

Summary Report

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel

Town and Country Inn & Suites
2008 Savannah Highway
Charleston, SC

October 9-11, 2019

Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council)'s Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP), convened at the Town and Country Inn and Suites 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.

Members of the public were given the opportunity to address the AP. No comment was submitted during the meeting but staff reviewed Five comments submitted online. Comments are available [HERE](#). AP members were advised by the AP Chair to read the comments.

The AP approved minutes from the April 2019 meeting and the agenda for the October meeting.

Update on Snapper Grouper FMP Amendments

Council staff briefed the AP on the status of recently submitted and developing amendments and the expected timeframe for new regulations to become effective. Included in the update were the following amendments:

- Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26 (Recreational)
- Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 (Commercial)
- Abbreviated Framework 3 (Blueline Tilefish)
- Amendment 42 (Sea Turtle Release Gear and Framework Update)
- Amendment 46 (Recreational Permit and Reporting)
- Regulatory Amendment 30 (Red Grouper Rebuilding)
- Regulatory Amendment 31 (Recreational Accountability Measures)
- For-hire Electronic Reporting Amendment
- Regulatory Amendment 29 (Best Fishing Practices & Powerheads)
- Wreckfish ITQ Review
- Visioning for Snapper Grouper Fishery

Chair's remark: Comment was made that these management measures are the fruits of our labor, and concern was expressed about the long time it took for final approval from the Commerce Secretary.

Update on Southeast Reef Fish Survey

Dr. Wally Buble, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, provided an overview of results from the 2018 Southeast Reef Fish Survey. The survey collects biological samples used for life history studies of many species in the Snapper Grouper Complex and produces indices of

abundance used in stock assessments. Dr. Buble explained the survey methodology, including gear, soak time, and locations of sampling stations. He also presented catch per unit effort trends from the beginning of the survey (1990) until 2018 for select species and answered questions from AP members. The AP found the presentation very informative and the data the survey collects extremely valuable. The AP requested that updates on the survey be regularly included in the agenda for their annual fall meeting. The AP expressed their support for the program and for its continued funding. In addition, AP members expressed support for expanded cooperative work with fishermen.

Citizen Science Update and FISHstory Demonstration

Julia Byrd, Council staff, presented a brief update on the Council's Citizen Science Program, highlighting activities that have occurred since the Spring 2019 Snapper Grouper AP meeting. Subsequently, Allie Iberle, Council staff, provided an overview and demonstration of the FISHstory pilot project that will launch in early 2020. The FISHstory project will document historic catch and length estimates from the 1940s-1970s from a headboat fleet in Daytona Beach, FL. The project uses an online crowdsourcing platform, Zooniverse, to build an interface that will allow members of the public (i.e., citizens) to be trained to identify species in the photos. A team of species ID experts will help validate the species identified by citizens. Once species are verified, one key species will be selected for length analysis. A project design team – comprised of scientists, fishermen, and outreach experts – has been developing the FISHstory project interface and training materials in Zooniverse. Allie gave a demonstration of the FISHstory test project. AP members had the opportunity to provide feedback on the test project and several members volunteered to serve on the project validation team or provide possible participants from among their peers. The AP had encouraging words for staff and expressed strong support for the project.

Chair's remark: Comment was made that the FISHstory project could give a realistic historic base line of age /length/abundance as well as CPUE of our SG stocks prior to 1970s. This information would be very important for use in stock assessments and could help scientists gauge success in our stock rebuilding plans.

Fishery Performance Report – Scamp

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 SSC, the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP), and the Council to assist in their discussions. Using an online application <http://data.safmc.net/FPRAll/> staff provided a brief overview of landings trends and other background information. AP members then used a series of discussion questions to provide information on scamp that will be compiled and developed into the FPR. AP members will have the opportunity to provide edits on the draft FPR before it is finalized in the spring.

Chair's remark: The SG/AP has good fishermen representation from the vast South Atlantic management area. Thus, a wide shot view of Scamp interaction from North Carolina to Florida is very informative and important.

Presentation on Draft EIS to modify boundary and update regulations in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

NOAA is releasing for public review and comment a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) - Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (Sanctuary) Marine Zoning and Regulatory Review that analyzes a proposed action to expand the Sanctuary's boundary, update sanctuary-wide regulations, modify and establish new marine zones, update marine zone-specific regulations, and revise the sanctuary's non-regulatory management plan. NOAA's preferred alternative would expand the sanctuary by 741 square miles and would protect habitats through additional proposed marine zones and through proposed regulations applied in those marine zones. NOAA has requested the Council's comment on the DEIS. Beth Dieveney, Sanctuary staff, presented an overview of the proposed changes via webinar. AP members engaged in lengthy discussion and asked many questions of Ms. Deveney. One AP member who could not attend the meeting submitted a comment on this topic. His comment is available [HERE](#). During the discussion, Sanctuary staff also used the online interactive tool to address questions. AP members offered the following:

