

SUMMARY REPORT

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

Town & Country Inn
2008 Savannah Highway
Charleston, SC

October 17-19, 2018

Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council)'s Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP), convened at the Town and Country Inn in Charleston, SC to discuss topics supporting management of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic region. Below is a summary of the AP's discussions and recommendations. Please note that unless noted or in the form of a motion, the comments below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements.

Status and overview of amendments under development or under review

Council staff briefed the AP on the status of developing and recently submitted amendments and the expected timeframe for new regulations to become effective. Staff discussed the actions being considered in Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendments 26 (Recreational) and 27 (Commercial) in more detail to inform the AP of recent Council guidance and updated analyses on those two amendments.

Regulatory Amendment 29 (Best Fishing Practices)

Council staff provided an overview of the actions being considered in the amendment, including changes the Council made at their recent meeting. The amendment is scheduled to be approved for public hearings in March 2019. The AP offered the following comments:

- Need to consider issue of liability with the use of venting devices on for-hire vessels. Descending devices have less liability and are not likely to cause additional damage to the fish. It is more feasible to require the use of descending devices than venting devices. Venting devices are often not used correctly.
- Description of descending and venting devices currently in the amendment are well thought out but consider that fishermen sometimes construct descending devices that are tailored to a specific species.
- Definition of descending device includes "rigged and ready for use while fishing is occurring." It is important that this aspect of the definition is enforceable.
- Venting works better for smaller fish and descending works better in deeper water so venting and descending should both be options.
- AP members stated that stakeholders are very likely to support best fishing practices.
- Suggest retaining information on price of available descending devices but clarify that these are "commercially available".
- The AP reiterated that yellowtail snapper should continue to be excluded from the requirement for circle hooks.
- It is particularly difficult to dehook a gray triggerfish that was caught on a circle hook. Hence, circle hooks do not necessarily translate into less discard mortality for all species. In the case of gray triggerfish, circle hooks may contribute to higher discard mortality.

- Consider adding information in the amendment on how the use of circle hooks is likely to benefit a stock over the long-term, particularly how the information is used in a stock assessment.
- Alternative 4 under Action 2 is not useful. Consider removing.
- Regarding the use of powerheads, the AP expressed concern over the potential for localized depletion of some species (i.e., black grouper, greater amberjack).
- Might want to consider circle hook regulations based on species and/or the size of hook being used.
- Powerheads are used for protection by divers, so any restriction should address the use of the gear specifically for harvest of snapper grouper species.
- Fish that have been harvested with a powerhead are much harder to market.
- The AP would like for any regulation that is considered to be the same for the commercial and recreational sectors.

The AP approved the following motions:

MOTION #1: AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) UNDER ACTION 2
Action 2. Modify the requirement for the use of non-stainless-steel circle hooks when fishing for and/or possessing snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Use of non-stainless-steel circle hooks is required when fishing for and/or possessing species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit with hook-and-line gear and natural baits north of 28 degrees north latitude.

APPROVED BY AP

MOTION #2: AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 3, SUB-ALTERNATIVES 3A AND 3B UNDER ACTION 3

Action 3. Adjust powerhead prohibitions in the South Atlantic Region.

Alternative 3. Prohibit the use of a powerhead for recreational and commercial harvest of species in the South Atlantic snapper grouper complex species in the exclusive economic zone of the South Atlantic Region.

Sub-alternative 3a. private recreational and for-hire vessels.

Sub-alternative 3b. commercially permitted South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

APPROVED BY AP (1 OPPOSED, 4 ABSTENTIONS)

Regulatory Amendment 30 (Red Grouper Rebuilding)

The recent red grouper assessment (SEDAR 53) indicated that the stock is undergoing overfishing and is not making adequate progress towards rebuilding, which is supposed to take place by 2020 under the current rebuilding plan. In response, the Council needs to revise the rebuilding plan for red grouper by September 2019 to meet the statutory deadline. The amendment also includes actions to modify the annual spawning season closure for that species off the Carolinas and establish a commercial trip limit. Staff presented an overview of the actions included in the amendment and updated the AP on the need for the Council to revise the timing for this amendment due to issues with the 2017 commercial landings data (the Council had intended to approve the amendment for formal review in December 2018). The AP provided the following comments:

