

Summary Report

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

Crowne Plaza
4831 Tanger Outlet Boulevard
North Charleston, SC

November 8-9, 2017

Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council)'s Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP), convened at the Crowne Plaza in North 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.

Update on Recent and Upcoming Management Changes

Council staff briefed the AP on the status of recently submitted amendments and the expected timeframe for new regulations to become effective. The AP received updates on Amendment 41 (mutton snapper), Amendment 43 (red snapper), and the golden tilefish interim rule.

Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 - Recreational Management Measures

Council staff facilitated discussion on the suite of actions and alternatives included in the amendment and requested the AP's input on each action. At the September 2017 Council meeting, staff presented an alternative approach to structure the amendment that would better reflect the manner in the recreational fishery operates and more clearly convey the Council's vision for the fishery. The Council approved the suggested approach, made several more revisions, and approved a modified timeline (final approval in September 2018). The AP received a detailed update of the most recent changes the Council requested. However, analyses will not be available for the AP to review until the spring 2018 meeting. The AP discussed the range of alternatives for analyses under each action and considered them appropriate. Consequently, the AP did not have additional recommendations at this time except the following:

MOTION #1: RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL CONSIDER ADDING AFRICAN POMPAÑO TO THE SNAPPER GROUPE R FISHE RY MANAGE ME NT UNIT
APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 - Commercial Management Measures

Council staff facilitated discussion on the suite of actions and alternatives included in the amendment and requested the AP's input on each action.

Regarding management of blueline tilefish, AP members suggested that recent regulatory changes should be evaluated before considering additional modifications. Also, because blueline tilefish and snowy grouper are caught together, fishermen ask the

management approach aim at extending the season for both species as long as possible. AP members were in agreement with the range of alternatives being considered for both blueline tilefish and snowy grouper. AP members reiterated that South of Cape Lookout, NC, blueline tilefish are an incidental catch.

Regarding greater amberjack, AP members stated that it is an important resource for commercial fishermen throughout the South Atlantic. However, greater amberjack are not available to fishermen off NC until August and this results in inequitable access. AP members maintain that the fishery is healthy and they are seeing large numbers of small fish indicating strong recruitment.

On vermilion snapper, the AP reiterated how important the species is to the commercial snapper grouper fishery and especially to “traditional bandit boats.” However, AP members indicated that certain components of the fishery would be severely impacted by a reduction in the trip limit. In particular, AP members stated fishermen in north Florida (Mayport, St. Augustine) would be negatively impacted. AP members stated that the trip-limit reduction is not having much of an effect at extending the season. Asked whether trip limit increases, or “step-ups” should be considered, AP members indicated they may not be desirable from a market stand point because of the potential for market flooding.

The AP stated that trip limit reductions (step-downs) for the Other Jacks Complex may not be necessary.

Regarding the consideration of a minimum size limit for almaco jack, the AP was in agreement with the range of alternatives being considered. In addition, the AP discussed whether a minimum size limit on almaco jack should also be considered for the recreational sector. The AP agreed that one is not necessary for that sector as recreational anglers generally fish shallower waters where large almaco are uncommon. AP members also stated that species identification issues should be kept in mind when considering management changes.

The AP had the following specific recommendations:

Action 3. Establish a commercial split season and modify commercial trip limit for greater amberjack

MOTION #2: SUPPORT FOR SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2C WITH SUGGESTED MODIFICATIONS BELOW:

Sub-alternative 2c. Trip limit = 1,000 pounds whole weight in both seasons. A trip limit step-down to 500 pounds whole weight would occur in each season once 75% of the seasonal quota is met or projected to be met. ~~A trip limit step-down would not occur in Season 1 unless 75% of the season’s quota is met or is projected to be met on _____.~~ A trip step down would not occur in Season 2 unless 75% of the season’s quota is met or is projected to be met on **JANUARY 31.**

APPROVED (4 OPPOSED)

Action 4. Establish a commercial split season and modify commercial trip limit for red porgy

MOTION #3: SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVE 2, SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2C:

Alternative 2. Specify two commercial fishing seasons for red porgy. Allocate the commercial red porgy annual catch limit into two quotas: 30% to the period January 1 through April 30 and 70% to the period May 1 through December 31. Any remaining quota from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 would not be carried forward. Remove the sale and purchase prohibition during January 1 to April 30 each year. Retain the commercial trip limit of 120 fish from May 1 through December 31 and specify a commercial trip limit from January 1 through April 30 of:

Sub-alternative 2b. 45 fish

APPROVED BY AP

Action 5. Modify the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper in the second season

MOTION #4: CONSIDER ADDING ANALYSIS FOR A 500-POUND TRIP LIMIT YEAR-ROUND

APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUSLY)

MOTION #5: CONSIDER ADDING ALTERNATIVE FOR 500-POUND TRIP LIMIT IN BOTH SEASONS WITH NO STEP-DOWNS

Intent is to look at analysis first and then consider adding the alternative

APPROVED BY AP (2 OPPOSED)

MOTION #6: CONSIDER ADDING ALTERNATIVE FOR 650-POUND TRIP LIMIT IN BOTH SEASONS WITH NO STEP-DOWNS.

