

Discussion Document for Revising the Goals and Objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Dolphin Wahoo Committee
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Introduction

The Fisheries Allocation Review Policy (NMFS Policy Directive 01-119) issued in July 2016 encourages the use of adaptive management in respect to allocation revisions, which includes “*periodic re-evaluation and updating of the management goals and objectives to ensure they are relevant to current conditions and needs.*” As part of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s (Council) process for creating an Allocation Review Trigger Policy, the goals and objectives of all fishery management plans (FMPs) that include sector allocations will be reviewed and updated as appropriate.

It is likely that the Dolphin Wahoo Committee (Committee) may need to discuss revisions to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP’s goals and objectives over several meetings. Once approved by the Committee and the Council, the revised goals and objectives will be implemented as part of the next plan amendment. This could be Amendment 10 to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP. At this meeting, the Committee will be asked to review the current goals and objectives of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP and provide initial guidance on how to begin revising them to reflect the Committee’s contemporary vision of the fisheries for dolphin and wahoo.

Background

The goals and objectives of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP were implemented in the original plan¹ that went into place in 2004² and have not been revised since then. At the time that the Council was formulating the original Dolphin Wahoo FMP, there was concern over increased landings of dolphin and wahoo. The Council was also proactively attempting to address potential commercial effort shifts towards dolphin that could have occurred due to consolidation within the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) fleet.

Within the FMP, it is noted that “*the Councils are concerned that recent increases in landings could result in localized depletion of stocks and a shift in the historical levels of catch*”

¹ The original Dolphin Wahoo FMP can be accessed at:
https://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/s_atl/dw/archives/dolphinwahoo_fmp_jan_2003.pdf

² The Federal Register notice implementing the original Dolphin Wahoo FMP can be found at:
https://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/policy_branch/rules/sa/dw/2004/fmp_fr_052704.pdf

between commercial and recreational fishermen. This increase in landings has resulted from both the commercial longline fishery and the historical recreational fishery, with the most significant increase in harvest of wahoo and dolphin coming from the recreational sector, more specifically the charterboat fishery. Another complicating factor in determining landings by sector is that commercial landings also include fish that were caught by the recreational sector.”

For additional context, the original Dolphin Wahoo FMP outlines the following “problems and issues” that were identified by the Council and addressed by the FMP:

- 1) *“Localized reduction of fish abundance due to high fishing pressure. (What is the best approach to maintain a sufficiently high abundance level?)*
- 2) *Disruption of markets. (What is the best approach to maintain stable markets for dolphin?)*
- 3) *Conflict and/or competition between recreational and commercial user groups of dolphin fish. (What is the best approach to reduce conflict and/or competition that has recently developed between these two sectors of the fishery?)*
- 4) *Reduced social and economic benefits. (What is the best approach to optimize social and economic benefits of the dolphin fishery?)*
- 5) *Bycatch. (Given the mandate in the Magnuson-Stevens Act to address bycatch in all fishery management plans, what is the best approach to quantify and reduce existing bycatch within the fishery, as well as, prevent an increase in non-target bycatch?)*
- 6) *Importance of predator/prey relationships between dolphin and other pelagic species.*
- 7) *Limited biological, habitat, economic, and social information on dolphin and wahoo stocks and fisheries.”*

Existing Dolphin Wahoo FMP Goals

The goals of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP are as follows:

“The overall goal of the fishery management plan for the South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, and New England Councils’ areas of jurisdiction is to adopt a precautionary and risk-averse approach to management which in the first instance attempts to maintain the status quo. This will require that current catch levels not be exceeded and that recent conflict between sectors of the fishery (commercial longliners and recreational fishermen) be resolved. Status quo should reflect trends (average catch and effort levels) in the fishery over the last five years 1993 through 1997.

Owing to the significant importance of the dolphin/wahoo fishery to the recreational fishing community in the Atlantic, the goal of this fishery management plan is to maintain the current harvest level of dolphin and insure that no new fisheries develop. With the potential for effort shifts in the historical longline fisheries for sharks, tunas, and swordfish, these shifts or expansions into nearshore coastal waters to target dolphin could compromise the current

allocation of the dolphin resource between recreational and commercial user groups. Further, these shifts in effort in the commercial fishery, dependent upon the magnitude (knowing that some dolphin trips may land over 25,000 pounds in a single trip) could result in user conflict and localized depletion in abundance.”