- The AP questioned whether lionfish predation and algae blooms are factors in the decline of red grouper stocks in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.
- Regarding the proposed alternatives to modify the spawning season closure, the AP commented that sub-alternative 2d (six-month closure, January-June) would be very punitive for recreational fishermen in North Carolina. The for-hire industry in south Florida and the Keys would also be negatively affected. Nonetheless, the AP recommended conducting analyses to apply the closure in federal waters off the entire South Atlantic (see motions below) for both the commercial and recreational sectors for the months of January through June.
- The AP expressed concern about access to other Shallow Water Groupers possibly diminishing in the future due to regulatory actions aimed at red grouper.
- It was noted that a research study published in 2007 found that red grouper do not spawn in January but rather from February through June.
- Genetic studies have found no evidence of distinct stocks of red grouper between the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico.
- AP members noted that a trip limit for the commercial sector may not be effective overall in reducing harvest since that sector is already only harvesting a small portion of the ACL. However, a low trip limit may disproportionately affect fishermen who “specialize” on red grouper in some areas, such as the Florida Keys.

The AP approved the following motions:

MOTION #3: INCLUDE ALL 4 STATES IN SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2D (FOR RED GROUPEr ONLY) FOR THE RECREATIONAL (ACTION 2) AND COMMERCIAL (ACTION 3) SECTORS.

Preferred Alternative 2. During January through April, no person may fish for, harvest, or possess in or from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone any shallow-water grouper (gag, black grouper, scamp, red grouper, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper, red hind, rock hind, grayby, or coney). Additionally, during January through April, no person may sell or purchase any shallow-water grouper harvested from or possessed in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone. Revise the timing of these restrictions only for red grouper in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina and South Carolina as follows:

Preferred Sub-alternative 2a. January – May (five months).

Sub-alternative 2b. February – May (four months).

Sub-alternative 2c. March – June (four months).

Sub-alternative 2d. January – June (six months)

APPROVED BY AP (11 IN FAVOR, 5 ABSTENTIONS)

Regulatory Amendment 32 (Yellowtail Snapper Annual Catch Limit and Accountability Measures)

In March 2018, the Council directed staff to begin work on an amendment that would revise in-season accountability measures for yellowtail snapper to alleviate socio-economic impacts to the commercial sector. Scoping hearings were held via webinar on August 15 and 16, 2018. At the September/October Council meeting, the Committee selected a preferred alternative and directed staff to prepare the amendment for formal approval in December 2018. The AP discussed the proposed action and offered the following comments:

- The yellowtail snapper fishery is well managed. It is a very important fishery both commercially and recreationally.
- The current fishing year (August-July) is working well for the commercial sector.
- In terms of marketability, the summer months are not the best. Price of yellowtail diminishes substantially during this time.
- Yellowtail snapper fishermen on the AP stated their preference to wait until after the stock assessment is completed to make any management changes. Although commercial catch rates for yellowtail snapper have ramped up in recent years, fishermen do not think they will continue to increase much.
- AP members also mentioned intentional discarding of small yellowtail in the summer months. They suggest that in-season closures could benefit the stock by reducing the length of time this practice takes place.
- Another reason to support taking no action at this time is to allow the recent changes in management to play out. Fishermen claim that businesses that were affected by the 2017 hurricanes have stabilized.
- It was suggested that a bycatch trip limit could be established once a certain percentage of the yellowtail snapper ACL is met to minimize discarding when fishermen begin targeting mangrove snapper. Alternatively, it was suggested that historical landings of mangrove could be examined such that a possible yellowtail snapper bycatch trip limit could be implemented during the time when landings of mangrove snapper tend to increase.

MOTION #4: RECOMMEND ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) FOR YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER

Action 1. Revise the In-season Accountability Measures for Yellowtail Snapper

APPROVED BY AP (15 IN FAVOR, 2 ABSTENTIONS)

MOTION #5: RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL EXPLORE A BYCATCH ALLOWANCE OF YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER IN THE MANGROVE SNAPPER SEASON. (LOOK PRE-2015 IN JUNE & JULY)

APPROVED BY AP (15 IN FAVOR, 2 ABSTENTIONS)

Input for biennial evaluation of 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint

The 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery was approved in December 2015 and includes prioritized short-term objectives around broad goals addressing science, management, communication, and governance. From 2016 through 2018, the Council accomplished many of the objectives detailed in the Vision Blueprint and is scheduled to conduct a biennial evaluation in December 2018. To gather input for the evaluation, the Council requested that the Snapper Grouper AP provide input on items that have not yet been addressed, specifically in terms of priority. Council delivered a presentation touching on accomplishments to date and highlighting items left to address. The AP was asked to comment specifically on items remaining under the Management and Communication goals (**Tables 1 and 2**).

