

Summary Report

Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel

Webinar

August 22, 2019

The Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar to discuss topics supporting management of the dolphin wahoo fishery in the Atlantic. Below is a summary of the AP's discussions and recommendations. The AP approved motions for recommendations to the Council, but a summary of all viewpoints relevant to each motion/recommendation are included.

AP Members

Ray Rosher, Chair	Christopher Burrows, Vice Chair*
Wendell Barnett	Brice Barr
Ty Conti*	Robert Frevert*
Richard Harris*	Earl Harris, Jr.*
Glen Hopkins*	Harris Huddle*
Fred Kinard	Daniel Owsley
Jonathon Reynolds	Tim Scalise
Charles Yeomans*	

Council Members

Anna Beckwith
David Whitaker
Mel Bell

South Atlantic Staff

Brian Chevront
Chip Collier
Gregg Waugh
Julia Byrd
Kelly Klasnick
John Hadley

*Not in attendance.

The meeting started with approval of the agenda and April 2017 AP meeting minutes. Public comment was then provided by two commenters in support of adding bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as ecosystem component species in the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

Update on Dolphin Wahoo FMP amendments

Council staff briefed the AP on the status of developing amendments and the expected timeframe for the amendments. Included in the update were the following amendments:

- Amendment 9 (For-hire Electronic Reporting) - approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and is awaiting publication of the final rule.
- Amendment 10 (Revise Dolphin and Wahoo Management Measures) – under development and will be discussed by the Council at the September 2019 meeting.
- Amendment 11 (ABC Control Rule Revisions) – under development and will be discussed by the Council at the December 2019 or March 2020 meetings.

After the presentation, the AP asked some clarifying questions on Amendment 10 and provided some general observations on the dolphin fishery. For South Florida, it was noted that there has been a significant decline in the average catch of dolphin on recreational trips. This has been particularly noticeable over the past 5 years. It was also noted that in the Florida Keys there is increasing demand for for-hire trips and there seems to be increasing fishing effort in general in the South Florida area, with dolphin being an important species for the recreational sector. Should dolphin catches continue to decrease, there may be notable negative consequences for that region.

The AP revisited Amendment 10 during Other Business and had a lengthy discussion on the current contents of the amendment, additional observations in the dolphin fishery, and recommendations for items that the Council could consider in development of the amendment. The motions that were passed and a summary of the discussion can be found under Other Business.

Revising the goals and objectives of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP

The AP discussed initial revisions to the goals and objectives of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP. The AP generally expressed that the Council had a “strong start” in revising the goals and objectives and felt that the general topics that were covered were appropriate. AP members noted that it was particularly important to preserve continued access to the dolphin and wahoo resources and maintain high abundance.

Additionally, while it was discussed under Other Business, some AP members noted that dolphins serve not only as an important target species for fishermen but are also prey for other pelagic species such as blue marlin, thereby serving a prominent role in the offshore ecosystem. This observation may be applicable in the consideration of ecosystem objectives. The AP did not have recommendations for additional goals outside of those currently being considered.

Bullet and frigate mackerel as ecosystem component species to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP

Staff provided information on the Council’s consideration of adding bullet and frigate mackerel as ecosystem component (EC) species to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP, including background information on the two mackerel species and options that the Council is initially considering in Amendment 12. The AP expressed general support for designating bullet and frigate mackerel as EC species, with some members noting in their experience wahoo particularly target the *Auxis* species as forage and fishermen use them as effective live baits as well as troll around the mackerel schools when targeting wahoo. The AP felt that the Council

should consider a “conservative approach” that would help ensure there are not major increases in harvest of bullet and frigate mackerel.