APPROVED BY AP (1 OPPOSED)

MOTION #7: CONSIDER ADDING ALTERNATIVE FOR A 750-POUND TRIP LIMIT IN SEASON 1 AND 500 POUNDS IN SEASON 2 WITH NO STEP-DOWNS.

APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUSLY)

MOTION #8: AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 2

Alternative 2. Implement a 750 lbs gw vermilion snapper commercial trip limit for the second season (July 1 through December 31). The commercial trip limit is reduced to 500 lbs gw when 75% of the second season quota is met or is projected to be met.

APPROVED BY AP (2 ABSTENTIONS)

Fishery Performance Reports: Black Sea Bass and Vermilion Snapper

Council staff presented an overview of the Fishery Information Documents for each species and answered questions from the AP. Staff then presented a series of discussion questions for each species pertaining to management approaches, trends in abundance, environmental factors, etc. intended to elicit discussion. Council staff will consolidate the information provided during the discussion to generate Fishery Performance Reports for each species that will be available for the Scientific and Statistical Committee, SEDAR process, and the Council to better inform management of these species. AP members suggested that the reports be made available to the public on the Council website.

Amendment 46 – Red Snapper, Best Fishing Practices, and Recreational Reporting

Council staff updated the AP on actions currently included in Amendment 46, including red snapper benchmarks, recreational permitting and reporting, and best fishing practices. The AP continued to express support for best fishing practices, especially the use of descending devices to curb release mortality. The AP discussed the requirement to use circle hooks north of 28 degrees North Latitude. Some AP members stated the requirement had the intended effect to reduce release mortality of red snapper; hence, it should be maintained. Other members stated that it should not be a requirement for the commercial sector as it impacts that sector's ability to target vermilion napper and gray triggerfish and there are comparatively fewer commercial vessels. AP members who fish commercially stated that circle hooks work better for larger fish and fishermen will continue using them when needed. AP members suggested that the use of circle hooks should not be a requirement but a practice that is encouraged, similar to the use of descending devices. The AP also questioned the enforceability of the regulation (and other gear-related modifications being considered). The AP offered the following suggestions/comments:

- Allowing limited harvest of red snapper through mini-seasons leads to highgrading. Consider a vessel limit instead of per person limit.
- Consider a range of minimum size limits for red snapper from 12 to 20 inches.
- Consider requiring completion of training on descending devices.
- Consider scheduling red snapper harvest outside of months of peak spawning.

The AP will discuss Amendment 46 in more detail at their Spring 2018 meeting.

Updates

The AP received a series of updates from Council/SEDAR staff on various topics relevant to the snapper grouper fishery including ongoing and upcoming stock assessments, the Citizen Science Program, reporting projects for the charter and private recreational components of the recreational sector, outreach activities, a proposed moratorium on snapper grouper for-hire (charter/headboat) permits, and a review of the wreckfish Individual Transferrable Quota (ITQ) program. AP comments/recommendations are below:

- Suggestion for managers to focus on simple methods to assess the status of managed stocks instead of more complex tools that require more time, effort, and better-quality data.
- There are indications of red grouper recruitment off Cape Lookout, NC. Also, observations of small red grouper off FL after the hurricanes.
- AP members reiterated support for a moratorium on the issuance of charter/headboat permits in the snapper grouper fishery.

Other Business

At the request of the Council chair, AP members further discussed the circle hook requirement and offered the following observations:

- The release mortality estimate for red snapper in the last stock assessment was diminished thanks to the circle hook requirement. It is important to acknowledge that was the original intent of that requirement and that it has benefitted red snapper management.

- Fishermen are using triple barbs to catch gray triggerfish and vermilion snapper since circle hooks don't work well for those species. Commercial fishermen catching gray triggerfish and vermilion snapper would support removing the current requirement. Triple barbs are smaller and easier to de-hook resulting in higher release survival.
- The circle hook requirement has not negatively impacted the charter fleet.
- The current circle hook requirement is not enforceable and is cumbersome. The use of circle hook should be encouraged for applicable species as a 'best fishing practice.'
- Fish that are gut hooked with a circle hook do not survive. Circle hooks work best with larger fish. Disadvantages appear to outweigh benefits for smaller fish.

MOTION: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL REQUIRE ALL VESSELS
FISHING FOR SG SPECIES CARRY DESCENDING DEVICES ON BOARD
APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

Suggestion to include definition of "descending device"