Table 1. Remaining long- and short-term items to be addressed under the **Management** strategic goal of the 2016-2010 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery.

REMAINING LONG-TERM ITEMS	REMAINING SHORT-TERM ITEMS
Species-specific quota-based management -Design elements (e.g., quota transfer by sub-region) -Management elements (e.g., sub-regions set quotas, openings, etc.)	Staggered spawning season closures*
Regulations by sub-region not based on quota or allocations	Use bag-limit step-down as post-season AM for rec sector
State-by-state regulations for either sector	Charter boat limit instead of per-person limit
Adaptive management to slowly increase almaco and rudderfish ACL	Alternative management approaches for multi-day boats (“traditional bandit boats”) – permit stacking, multi-day endorsement, sector/community shares)
Consider permit bank to address new entrants	Evaluate retention of bag limit when commercial season is closed
	Use multi-year ACLs/catch specifications*
	Consider non-traditional stakeholders in management decisions (restaurants, eco-tourism, bait/tackle businesses)
	Consider diversity of harvest operations (owner-operator, multiple vessels)
	Consider number of days allowed to fish for rec sector
	“Time out” period of no fishing for rec sector

*Items that have been considered or are in the process of being considered

Table 2. Remaining long- and short-term items to be addressed under the **Communication** strategic goal of the 2016-2010 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery.

REMAINING LONG-TERM ITEMS	REMAINING SHORT-TERM ITEMS
Incorporate real-time calendar for fishery closures for both sectors	Work with agency partners to provide notification of ACL monitoring updates
Advertising campaign highlighting Council activities and success stories	Website analytics to evaluate effectiveness and access of materials on website
Outreach strategies related to connection between habitat and fisheries	Targeted outreach about the Council process including role of SSC
	Expand use of educational webinars on stock assessment, data collections, etc.
	Develop training for new AP members

The AP had the following comments:

- Pursuit of research on life history of managed species is critical
- While staggered spawning season closures is an attractive concept, it is complicated from a regulatory standpoint. More information would be needed to consider feasibility in the South Atlantic region.
- More information would be needed to consider whether a bag limit step-down could work for the recreational sector.

- Time out period of no fishing for the recreational sector is not feasible and should be removed from consideration.
- Needs of “non-traditional stakeholders” are already being addressed by the needs of the commercial and recreational sectors.
- Multi-year ACLs is an interesting concept and should be considered.
- Multi-day trip limits would be a good way to address the “carbon footprint” of the commercial fishing industry and should be considered in management in addition to permit stacking.
- Permit stacking would also be economically beneficial and alleviate the cost to fishermen when a vessel requires maintenance or is otherwise unable to fish.
- Permit stacking may improve professionalism in the fishery. Pros and cons would need to be examined.
- Weekly trip limits or multi day endorsements could be considered.
- Instead of referring to large vessels capable of making multi-day trips as “traditional bandit boats”, suggest using the term “trip fishing vessels”.

Fishery Performance Reports: Yellowtail Snapper and Golden Tilefish

With input from the AP, Fishery Performance Reports (FPRs) have been developed for several snapper grouper species. The intent of the FPRs is to assemble information from AP members’ experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPRs will be provided to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP), and the Council to assist in their discussions. Using an online application <https://testsafmcouncil.shinyapps.io/FPRTilefishYellowtailSnapper/> (user can toggle between the two species), the AP reviewed historical landings trends and economic information for the two species and provided input to develop the FPRs. The latter will also be available as stand-alone documents on the Council’s website.