In summary, the goals of the amendment cover:

- Adopting a precautionary and risk-averse approach to management which in the first instance attempts to maintain the status quo.
- Current catch levels should not be exceeded and conflict between sectors of the fishery (commercial longliners and recreational fishermen) should be resolved.
- Status quo should reflect trends (average catch and effort levels) in the fishery from 1993 through 1997.
- Maintaining the “current” harvest level of dolphin and insuring that no new fisheries develop.
- Potential for effort shifts in the historical longline fisheries for sharks, tunas, and swordfish, and that these shifts could compromise the allocation of the dolphin resource between recreational and commercial user groups.
- Localized depletion in abundance.

IPT Recommendations:

- The IPT requests that the Committee provide general topics or talking points that should be covered in the goals of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP.
- A FMP can have multiple goals if the Committee decides that this is appropriate.
- If left in a narrative state, consider consolidating “goals paragraphs” into a single paragraph with broader elements.
- If “status quo” remains in the goals, what years best represent “status quo?” For reference, landings are provided in **Table A-1** in the **Appendix**.
- The current allocations are based on landings from 2008 to 2012 for dolphin and 1999 through 2008 for wahoo. This is contrary to the years used for “status quo” in the current goals.

Potential ways to move forward with revising the Dolphin Wahoo FMP goals:

The Committee could consider several general strategies for revising the goals of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP. One consideration could be whether to have one overarching goal for the FMP or have multiple goals that address several major topics. Additionally, the Committee can stay with the current narrative format of the goals for the FMP or could change the format of both the goals and objectives to a “table format”, similar to the Snapper Grouper FMP (see **Table A-2** in the **Appendix** for the Snapper Grouper FMP goals and objectives) where there are set of overarching goals with ensuing objectives directed towards achieving those goals. With initial guidance, the Committee could receive feedback from the Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (AP) as well as the interdisciplinary plan team (IPT) on potential ways to update the FMP’s goals. To help provide such guidance, some discussion questions that the Committee may want to consider are:

- **Content:** Are the current goals appropriate? If not, should the goals be updated or revised? Should new goals be added to the FMP? What overarching topic or topics should be considered?

- **Structure:** Does the Committee want one goal or multiple goals for the Dolphin Wahoo FMP?
- **Format:** Would the Committee prefer to keep the goals in the current narrative format or is a “table format”, similar to the Snapper Grouper FMP goals and objectives, a better option?
- **Concept:** Portions of the existing goals aim to maintain the “status quo”, “current harvest levels for dolphin”, and “insure that no new fisheries develop.” Should this wording be changed to accommodate potential actions in Amendment 10 that may introduce new gears to the fishery, allow additional sale of dolphin landings, and potentially change harvest levels?

Committee Action:

- PROVIDE INITIAL FEEDBACK ON REVISIONS THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FMP GOALS.
- DO NOT REVISE THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FMP GOALS.
- OTHERS?

Existing Dolphin Wahoo FMP Objectives

The objectives of the Dolphin Wahoo FMP are as follows:

- “1. Address localized reduction in fish abundance. The Councils remain concerned over the potential shift of effort by longline vessels to traditional recreational fishing grounds and the resulting reduction in local availability if commercial harvest intensifies.*

- 2. Minimize market disruption. Commercial markets (mainly local) may be disrupted if large quantities of dolphin are landed from intense commercial harvest or unregulated catch and landing by charter or other components of the recreational sector.*

- 3. Minimize conflict and/or competition between recreational and commercial user groups. If commercial longlining effort increases, either directing on dolphin and wahoo or targeting these species as a significant bycatch, conflict and/or competition may arise if effort shifts to areas traditionally used by recreational fishermen.*

- 4. Optimize the social and economic benefits of the dolphin and wahoo fishery. Given the significant importance of dolphin and wahoo to the recreational sector throughout the range of these species and management unit, manage the resources to achieve optimum yield on a continuing basis.*

- 5. Reduce bycatch of the dolphin fishery. Bycatch is a problem in the pelagic longline fishery for highly migratory species. Any increase in overall effort, and more specifically shifts of effort into nearer shore, non-traditional fishing grounds by swordfish and tuna vessels, may result in increased bycatch of non-target species.*

In addition, National Standard 9 requires that: “Conservation and management measures shall, to the extent practicable, (A) minimize bycatch and (B) to the extent bycatch cannot be avoided, minimize the mortality of such bycatch.” Therefore bycatch of the directed dolphin fishery must be addressed.

Appendix C (FSEIS for HMS Regulatory Amendment 1) contains data on dolphin-wahoo pelagic longline fishery analysis. The data presented on page C-66 and in Table C-4 indicate that pelagic longlines targeting dolphin do in fact result in a bycatch of HMS species.

