

Summary Report

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

Crowne Plaza
4831 Tanger Outlet Boulevard
North Charleston, SC

April 11-13, 2018

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 amendments recently submitted

Council staff briefed the AP on the status of recently submitted and developing 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). The AP has reviewed the amendments during previous meetings and their comments and recommendations are captured in summary reports for 2017. AP members had the following to add on Regulatory Amendment 26 (recreational measures):

- Complexity of proposed changes to aggregates and bag limits is of concern.
- Concern over proposed recreational season for deep-water species and possible increase in dead discards.
- Need to define what constitutes "deep-water" vs "shallow-water". For instance, off North Carolina, red grouper (considered to be a shallow-water grouper) can be caught in 300-400 feet of water.
- Proposed 20-fish "cap" would be a significant reduction from what fishermen are allowed to retain currently. Impacts to for-hire businesses are concerning, especially in areas where productive fishing grounds are far offshore.
- Council should begin looking into management of barrelfish.
- Acknowledgement that a single-hook-rig requirement is better than the status quo. However, if the snowy limit remains 1 per vessel and the blueline tilefish limit is three per person, there is still the potential for an increase in snowy discards in areas where the two species co-occur.

AP members had the following to add on Regulatory Amendment 27 (commercial measures):

- Support for proposed measures to reduce red porgy discards.
- Need to revisit the sector allocation for banded rudderfish. Almaco jack should have its own ACL but the proposed trip limit for the Jack Complex should help slow down the harvest.

MOTION #1: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER A BYCATCH COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT FOR RED GROUPER APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

Regulatory Amendment 28 – Golden Tilefish

Regulatory Amendment 28 would address long-term management of golden tilefish. The Council discussed this amendment at their March 2018 meeting and considered options to modify the acceptable biological catch and annual catch limits in addition to modifying the start date of the fishing year for the commercial hook-and-line component. Council staff delivered an overview of the actions/alternatives under consideration and explained that the Council would receive public comment on the amendment at their June meeting and consider approving the amendment for formal review at that time. The Council will also receive recommendations on catch levels from the SSC at the June meeting. AP members had the following comments:

- There is no support for reducing the hook-and-line trip limit below the current 500 pounds.
- Blackbelly rosefish are caught incidentally to blueline tilefish, not golden.

MOTION #2: RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL CONSIDER A FISHING YEAR START DATE OF MARCH 1 FOR THE HOOK-AND-LINE COMPONENT FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH. APPROVED BY AP (2 OPPOSED, 2 ABSTENTIONS)

- A March 1 start date for the hook-and-line component would be close to when the longline component closes for the year and would allow product to be available when groupers are still closed and during Lent. However, fishermen in Florida would prefer for the fishing year to begin on September 1 or October 1. Discards of snowy grouper and blueline tilefish may be a concern with a fall opening.

MOTION #3: RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL CONSIDER AN ACTION THAT WOULD SPLIT THE HOOK AND LINE COMPONENT INTO TWO SEASONS WITH A MARCH 1 AND SEPTEMBER 1 START DATES SPLITTING THE ACL 50/50. APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUSLY)

Wreckfish Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) Program Review (*Attachment 3*)

Council staff briefed the AP on the status of the review. The Socio-economic Sub-panel of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed a draft of the document in February of 2018 and the SSC will discuss this item at their May 2018 meeting. AP members had the following comments:

- There is concern that the recreational allocation for wreckfish is too high. It was originally intended as a bycatch fishery, not a targeted one. A lower allocation may be more appropriate (also consider the low encounter rate in the MRIP survey).
- There are charter operations that target wreckfish out of Hatteras.
- Concern over discards if there is no recreational allocation.

