

OVERVIEW

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting

August 4-6, 2009
Hilton Garden Inn Charleston Airport
5265 International Boulevard
North Charleston, SC

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel will receive overviews on Amendments 17A, 17B, 18, and 20 and provide any comments/recommendations to the Snapper Grouper Committee and Council.

A. Overview (Attachment 1)

Staff will provide a brief overview of the role of the AP, new requirements from the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act of 2006, and recent amendments to the Snapper Grouper FMP (Attachment 1).

REQUIRED AP ACTION: None required.

B. Amendment 17A (Attachments 2 and 3)

The red snapper stock assessment, completed February 2008, determined that the species is undergoing overfishing and is overfished (Attachment 3). Biomass shows a sharp decline during the 1950s and 1960s, continued decline during the 1970s, and stable but low levels since 1980. Estimates of annual biomass have been well below B_{MSY} since the mid-1960s, with possibly some small amount of recovery since implementation of current size limits in 1992 (Figure 1).

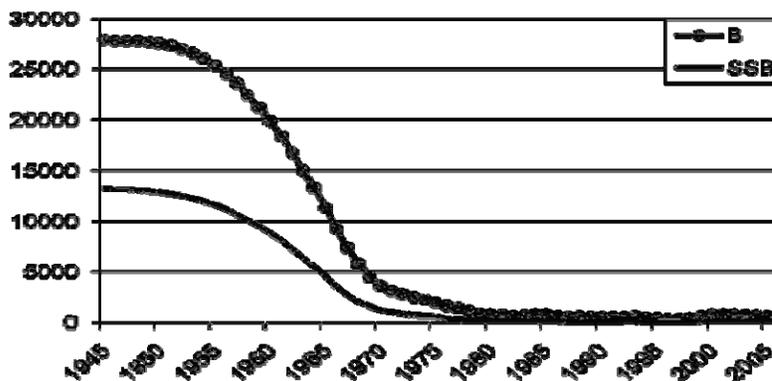


Figure 1. Biomass and Spawning Stock Biomass (pounds).

The Council received notification, in a letter dated July 8, 2008, that the South Atlantic red snapper stock is undergoing overfishing and is overfished and that the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the Council to prepare a plan amendment or proposed regulations to end overfishing within one year. The Council is proposing management measures in this amendment to end overfishing of red snapper and rebuild the stock.

The schedule for Amendment 17A (**Attachment 2**) is as follows:

- Scoping - February 2008.
- Review scoping comments and options - February & June 2008.
- At the December 2008 meeting, the Council decided to split 17 into Amendments 17 and 18. Amendment 17 would be completed and approved for public hearing after NMFS publishes the final ACL guidelines and the SSC provides their OFL and ABC recommendations. It is anticipated that this will take place in September 2009 at the earliest.
- At the June 2009 meeting, the Council decided to split 17 into Amendments 17A (Red Snapper) and 17B (Remaining Species). Both amendments are going to be worked on together. If possible, they will be approved for public hearings in September or December 2009.
- If approved for public hearings at the September meeting, hearings will be held in November 2009. If approved for public hearings at the December meeting, hearings will be held in January/February 2010 and a revised schedule will be prepared.
- Review all comments and approve all actions – December 2009 or March 2010.
- Review complete document and approve for formal review by Secretary of Commerce – March 2010 or June 2010.
- Send to Secretary of Commerce for formal review – March 2010 or June 2010.
- Regulations effective by _____.

REQUIRED AP ACTION: Provide comments and/or recommendations to the Snapper Grouper Committee/Council.

C. Amendment 17B (Attachment 4)

Revisions to the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 2006 require that by 2010, Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for fisheries determined by the Secretary to be subject to overfishing must establish a mechanism for specifying ACLs at a level that prevents overfishing and does not exceed the recommendations of the respective Council's SSC or other established peer review processes. These FMPs also are required to establish within this time frame measures to ensure accountability. AMs are management controls that ensure that the ACLs are not exceeded; examples include corrective measures if overages occur and implementation of an in-season monitoring program. By 2011, FMPs for all other fisheries, except fisheries for species with annual life cycles, must meet these requirements.