- An AP member asked whether feedback received during private meetings the Sanctuary has held with stakeholders would be a part of the public record. Sanctuary staff responded that those comments are not officially part of the Regulations.gov public record but the information is being taken into consideration. Comments submitted at upcoming in-person meetings will be posted as part of the official record.
- An AP member asked whether there would be any in-person hearings held in Broward County since many fishermen that live in Broward County fish in the Keys. Sanctuary staff responded that there are no plans to hold hearings in Broward at this time, but stakeholders are encouraged to submit comment through other available avenues.
- Proposed regulations will make it exceedingly confusing for recreational anglers using the Sanctuary. There is concern that stakeholders from neighboring counties (e.g., Dade, Broward, Palm Beach) will stay away because of the regulatory complexity within the Sanctuary. This will likely have negative economic impacts on communities in the Florida Keys.
- A charter captain on the AP expressed concern and frustration that under the current proposal divers would still be allowed to utilize areas where fishing would no longer be allowed. He maintains that the number of divers using these areas likely has a greater environmental impact than fishing activity.
- Current closures are already impacting the charter industry. The proposed regulatory changes will further restrict for-hire activity and increase conflict with the diving industry.
- An AP member maintained that efforts to restore areas within the sanctuary are not "big enough". In his opinion, efforts need to be focused on addressing issues that have a broader impact, such as water quality, on the Keys ecosystem.
- Concern that once additional restrictions are put in place they will never be lifted.
- Concern that proposed restrictions would shift effort to open areas over the long term.
- Concern that no walk-in access wade fishing would be allowed via Long Key State Park.
- Concern over access to Western Dry Rocks because of fish spawning activity and that similar restrictions in other areas would follow. Other management measures besides restricting access can be used to control harvest during times of high spawning activity, in addition to enforcing existing regulations.

- Concern over proposed idle speed/no wake in area off Long Key -- which includes Hawks Channel, a major thoroughfare for vessels transiting to and from the Keys. This proposal is clearly not enforceable and in fact creates skepticism among stakeholders towards other proposed changes.
- Suggestion to present information of “success stories” of existing regulations to promote stakeholder buy-in before proposing further restrictions.

Chair’s remark: SG/AP members learned a lot from this presentation and discussion. Especially the difference between being managed under the Sanctuaries Act and the Magnuson Stevens Act. Fishermen in the Keys are very concerned about their future in an expanded Sanctuary boundary.

The AP approved the motion below:

MOTION # 1: RECOMMEND TO THE SAFMC THAT WE MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO ON THE FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY PROPOSED CHANGES

APPROVED BY AP (12 IN FAVOR, 3 ABSTENTIONS)

Economic Performance of the Commercial Snapper Grouper Fishery

In the fall of 2018, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) released the technical memorandum *Economics of the U.S. South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper Fishery – 2016*. The tech memo provides summary information and economic estimates for the snapper grouper fishery as a whole and for specific Segments of Interest (SOI) that consist of species or groups of species within the snapper grouper management complex. Among the results are estimates of net revenue and net cash flow that are potentially useful for better analyzing the economic effects of fishery management actions on the commercial sector. The AP received a summary presentation from Dr. Christopher Liese, SEFSC, on the methods and major findings from the study. A similar presentation was delivered to the Council’s Snapper Grouper Committee in June 2019. AP members had the following comments:

- The presentation stated that golden tilefish longline vessels are “dormant” after the fishery closes for the year. An AP member noted that some of those vessels switch to the wreckfish or other fisheries. The analyst replied that the wreckfish component of the fishery was not included in the analysis because that fishery is managed very differently (under an Individual Transferrable Quota program) and therefore not comparable. This is an aspect that he intends to address in future analyses.
- An AP member pointed out that regulatory changes are not necessarily what is causing shorter trips. Many fishermen have adapted to selling their own catch and their catch/trips are often driven by market/restaurant demand.
- An AP member from North Carolina explained that the fishery in his area has moved from traditional boats and moved into the “outboard fishery” that consumes a lot more fuel.
- Habitat and weather differences have an impact on how the fishery performs in different areas.
- An AP member disagreed with the statement that there is a high level of discards in the commercial snapper grouper fishery.

- An AP member from the Florida Keys offered that for some fishermen it is a trade-off to spend more fuel in exchange for more time at home with their families. This may be a hidden value that is not accounted for in the analysis.

Chair's remark: This presentation was a comparison between the Gulf of Mexico Individual Transferrable Quota (catch shares) S/G fleet and the South Atlantic S/G shared quota fleet. Most SG/AP members felt the comparison was flawed and the full value of the Shared South Atlantic quota was not represented. In the South Atlantic we have a portfolio of small quota fisheries that are shared by all commercial S/G fishermen. The value of that is hard to put a dollar sign on.