6. Direct research to evaluate the role of dolphin and wahoo as predator and prey in the pelagic ecosystem.

7. Direct research to enhance collection of biological, habitat, social, and economic data on dolphin and wahoo stocks and fisheries.”

IPT Recommendations:

- Consider adding an objective that aims to prevent overfishing.
- Regarding Objective #1: Is localized depletion and a shift in pelagic longline effort still a concern of the Council?
- Regarding Objective #5: If reducing bycatch in the pelagic longline fishery for dolphin is still a concern, potentially update the language. If “reducing” bycatch is no longer a concern, consider wording such as “minimizing”. Also should wahoo be included?
- As general guidance, objectives should aim to be tangible and expressed in detail.

Potential ways to move forward with revising the Dolphin Wahoo FMP objectives:

The Committee could consider whether the objectives are still appropriate or should be updated to reflect the current fisheries for dolphin and wahoo. As discussed with the FMP goals, the Committee can stay with the current format of the objectives or change the format of both the FMP goals and objectives to a “table format” where there are set of overarching goals with ensuing objectives directed towards achieving those goals (similar to the Snapper Grouper FMP goals and objectives). With initial guidance, the Committee could receive feedback from the Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (AP) as well as the interdisciplinary plan team (IPT) on potential ways to update the FMP’s objectives. To help provide such guidance, some discussion questions that the Committee may want to consider are:

- **Content:** Are the current objectives still appropriate? If not, should certain objectives be revised or eliminated? Are there additional objectives that should be added to the fishery management plan? If so, what overarching topic or topics should be considered?
- **Format:** Would the Committee prefer to keep the objectives in the current format or change to a “table format” where there are set of overarching goals with ensuing objectives directed towards achieving those goals?

Committee Action:

- PROVIDE INITIAL FEEDBACK ON REVISIONS THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FMP OBJECTIVES.
- DO NOT REVISE THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FMP OBJECTIVES.
- OTHERS?

Appendix

Table A-1. Dolphin landings (lbs ww) by sector. Original Rec are recreational landings before the Fishery Effort Survey (FES) and Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) calibrations. Revised Rec are recreational landings after the FES and APAIS calibrations.

| Year | Total Original | Original Rec | Commercial | Total Revised | Revised Rec |
|------|----------------|--------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1986 | 8,022,026 | 7,485,664 | 536,362 | 7,105,106 | 6,568,744 |
| 1987 | 5,491,083 | 4,994,605 | 496,478 | 7,667,597 | 7,171,119 |
| 1988 | 7,786,760 | 7,262,041 | 524,719 | 7,879,048 | 7,354,329 |
| 1989 | 12,388,991 | 11,325,592 | 1,063,399 | 16,916,490 | 15,853,091 |
| 1990 | 10,590,511 | 9,574,615 | 1,015,896 | 13,162,489 | 12,146,593 |
| 1991 | 14,208,752 | 12,606,054 | 1,602,698 | 17,821,010 | 16,218,312 |
| 1992 | 7,084,072 | 6,416,889 | 667,183 | 9,310,483 | 8,643,300 |
| 1993 | 11,132,608 | 10,198,215 | 934,393 | 10,372,006 | 9,437,613 |
| 1994 | 13,913,011 | 12,712,945 | 1,200,066 | 12,542,074 | 11,342,008 |
| 1995 | 18,079,709 | 15,943,175 | 2,136,534 | 16,187,655 | 14,051,121 |
| 1996 | 11,321,976 | 10,096,307 | 1,225,669 | 10,657,235 | 9,431,566 |
| 1997 | 16,935,917 | 15,333,116 | 1,602,801 | 13,119,367 | 11,516,566 |
| 1998 | 11,612,034 | 10,788,292 | 823,742 | 9,476,445 | 8,652,703 |
| 1999 | 14,488,382 | 13,441,221 | 1,047,161 | 15,932,741 | 14,885,580 |
| 2000 | 17,759,811 | 16,772,185 | 987,626 | 20,368,995 | 19,381,369 |
| 2001 | 17,020,155 | 16,254,779 | 765,376 | 17,944,001 | 17,178,625 |
| 2002 | 18,966,645 | 18,258,553 | 708,092 | 18,731,751 | 18,023,659 |
| 2003 | 11,533,067 | 10,809,559 | 723,508 | 14,564,094 | 13,840,586 |
| 2004 | 7,791,755 | 6,932,053 | 859,702 | 11,098,163 | 10,238,461 |
| 2005 | 9,217,014 | 8,639,399 | 577,615 | 11,606,173 | 11,028,558 |
| 2006 | 9,551,724 | 8,901,416 | 650,308 | 14,760,431 | 14,110,123 |
| 2007 | 10,571,899 | 9,572,737 | 999,162 | 14,409,861 | 13,410,699 |
| 2008 | 8,481,737 | 7,645,364 | 836,373 | 11,125,956 | 10,289,583 |
| 2009 | 8,949,529 | 7,653,516 | 1,296,013 | 16,259,670 | 14,963,657 |
| 2010 | 7,331,699 | 6,616,330 | 715,369 | 10,661,865 | 9,946,496 |
| 2011 | 7,247,438 | 6,452,997 | 794,441 | 13,982,145 | 13,187,704 |
| 2012 | 7,045,515 | 6,183,475 | 862,040 | 12,181,306 | 11,319,266 |
| 2013 | 4,779,301 | 4,022,845 | 756,456 | 9,471,310 | 8,714,854 |
| 2014 | 6,470,884 | 5,167,895 | 1,302,989 | 15,182,967 | 13,879,978 |
| 2015 | 8,832,632 | 7,722,528 | 1,110,104 | 21,454,155 | 20,344,051 |
| 2016 | 7,384,704 | 6,449,005 | 935,699 | 15,956,261 | 15,020,562 |
| 2017 | 4,483,518 | 3,830,338 | 653,180 | 11,410,918 | 10,757,738 |