The purpose of this amendment is to establish Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) and Accountability Measures (AMs), where needed, including management measures to reduce the probability that catches will exceed the stocks' ACLs pursuant to reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requirements for nine species undergoing overfishing. The Council will also consider the specification of Annual Catch Targets (ACT) for recreational fisheries where necessary. Previously implemented snapper grouper amendments may contain management measures for species undergoing overfishing that are comparable to ACLs, AMs, and Overfishing Limits (OFLs). The status quo alternatives would retain management measures that are equivalent to OFLs, ACLs, and AMs specified by the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act and in the final National Standard 1 guidelines and recommended by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) for previous amendments. ACL and AM alternatives are provided for other snapper grouper species, that are undergoing overfishing, and currently have no applied regulations qualifying as ACLs or AMs. The SSC recommended at their December 2008 meeting that the acceptable biological catch (ABC) levels for snowy grouper, black sea bass, and red snapper be set consistent with the rebuilding plans for those species until they can be further amended on better scientific information (Table 1). The SSC met in March and June 2009 to identify protocol for determining ABCs, which will be included in the Comprehensive ACL amendment.

Table 1. Values for Overfishing Level (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendations from the SSC.

Species	OFL	ABC
Black grouper ¹	OFL = MFMT	-
Black sea bass	OFL = MFMT	ABC = rebuilding plan
Gag ²	OFL = MFMT	805,000 lbs gw + 18,000 fish
Golden tilefish ³	OFL = MFMT	-
Red grouper ¹	OFL = MFMT	-
Snowy grouper	OFL = MFMT	ABC = rebuilding plan
Speckled hind	SSC Recommendation=Unknown	0
Vermilion snapper ⁴	OFL = MFMT	1,109,000 lbs gw
Warsaw grouper	SSC Recommendation=Unknown	0

1. Given stock assessments have been scheduled for both black and red grouper, the SSC requested that estimates of the OFLs come from the Science Center. In Amendment 17B, the Council is considering establishing the commercial and recreational ACLs for black grouper and red grouper equivalent to (1) the expected catch resulting from management measures in Amendment 16 or (2) to the expected catch resulting from management measures in Amendment 16 and the gag ACL.
2. In December 2007, the SSC motion indicated that the values for gag are ABC=694,000 pounds and OFL=yield at MFMT. In June 2008, the SSC stated that for species assessed through SEDAR, ABC=yield at 75%Fmsy and OFL=yield at MFMT. In December 2008, the SSC withdrew the ABC and OFL recommendations for gag established at the June 2008 meeting. The SSC previously specified MFMT for gag in Amendment 16.

3. At their June 2009 meeting, the SSC did not provide an ABC value for golden tilefish because of the age of the assessment and lack of a current estimate of abundance. The Council has determined that the current commercial quota of 331,000 pounds ww (295,000 pounds gw) is the commercial ACL. This value is set at the F_{MSY} level. The Council believes that since Amendment 13C was determined to be based upon the best available science, this value is at or below the SSC's ABC.
4. In December 2007, the SSC motion indicated that the values for vermilion snapper are ABC=628,459 pounds and OFL=yield at MFMT. In June 2008, the SSC stated that for species assessed through SEDAR, ABC=yield at 75% F_{MSY} and OFL=yield at MFMT. A new age-based assessment was completed for vermilion snapper in 2008. In December 2008, the SSC withdrew the ABC and OFL recommendations for vermilion established at the June 2008 meeting. The SSC previously specified MFMT for vermilion snapper in Amendment 16.

To summarize, actions proposed in Amendment 17B (**Attachment 4**) would:

- Specify ACLs, ACTs, and AMs, where necessary, for nine species undergoing overfishing;
- Modify management measures as needed to limit harvest to the ACL or ACT;
- Update the framework procedure for specification of TAC.

The schedule for the amendment is as follows:

- Scoping - February 2008.
- Review scoping comments and options - February & June 2008.
- At the December 2008 meeting, the Council decided to split 17 into Amendments 17 and 18. Amendment 17 would be completed and approved for public hearing after NMFS publishes the final ACL guidelines and the SSC provides their OFL and ABC recommendations. It is anticipated that this will take place in September 2009 at the earliest.
- At the June 2009 meeting, the Council decided to split 17 into Amendments 17A (Red Snapper) and 17B (Remaining Species). Both amendments are going to be worked on together. If possible, they will be approved for public hearings in September or December 2009.
- If approved for public hearings at the September meeting, hearings will be held in November 2009. If approved for public hearings at the December meeting, hearings will be held in January/February 2010 and a revised schedule will be prepared.
- Review all comments and approve all actions – December 2009 or March 2010.
- Review complete document and approve for formal review by Secretary of Commerce – March 2010 or June 2010.
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REQUIRED AP ACTION: Provide comments and/or recommendations to the Snapper Grouper Committee/Council.