Status of Commercial Electronic Logbook Project

In September 2013 the Council received a presentation from the NMFS SEFSC on their commercial electronic logbook pilot study and requested regular updates on electronic logbooks. The Council encouraged the SEFSC to continue to develop electronic logbook reporting capabilities, and initially intended to work with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council staff and NMFS staff to allow fishermen to voluntarily provide their data electronically and to plan for completion of a comprehensive amendment incorporating results from year one of the pilot study. The SEFSC has proceeded with the electronic reporting pilot in cooperation with ACCSP, but the Council has not resumed formal work on the amendment as they have been waiting for the voluntary program to be developed and evaluated. As of April 2016, *voluntary* reports may be provided through the ACCSP SAFIS system. The AP received an update from Brett Pierce, SEFSC staff, on the status of the electronic logbook pilot project for commercial vessels. During the ensuing discussion, the following points were brought up:

- When corrections are needed to current logbook entries, it takes a long time and causes much frustration. SEFSC staff explained that once the electronic logbook system is implemented, it will only allow fishermen to submit valid entries thereby greatly increasing efficiency over the current system.
- AP members requested a target date for when the system will be ready to launch. SEFSC staff stated that the goal is that there will be a voluntary electronic logbook program in place sometime in 2020.
- It is expected that there will be multiple platforms (e.g., mobile apps, desktop-based programs) developed to support the new system as technology has advanced a great deal since the pilot was first begun.
- AP expressed their wishes for a speedy completion of the electronic reporting system.

Regulatory Amendment 33 (Red Snapper Seasons)

Regulatory Amendment 33 proposes changes to the red snapper recreational and commercial seasons to increase access, reduce discards, and maximize fishing opportunity in the event of bad weather. The Snapper Grouper AP provided feedback early in the development of the amendment. Subsequently, public hearings were held in August via webinar and listening stations. The Council discussed the amendment at their September 2019 meeting and made modifications to the proposed actions. Council staff presented an overview and requested the AP's feedback on the proposed actions. The AP acknowledged the two comments that were submitted to the AP regarding this amendment (available [HERE](#)).

- It was clarified that public comment that is submitted to the AP is not included in the administrative record for that particular amendment/topic since the comments are intended for the AP's review. Commenters wishing to address the Council can submit

their comment on the Council's public comment form for the amendment, which is available throughout the development of the amendment.

- AP members expressed support for removing the 3-day minimum threshold for red snapper harvest citing potential economic benefits.
- One AP member pointed out that the level of discards differs by area and time of the year; hence the interest in discussing regional management approaches for species like red snapper.
- Some AP members expressed concern over the commercial season beginning ahead of the recreational opening.
- One AP member acknowledged that red snapper have a lengthy spawning season so whether the fish are harvested at the beginning or end of the spawning season may make no biological difference to the stock.
- Some AP members expressed interest in re-considering a harvest tag system with reporting for red snapper.
- AP members inquired as to whether the Council would consider a start date of August 1 for the commercial sector, as several commenters from Florida proposed.
- One AP member from North Carolina explained that the proposed May 1 start date for the red snapper commercial season would be beneficial to fishermen off North Carolina who also fish for red grouper since that species will no longer be available in May off the Carolinas once Regulatory Amendment 30 is implemented. In addition, the vermilion snapper ACL, as implemented through Abbreviated Framework 2, will diminish annually possibly leading to early closures. If that is the case, having red snapper available beginning May 1 would be beneficial.

Chair's remark: The SG/AP discussed how important the red snapper fishery is to all fishermen in the expansive South Atlantic management area. Florida AP members, where the vast majority of landings occur, want a different opening start date than North Carolina. Conversation was had by the AP about the need for regional management in the South Atlantic.

Regulatory Amendment 34 (SMZs in NC and SC)

In March 2019, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries and the South Carolina Marine Resources Division requested that the Council designate artificial reef sites in the exclusive economic zone off those states as special management zones (SMZ). In June 2019, the Council directed staff to begin development of an amendment to address the states' requests. The process to designate SMZs around artificial reefs (permitted through the Army Corps of Engineers) was established in the Snapper Grouper FMP in 1983 with the main intent being to *increase biological production and/or create fishing opportunities that would not otherwise exist*. The Council discussed the amendment at their September 2019 meeting and directed staff to request the AP's input and hold scoping hearings this fall. Council staff presented an overview of the proposed actions and tentative timing for development. The AP had the following comments and approved the motion below:

- One AP member from North Carolina stated an opinion that during the past few years, research and fisheries enhancement programs have become mostly funded by the NC recreational fishing license due to state budget cuts. He stated that in fairness the artificial reefs should then favor recreational angling by restricting very efficient commercial gear.