The AP made the following motions:

MOTION #1: RECOMMEND THAT THE SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL DESIGNATE BULLET AND FRIGATE MACKEREL AS ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES IN THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FMP. ALSO THE AP ENDORSES THAT THE SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL PROACTIVELY PROTECT THE SPECIES AS PREY.
APPROVED BY AP (6 IN FAVOR/0 OPPOSED/1 ABSTENTION)

MOTION #2: CONSIDER REGULATORY ACTIONS IN CONJUNCTION WITH ADDING BULLET AND FRIGATE MACKEREL AS ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES.
APPROVED BY AP (6 IN FAVOR/0 OPPOSED/1 ABSTENTION)

For Motion #2, the AP initially discussed options that would prohibit sale or implement a trip limit for bullet and frigate mackerel. After further discussion, the AP felt that they did not have enough information to recommend specific options but suggested that the Council consider actions to avoid an unexpected major increase in landings of the two mackerel species.

Other Business

Amendment 10

The AP had a lengthy discussion on observations for the dolphin fishery and potential considerations for the Council when developing Amendment 10. The following is a summary of that discussion:

Recreational retention limits

There was discussion on lowering the retention limit for dolphin, with some AP members noting that this may be acceptable while others felt that it may not be necessary and offered some hesitation in reducing bag limits since “once you give it up, you may never get it back.” Additionally, it was noted that reducing retention limits too far could have a notable negative impact on the ability to book charter trips, therefore caution should be exercised if there is a change in the retention limit. While some members noted that a retention limit reduction may be acceptable in the South Florida area, others felt that any changes should be region-wide. There seemed to be general consensus that if the Council reduces recreational limits for dolphin, consider reducing the vessel limit but do not change the bag limit of 10 fish per person per day.

Commercial landings and pelagic longline gear

Many AP members voiced concern over pelagic longline (PLL) landings of dolphin. Some AP members expressed that pelagic long line landings of dolphin had increased in recent years, particularly as a percentage of overall commercial landings. They felt that pelagic longline landings were having a detrimental effect on the dolphin stock. Concerns were raised over the targeting of fish that may be spawning off of the Carolinas, PLL trips that had particularly high

landings of dolphin (30,000 pounds was mentioned), and the relatively small size of fish that were observed being landed in some circumstances.

To address some of these concerns, the AP offered up a motion for the Council to consider a commercial trip limit for dolphin. While various potential trip limits were mentioned, in the end, AP members expressed that they wanted to keep their recommendation for a trip limit in a more general format, with the intention of avoiding large or excessive catches on a single commercial dolphin trip while still maintaining the ability to make profitable commercial trips. The AP also supported Action 15, Alternative 2 in Amendment 10, noting that increasing the hook size when using PLL gear for dolphin would help address some of the AP's size-related concerns by discouraging landing smaller sized fish in the PLL fishery as well as bringing parity in gear and training requirements amongst vessels fishing PLL gear in the HMS and Dolphin Wahoo fisheries.

The AP made the following motions:

MOTION #3: CONSIDER A START OF SEASON COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT IN THE DOLPHIN FISHERY.

APPROVED BY AP (6 IN FAVOR/0 OPPOSED/1 ABSTENTION)

MOTION #4: THE AP SUPPORTS ACTION 15, ALTERNATIVE 2 IN AMENDMENT 10.

Action 15. Modify gear, bait, and training requirements in the commercial longline fishery for dolphin and wahoo to align with Highly Migratory Species requirements.

Alternative 2. Require the following for vessels with a commercial dolphin wahoo permit when using pelagic longlines:

Sub-alternative 2a. Must possess valid Safe Handling, Release, and Identification Workshop certificate onboard for both the owner and operator.

Sub-alternative 2b. Must possess and/or use only corrodible (i.e., non-stainless steel) circle hooks.

Sub-alternative 2c. Must possess and/or use only 18/0 or larger hooks with an offset not to exceed 10 degrees, and/or 16/0 or larger non-offset hooks.

Sub-alternative 2d. Must use whole finfish and/or squid as bait.

Sub-alternative 2e. If the total length of any gangion plus the length of any floatline is less than 100 meters, then the length of all gangions must be at least 10 percent longer than the length of the floatlines.

Sub-alternative 2f. Cannot deploy a pelagic longline that exceeds 20 nautical miles in length in the Mid-Atlantic Bight.

APPROVED BY AP (6 IN FAVOR/0 OPPOSED/1 ABSTENTION)