D. Amendment 18 (Attachment 5)

At its December 2008 meeting, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) voted to address several issues associated with the snapper grouper fishery of the South Atlantic region. In recent years, it has been noted that some snapper grouper species (blueline tilefish and snowy grouper) are becoming more common in the northern part of their range. In order to manage snapper grouper occurring north of the North Carolina/Virginia line, the Council's area of jurisdiction for the snapper grouper fishery management unit must be extended to encompass the full range of those species. The Council is also concerned that regulations implementing several recent snapper grouper amendments could increase the incentive to fish for golden tilefish or black sea bass. Therefore, the Council is proposing management measures that would limit participation in these two sectors of the snapper grouper fishery.

Seasonal variations between South Atlantic states have the potential to give fishermen in southern states an advantage when fishing for snapper grouper species during winter months. As a result, the bulk of recreational allocations and commercial quotas may be caught by fishermen in southern states while those in the northern part of the region are unable to fish. To remedy this imbalance, the Council is considering separating the snowy grouper quota into regions, and separating the recreational allocation for gag in to regions.

Actions in Amendment 18 (**Attachment 5**) also adjust the golden tilefish fishing year start date in order to allow for a fall harvest by longline vessels, and to require improvements to current data reporting requirements.

Actions in Amendment 18 would:

- Extend the range of the snapper grouper FMP north;
- Limit participation and effort in the golden tilefish fishery;
- Limit participation and effort in the black sea bass pot fishery;
- Separate snowy grouper quota into regions/states;
- Separate the gag recreational allocation into regions/states;
- Change the golden tilefish fishing year;
- Improve the accuracy, timing, and quantity of fisheries statistics; and
- Designate EFH in new northern areas.

The schedule for Amendment 18 is as follows:

- Scoping – January/February 2009.
- Review scoping comments, LAPP Working Group recommendations, and options – March & June 2009.
- If approved for public hearings at the September meeting, hearings will be held in November 2009. If approved for public hearings at the December meeting,

- Review all comments and approve all actions – December 2009 or March 2010.
- Review complete document and approve for formal review by Secretary of Commerce – March 2010 or June 2010.
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REQUIRED AP ACTION: Provide comments and/or recommendations to the Snapper Grouper Committee/Council.

E. Amendment 20

The Reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act details several requirements for limited access privilege (LAP) programs. The wreckfish Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) program is a type of limited access privilege (LAP) program and therefore must adhere to the requirements set out in the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act. For example, the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act requires Councils develop a methodology and the means to identify and assess the management, data collection and analysis, and enforcement programs that are directly related to and in support of the ITQ program and provide a fee paid by limited access privilege holders that will cover the costs of management, data collection and analysis, and enforcement activities. The wreckfish ITQ program does not have a cost recovery program and does not currently adhere to the requirements laid out in the Reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act. The Council is therefore considering changes to the wreckfish ITQ program that will bring the program in adherence with the new requirements of the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act.

An ACL will be specified for wreckfish in Amendment 20. If this number is lower than the current 2 million pound Total Allowable Catch (TAC), the annual coupons (pounds) shareholders receive will be decreased. As a result, fishermen would need to purchase additional shares or coupons (pounds) to harvest the same amount they currently harvest. Council meeting discussions have mentioned the possibility of modifying how shares are allocated to current shareholders given implementation of ACLs in Amendment 20. Council discussions have also included the possibility of eliminating the wreckfish ITQ program given the small number of participants and the lack of transfers of coupons and quota share occurring over the past decade. For example, no coupons have been transferred since 1994 and no shares have been transferred since 1996. However, the investments people have made in quota shares in years past will need to be considered.

Wreckfish representatives of the Snapper Grouper AP will provide their recommendations for MSY, OFL, and ABC.

The schedule for Amendment 20 is as follows:

- Scoping – January/February 2009.
- Review scoping comments, LAPP Working Group recommendations, and options – March & June 2009.
- If approved for public hearings at the September meeting, hearings will be held in November 2009. If approved for public hearings at the December meeting, hearings will be held in January/February 2010 and a revised schedule will be prepared.
- Review all comments and approve all actions – December 2009 or March 2010.
- Review complete document and approve for formal review by Secretary of Commerce – March 2010 or June 2010.
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REQUIRED AP ACTION: Provide comments and/or recommendations to the Snapper Grouper Committee/Council.

F. Comprehensive ACL Amendment (Attachment 6)

The Comprehensive ACL amendment will specify ACLs, ACTs, AMs, and allocations for all species managed by the Council not subject to overfishing (**Attachment 6**). This includes species in the Snapper Grouper, Golden Crab, Coral, Sargassum, and Dolphin Wahoo FMUs.

REQUIRED AP ACTION: Provide comments and/or recommendations to the Snapper Grouper Committee/Council.