Citizen Science: Scamp Release App

Staff presented an update on the progress of the development of the Council’s Citizen Science Program and the final work of the Action Teams and the Operations Committee. Staff also updated the AP on development of the Program’s pilot project to collect data on scamp grouper discards using a mobile application. The AP had the opportunity to conduct a live test of the mobile application. The AP’s feedback was positive. They suggested using “No Release” instead of “No Encounter”.

Discussion to inform request for Southeast Regional Permits Office presentation in spring 2019

At the Spring 2018 meeting, the AP requested that Permits Office staff deliver a presentation at their fall meeting. The Council discussed this request at their October 2018 meeting and directed staff to request a presentation from the Southeast Region Permits Office to be delivered at the March 2019 Council meeting and the Spring 2019 AP meeting. The Committee requested that the AP provide specific issues/questions/concerns during their October 2018 to pass along to the SERO Permits Office to develop the presentation. The AP provided the following input for material they would like to see included in the presentation:

- Provide overview of the permit program. When was the program established, how many permits, are being managed, etc.

- Clarify how is the renewal process different for for-hire and commercial permits
- Clarify process for incorporating and, particularly, the time it takes to do it.
- Explain the process for permit application/renewal to identify areas that need improvement.
- Request feedback from the permits office for streamlining the permit application/renewal process
- Explain how changes could be made in terms of governance. How is the agency structured and where does the permits office fit in?
- Explain how permit leasing works.

The AP suggested the following to improve SERO Permits operations:

- Work to improve customer service and answering service.
- Renewal process is lengthy, especially for those who have multiple permits, and could be streamlined.
- Contact fishermen in a timely manner when permit issues need to be expedited.
- Much of the required information on permit renewal forms is duplicative from year to year. SERO Permits Office could streamline the system so fishermen don't have to spend a lot of time filling out the same information they have already provided. Forms could be pre-loaded in the system so that fishermen only have to edit their application at the time of renewal.
- Improvements in coordination between permits office (permit renewal) and the SEFSC (logbooks).
- Improvements to avoid issues such as sending fishermen's information to the wrong recipient.
- Consider assigning permits agents by customers' last names, permit numbers, etc. to create some continuity in service.
- Allow fishermen the option to submit forms electronically to minimize cost to fishermen of overnight mail to ensure their correspondence gets to the permits office on time.

Other Business

At their October meeting, the Snapper Grouper Committee requested that the AP provide input on whether to remove almaco jack from the Other Jack's Complex. The AP had the following input and approved the motions below:

- Recommend removing almaco jack from the Jacks Complex.
- Recommend evaluating whether African pompano could be included in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit.

MOTION #6: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL REQUEST THAT NMFS ADDRESS DESCENDING DEVICE USAGE AND RELEASE TREATMENT THROUGH EXISTING PROGRAMS (COMMERCIAL, FOR-HIRE LOGBOOKS AND MRIP). INCLUDE INFORMATION ON COMPLIANCE RATES AND TYPE OF DEVICE USED.
APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION #7: REQUEST THAT STAFF OBTAIN INFORMATION FOR THE AP TO SEND A LETTER TO REQUEST ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR THE SEFSC TO ADVANCE SCIENCE (AGEING, LIFE HISTORY, ETC.) AND RESEARCH NEEDS IN THE SOUTH

ATLANTIC REGION. ALTERNATIVELY, THE AP COULD DEVELOP A FORM LETTER THAT EACH MEMBER COULD SEND TO THEIR CONGRESSMAN AS A PRIVATE CITIZEN

APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION #8: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER RESTARTING DEVELOPMENT OF AMENDMENT 47 IN DECEMBER 2018 OR SOON THEREAFTER
APPROVED BY AP (15 IN FAVOR, 1 OPPOSED, 1 ABSTENTION)

MOTION #9: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER SEPARATING THE FOR-HIRE COMPONENT (CHARTER AND HEADBOAT) FROM THE RECREATIONAL SECTOR TO IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY
APPROVED BY AP (8 IN FAVOR, 5 OPPOSED, 4 ABSTENTIONS)

MOTION #10: REQUEST THAT A REFERENDUM BE HELD FOR THE FOR-HIRE COMPONENT FOR LIMITED ACCESS AND SECTOR SEPARATION
APPROVED BY AP (14 IN FAVOR, 1 OPPOSED, 2 ABSTENTIONS)