- One AP member from North Carolina explained how the artificial reefs were founded upon private funding by recreational fishing organizations, and how the NC Department of Marine Fisheries came to own and assume management of the artificial reefs.
- One AP member from North Carolina stated that the proposed gear restrictions would likely not directly affect commercial fishermen in the southern portion of North Carolina as the proposed sites (except two of them) are close to shore.
- One AP member inquired as to how enforcement would address a situation in which a commercial vessel (e.g., with bandit gear) stopped to fish an artificial reef with rod and reel during a commercial trip.
- The AP inquired as to whether there would be buffer zones specified around the reefs as part of the SMZ designation.
- One AP member from Florida pointed out that North Carolina does not have a Joint Enforcement Agreement with NOAA Fisheries like the rest of the South Atlantic states.
- Suggest including definition of various types of gear in the document.

MOTION #2: WITH RESPECT TO ACTION 1, REQUEST THAT THE COUNCIL DESIGNATE THE 30 ARTIFICIAL REEFS WITHIN THE EEZ OFF NC AS SMZs. RESTRICT LEGAL GEAR (COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL) TO HANDLINE, ROD AND REEL AND SPEARFISHING AND LIMIT SPEARFISHING HARVEST TO THE RECREATIONAL BAG LIMIT
APPROVED BY AP (11 IN FAVOR, 3 ABSTENTIONS)

MyFishCount Update: Past and Future

MyFishCount is a pilot project initiated in 2017 to explore electronic reporting for the recreational sector. The project consists of a web portal and mobile app that allow anglers to report data on their catch and trips. Council staff presented results of the first two years of the project and an overview of current outreach efforts and next steps.

The following were salient points from the discussion:

- Suggestion for states to consider incentive to use MyFishCount as part of the licensing requirement (ex: offer discount to anglers who use it).
- Location information is important in that it can help determine which areas/sites are important for recreational fishing. This can be useful when management agencies propose changes to regulations (e.g., FKNMS) or other government agencies propose activities that can impact recreational fishing (e.g., energy development).
- AP members appreciated the addition of weather information in the MyFishCount mobile app.
- Some AP members requested information that they can distribute at fishing clinics in their area.

SEDAR Update

Kathleen Howington, SEDAR staff, reviewed the new schedules for SEDAR 59 (Greater Amberjack) and SEDAR 60 (Red Pogy). Kathleen also reviewed the new schedule for SEDAR 66 (Golden Tilefish) and confirmed participation from AP members who had previously expressed an interest in being involved. AP members were also informed of the schedule for SEDAR 71 (Gag Grouper) and some volunteered to participate in workshops for that assessment.

Chair's remark: Fishermen on the SG/AP are happy for the opportunity to volunteer and better inform scientists about our S/G stocks.

Other Business

At the staff's request, the AP engaged in discussion regarding how fishermen (commercial and recreational) obtain information regarding changes to regulations, etc. AP members offered the following:

- Younger generations rely almost exclusively on social media. Staff reiterated how important it is for AP members to actively follow the Council on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to encourage peers to do so as well.
- Some dealers use text messages to keep their fishermen and customers informed of any changes
- Emails/texts from agencies (Councils, NOAA) are reaching their intended audiences
- Printed publications are still important
- Fishermen still rely on radio announcements of ACL closures
- The chair also mentioned NOAA FISH WATCH as a valuable site for consumers and fishermen to obtain information.

**MOTION #3: STRONGLY RECOMMEND TO THE COUNCIL TO PRIORITIZE DEVELOPMENT OF AMENDMENT 46 (PRIVATE RECREATIONAL PERMIT/REPORTING)
APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)**

**MOTION #4: STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER MODIFYING THE SHALLOW WATER GROUPER SPAWNING SEASON CLOSURE, AS APPROPRIATE (FOR BOTH SECTORS), IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC
APPROVED BY AP (10 IN FAVOR/4 OPPOSED)**

Chair's remark: This was discussed as a regional management need by the AP

Other recommendations/concerns:

- Concern over negative effects of restrictions on vessel speed limit to protect right whales on charter/for-hire industry. This is severely impacting the headboat industry.
- Include presentation on stock assessments and the SEDAR process for the next AP meeting
- Gray triggerfish – request additional information on discard mortality for this and other species (after it has been reviewed by the SSC).
- Add to AP's agenda an annual update on the Southeast Reef Fish Survey
- Recommend to the Council conducting a 10-year review of the Shallow-Water Grouper closure
- Request an update on artificial reef projects at a future AP meeting
- Recommend an update (to AP and Council) on feedback obtained during 2014 visioning port meetings