MOTION #4: RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL CONSIDER REDUCING THE RECREATIONAL ALLOCATION FOR WRECKFISH. APPROVED BY AP (10 IN FAVOR, 7 OPPOSED)

Citizen Science Research Needs

As part of the Council's Citizen Science program development efforts, the Citizen Science Action teams have been working on developing different components of the program including how to establish appropriate topics and research ideas that could be addressed using citizen science. To help outline citizen science topics and research ideas for the Program, the Teams used the Council's Research & Monitoring Plan to inform the development of a draft Citizen Science Research Needs document. The draft document outlines specific topics and research needs for projects developed under the Program. Staff reviewed how the document was developed, its intended use, and the content of the document. The AP provided the input below:

- Add commercial volunteers, in particular in relation to SMZ sites.
- Biological sampling would be relatively easy to accomplish. Perhaps solicit input from the Information and Education Advisory Panel.
- Emphasize how the information that is collected will be used in order to increase participation among volunteers.
- Utilize Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel to recruit volunteers.
- Recommend establishing partnerships with academic institutions to involve students.

Socio-economic Profile of the Commercial Fishery

The Socio-economic Profile of the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Commercial Fishery is a broad project characterizing the commercial sector of the snapper grouper fishery. The project includes detailed information about permits and permit holders, snapper grouper vessels, participation, catch portfolios, and landings and revenue over the last 20 years. The Council contracted Dr. Kari MacLauchlin Buck to conduct the analysis and produce a report. Dr. MacLauchlin Buck presented an overview of the report and key findings. The AP provided the input below:

- The Council needs to define what constitutes an "active" permit.
- Provide the number of vessels that are catching a certain percentage of the landings to inform discussion of what it means for a permit to be active.
- Request more information on leases of SG2 permits (225-pounds).
- Number of vessels landing 50,000 pounds of snapper grouper species per year, broken down by area
- Vessels with charter permits; part-timers (need to define).
- Percentage of landings from SG1 (unlimited) vs SG2 permits
- Concern that "2 for 1" will lead to less and less participation over the long term
- Council still needs to define the optimum number of vessels in the fishery in relation to continuing the "2 for 1" SG1 provision. How healthy is the fishery? What can it sustain?

MOTION #5: RECOMMEND TO THE COUNCIL THAT THEY STOP THE 2 FOR 1 PERMIT REQUIREMENT FOR SG 1 COMMERCIAL PERMITS APPROVED BY AP (12 IN FAVOR /3 OPPOSED)

Fishery Performance Reports: Greater Amberjack and Red Porgy

The AP addressed a series of discussion topics/questions to develop Fishery Performance Reports (FPRs) for greater amberjack and red porgy. Both species are undergoing assessments in the coming months. Draft FRPs (attached to this report), will be reviewed by the Council at their June meeting and made available to the SEDAR process and the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and its Socio-Economic Sub-Panel (SEP) as appropriate. The AP requested that, when possible, recreational landings be broken down by component (headboat, charter, and private) to better assess which component may be causing fluctuations in the landings. In addition, if possible, provide economic value of directed trips for the for-hire component.

Update on MyFishCount

The AP received an update on the MyFishCount recreational reporting tool that was developed to assist with recreational data collection in the South Atlantic region. MyFishCount was only available to fishermen as a web-portal for the fall 2017 red snapper mini-season. In 2018 it will be available as a phone app which will allow fishermen to use the app offshore to record information about their catch on private recreational trips. The app has been developed in consultation with the Council to ensure it includes all the needed features (i.e., number of fish caught and released, length and weight of fish, areas fished, photos of fish, hook type, how fish were released, reason for release, and depth caught). In addition, the app provides access to current regulations via link to the FishRules app. Staff presented a short instructional video for how to use the app. The AP suggested adding audio to the video and ensuring users know how to change the settings of the FishRules app to show state or federal regulations.

Updates:

- **SEDAR** – Staff updated the AP on ongoing and upcoming stock assessments and requested volunteers for the yellowtail and golden tilefish assessments. AP members expressed concern about the red grouper assessment being scheduled for 2021. Fishermen off North Carolina claim they are not seeing red grouper in the catches anymore. However, off Florida, fishermen report seeing more red grouper than before.
- **Scientific and Statistical Committee** – Council staff delivered a brief update on the status of ongoing blueline tilefish and red snapper discussions. A workgroup (comprised of South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic SSC members and analysts who conducted the SEDAR 50 stock assessment) was formed to look into methods of deriving a viable ABC estimate for blueline tilefish and allocating that ABC between the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Councils' jurisdictions. Another SSC workgroup was tasked with reviewing data and methodologies for setting an ABC for red snapper in the South Atlantic. The South Atlantic SSC discusses these topics at their May 1-3, 2018 meeting and their recommendations will be provided to the Council in June.

