attachment 1. Prior Blueline Tilefish Projections

Attachment 2. June 3, 2015 SSC Report

Attachment 3. SAFMC Projection Request Memo June 2015

Attachment 4. Scientific concerns regarding SSC projection scenarios\*

Attachment 5. Revised projections August 2015

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Attachment 9. ABC Alternatives Discussion Document

### 3.2. Overview

At a webinar held June 3, 2015, the SSC reviewed a suite of projections for the Blueline Tilefish stock (Attachment 1). The SSC concluded that the projections were not Best Scientific Information Available and therefore not adequate to support fishing level recommendations (Attachment 2). As a result, the SSC requested revised projections reflecting observed landings and using the standard projection approaches used previously. Alternative exploratory projection approaches were also identified by the SSC to address uncertainties with productivity and spatial patterns. The Council requested that the SEFSC prepare the projections suggested by the SSC (Attachment 3), and was informed that the additional scenarios requested by the SSC would not be provided due to a determination that they lacked sufficient scientific support (Attachment 4). Although this document is cited in the projection results (Attachment 5), as of the completion of this overview, the Council has not received approval from the Center to distribute the memo.

The SEFSC's response to the Council's request, addressed to the Regional Administrator on August 12, 2015 (Attachment 5), included results for the standard projection approach incorporating observed landings through 2015. Requests for additional information and further revisions to the projections were submitted to the SEFSC soon after receipt of the initial projections: SERO requested further projection outputs to provide more information on stock size and status (Attachment 6) and the Council requested revisions to landings used in the projections for 2012-2015 (Attachment 7). The results of these requests will be combined, if received separately, into a single document for this SSC review (as Attachment 8) and provided to the SSC once the information is received. As of completion of this document on August 25, the additional analyses were not available.

To facilitate discussion during this webinar, Council staff prepared a document proposing various alternatives for fishing level recommendations, in particular ABC, to address the direction given by the SSC at the earlier webinar and the analyses provided by the SEFSC (Attachment 9).

### 3.3. Action

- Review the most recent Blueline Tilefish stock projections of August 2015.
  - Determine whether the information provided addresses the SSCs

request.

- Identify uncertainties in the projections and discuss their impact on projection results and fishing level recommendations and management.
- Determine whether projection assumptions (e.g., recruitment, fishing mortality, interim year landings) are met, and comment on the consequences of this determination for fishing level recommendations and management.
- Determine whether available projections represent Best Scientific Information Available, and whether they are adequate to support fishing level recommendations for both the current and future years.
- Provide guidance for revised projections, if necessary.
- Provide revised Fishing Level Recommendations, including ABC and OFL, for 2016 and 2017. (The next assessment of Blueline Tilefish is scheduled for review by the SSC in April 2017.)

#### **SSC RECOMMENDATION:**

*The SSC received an overview presentation from Mike Errigo summarizing the history of SEDAR 32 projections and the issues associated with them (i.e., recruitment, fishing mortality, interim landings, etc.). The Committee then discussed the chronology and content of response letters and different sets of blueline tilefish projections provided by the SEFSC.*

*The SEFSC felt that there was not sufficient scientific support for providing the exploratory alternative recruitment scenarios requested by the SSC, i.e., a lack of empirical evidence and that a multitude of equally likely scenarios could have been investigated. Consequently, the Committee was provided only a limited set of projections that prevented the SSC from evaluating all the scenarios originally requested. Instead of exploring the requested recruitment scenarios, the SEFSC recommended updating the handline index and looking at the slope of that index from 2012 to date. If the slope of the index was remaining flat or rising, that could be used as an indicator that catch levels over the last three years are not having an appreciable negative impact on the stock for the area covered by the index, i.e. Cape Hatteras to Cape Canaveral. In this case the SEFSC suggested that catch level advice going forward could be based on average landings for the years just prior to the recent large increases until the Center is able to assess the stock again.*

*Based on the limited scope of the projections (i.e., not all recruitment scenarios were evaluated), the high degree of uncertainty in the original assessment, and the*

*disconnect between assessment and projections (the terminal year of data for this assessment was 2011 and the fishery has undergone major changes since then), the SSC concluded that the projections provided by the SEFSC do not represent the Best Scientific Information Available and were not adequate to support blueline tilefish fishing level recommendations for either current or future years.*

*The SSC then discussed alternatives for developing fishing level recommendations for blueline tilefish:*

- 1) The Committee discussed that given the new information (e.g., recent landings), the assessment may no longer represent the Best Scientific Information Available and, therefore, cannot be used for management advice. According to the ABC control rule, catch advice would be based on the ORCS method or another method in the control rule decision tree.*
- 2) Set ABC at the equilibrium yield at 75%  $F_{MSY}$*

*After much discussion, the SSC consensus was that option 2 was the best recommendation given the information before the Committee. Although the SSC agreed that the projections based on the 2012 assessment, cannot be used for setting the ABC primarily due to the required length of the projection period into the future (from 2011 to 2017), the assessment estimates of reference points ( $B_{MSY}$ ,  $F_{MSY}$ ) based on historic stock production remain to be the best scientific information available and can be used for management advice. Given that the assessment results based on two types of assessment models (BAM and ASPIC) indicated that the stock generally fluctuated around the  $B_{MSY}$  and the fact that recent catches remain high, the fishery dependent index appears to have a positive trend, and there was no significant change in the age and size composition of the catch in recent years, the Committee felt that the ABC at equilibrium yield at 75% $F_{MSY}$  is adequate and provides the best option for management. This method has been used in the past, but the SSC recognizes that this recommendation is based on results from the SEDAR 32 stock assessment, which had a very high degree of uncertainty.*

*The Committee notes that the same sources of scientific uncertainty that accompanied earlier advice from the June 2015 webinar also pertain to this ABC recommendation. These sources include the lack of fishery-independent survey information, the northward shift in landings in recent years, and the lack of biological characteristics and abundance information for blueline tilefish north of North Carolina.*

*The Committee stressed the fact that, given the uncertainties and paucity of information, this recommendation should be in place for no more than 2 years. This would bridge the period to completion of the upcoming blueline tilefish assessment, upon which further recommendations can be based assuming it passes SEDAR review.*

*Therefore, the SSC recommends that the 2016 and 2017 ABC for blueline tilefish be based on the equilibrium yield at 75%  $F_{MSY}$ , or 224,100 lbs. whole weight. The SSC wishes to emphasize that by not accepting the projection results as BSIA, no basis exists to infer the current (i.e., 2015) status of the blueline tilefish stock or the impact of the fishery with respect to the accepted status determination criteria for this stock. As well, no basis exists*

*to quantitatively gauge the consequences on the stock of the SSC's ABC recommendation for 2016 and 2017.*

#### **4. OTHER BUSINESS**

*The SSC did not discuss any items under 'Other Business.'*

#### **5. PUBLIC COMMENT**

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

*Public comments were made by SAFMC Chairman Ben Hartig and Vice-Chairman Michelle Duval.*

#### **6. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS REVIEW**

The Committee is provided this opportunity to review its recommendations and consensus statements recorded during the meeting.

The final SSC report should be provided to the Council by 9 am on Tuesday, September 15, 2015 for distribution to the Council for its September meeting. Recognizing the short turn around required, the Council requests that, if the final report cannot be provided, SSC recommendations addressing the TORs be provided by the SSC chair at the Snapper Grouper Committee meeting on September 15, 2015.

#### **7. ADJOURN**

*The SSC meeting was adjourned.*