Table A-2. Management objectives for the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper FMP.

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| Goal 1 (Science): Management decisions for the snapper grouper fishery are based upon robust, defensible science that considers qualitative and quantitative data analyzed in a timely, clear, and transparent manner that builds stakeholder confidence. | |
| <i>Objective 1</i> | Promote collection of quality data to support management plans and programs considered by the Council. |
| <i>Objective 2</i> | Encourage development of mechanisms to effectively engage and collaborate with stakeholders on cooperative research, data collection and analysis. |
| <i>Objective 3*</i> | Improve knowledge about the social and economic elements of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic. |
| <i>Objective 4*</i> | Support improved and expanded monitoring and reporting programs for the snapper grouper fishery. |
| <i>Objective 5*</i> | Promote data collection and analysis to support ecosystem and habitat considerations for the snapper grouper fishery. |
| Goal 2 (Management): Adopt management strategies for the snapper grouper fishery that rebuild and maintain fishery resources, adapt to regional differences in the fishery, and consider the social and economic needs of fishing communities. | |
| <i>Objective 1</i> | Develop management measures that consider sub-regional differences and issues within the fishery. |
| <i>Objective 2</i> | Develop innovative management measures that allow consistent access to the fishery for all sectors. |
| <i>Objective 3</i> | Ensure that management decisions help maximize social and economic opportunity for all sectors. |
| <i>Objective 4*</i> | Develop management measures that reduce and mitigate discards. |
| <i>Objective 5*</i> | Support management measures that incorporate ecosystem and habitat considerations for the snapper grouper fishery. |
| <i>Objective 6*</i> | Develop management measures that support optimal sector allocations for the snapper grouper fishery. |
| Goal 3 (Communication): Employ interactive outreach strategies that encourage continuous participation and support two-way engagement between managers and snapper grouper fishery stakeholders while building a greater understanding of science and management. | |
| <i>Objective 1</i> | Develop communication approaches that provide streamlined and timely information to increase awareness and engage stakeholders. |
| <i>Objective 2</i> | Improve awareness and understanding of fishery science and research and how these inform management. |
| <i>Objective 3*</i> | Ensure that Council communication encourages and supports engagement with a diverse audience of stakeholders. |
| <i>Objective 4*</i> | Improve awareness and understanding of how social and economic issues are linked to fisheries management measures. |
| Goal 4 (Governance): Commit to a transparent, balanced, and timely decision-making process that allows flexible yet well-defined protocols and strategies for managing the snapper grouper fishery. | |
| <i>Objective 1</i> | Create an accountable and flexible decision-making process for development and evaluation of management measures. |
| <i>Objective 2</i> | Build capacity to streamline management efforts and better coordinate with management partners. |
| <i>Objective 3*</i> | Improve communication with stakeholders to insure the needs of the fishery are understood and considered throughout the Council process. |

*These objectives were not prioritized for the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery in the South Atlantic (Vision Blueprint) and can be found in Appendix B to the Vision Blueprint.