Regulations recommended for removal

On February 24, 2017 the President issued Executive Order 13777 as part of efforts to lower regulatory burdens on the American people by implementing and enforcing regulatory reform. The NMFS requested that each of the fishery management councils identify a process to review/evaluate existing regulations by the end of December 2017. Each Council is to conduct the review/evaluation and provide recommendations on rules to be removed by the end of June

2018. The Council is reaching out to all of its APs to get their recommendations. The Snapper Grouper AP provided the following:

- Modify the sea turtle release gear requirements so they aren't so burdensome, especially to smaller vessels
- Remove 2-for-1 permit requirement for commercial fishery
- Modify specs for golden tilefish buoy gear to allow for a lead of longer than 30', but not increase the number of allowable hooks (10).

U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Priorities

A representative from the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Sector Charleston, Lt. Jerry Brown, addressed the AP with a request for input on law enforcement priorities for fisheries under the Council's jurisdiction, in particular for the South Carolina and Georgia coasts. AP members provided the following input:

- Penalties for violations are not severe enough
- Concern over penalties directed at vessel owners vs. operators. Operators who commit violations are not being held accountable
- Suggestion to improve USCG officers' knowledge of species identification, perhaps through development of a mobile application
- There is perception that enforcement effort is focused primarily on the commercial sector
- Suggestion for the USCG to provide regular updates to APs, similar to how it is done for HMS meetings
- There are issues in Florida with gear tampering (commercial gear being removed or tampered with by recreational anglers)

Other Business

During the March 2018 Council meeting, a brief discussion took place regarding fishermen off North Carolina who use spearfishing gear and those using hook-and-line increasingly experiencing conflict. Fishermen who have drawn attention to the issue cited concern over gear efficiency and resource conservation. The Council requested the AP's input on this topic. The AP provided the following:

- Free diving is increasingly popular activity and there is concern it will take a toll on the resource due to increased efficiency.
- Commercial hook-and-line fishermen are increasingly frustrated over efficiency of spearfishing activity. On the other hand, harvest with spearfishing gear does not result in regulatory discards.
- There is a need to determine the number of fishermen utilizing spearfishing gear

MOTION #6: REQUEST THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER A WAY TO IDENTIFY RECREATIONAL USE OF SPEARFISHING GEAR
APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION #7: REQUEST THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER CREATING A GEAR ENDORSEMENT FOR SPEARFISHING FOR THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR
APPROVED BY AP (7 IN FAVOR/4 OPPOSED/2 ABSTENTIONS)

The Snapper Grouper AP also discussed the following and approved the motions below:

- Reiterate concern over status of red grouper
- Concern about balanced representation on Council
- Frustration over permit renewal process. The AP requested an update on permit requirements and renewal at their upcoming meeting.

MOTION #8: AP REQUESTS THAT THE SNAPPER GROUPEr ADVISORY PANEL HAVE AN ADVISORY VOTE FOR PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES APPOINTED TO REPRESENT THEM AT THE COUNCIL TABLE. INTENT IS TO HAVE FAIR AND BALANCED REPRESENTATION FOR EACH SECTOR AND STATE.
APPROVED BY AP (11 IN FAVOR/1 OPPOSED/1 ABSTENTION)

MOTION #9: REQUEST THAT THE SSC REVISIT THE WRECKFISH ABC TO DETERMINE WHETHER AN INCREASE IN THE ACL IS FEASIBLE
APPROVED BY AP (1 ABSTENTION)

MOTION #10: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL WORK TO ADDRESS RECREATIONAL SECTOR ACCOUNTABILITY VIA A SNAPPER GROUPEr STAMP OR PERMIT
APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION #11: THE AP REQUESTS THAT THE COUNCIL CONTINUE TO CONSIDER LIMITED ENTRY FOR THE FOR-HIRE SECTOR IN THE SNAPPER GROUPEr FISHERY
APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION #12: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL REACH OUT TO NMFS TO REQUEST THAT THE SNAPPER GROUPEr COMMERCIAL PERMIT BE ISSUED ON A MULTI-YEAR (3 YEARS) BASIS
APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)