

OVERVIEW

Snapper Grouper Council Session

June 8-9, 2010
Renaissance Orlando Airport Hotel
5445 Forbes Place
Orlando, FL

The Snapper Grouper Committee needs to: (A) receive presentations on the SSC recommendations, *Oculina* studies, and data collection; (B) review alternatives in Amendment 17A/proposed rule/DEIS comments, modify documents as necessary, and approve to submit to the Secretary of Commerce; (C) receive a presentation on the closure analysis as a result of potential changes from benchmark assessment; (D) review alternatives in Amendment 18, modify document as necessary, select preferred alternatives where possible, provide guidance to staff, and approve for a 2nd round of public hearings; (E) review alternatives in Amendment 20, modify document as necessary, select preferred alternatives where possible, and provide guidance to staff; (F) review alternatives in the Comprehensive ACL amendment, modify document as necessary, select preferred alternatives where possible, and provide guidance to staff; (G) for Amendments 21 and 22, provide guidance to staff for the development of scoping documents and options papers; and (H) review the trip limit analysis and sea turtle options, determine approach (e.g., Interim Rule, Emergency Rule, Framework, or Comprehensive ACL Amendment) and provide guidance to the Staff/Team.

A. SSC Report (Attachments 1-7)

Dr. Carolyn Belcher will provide an overview of the SSC's recommendations developed at the April 20-22 meeting (**Attachment 1**). Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendations were developed using the ABC Control Rule previously presented to the Council, in addition to another one developed at the meeting for non-assessed stocks. The SSC also developed recommendations based on the SEDAR assessment for black and red grouper (**Attachments 2-7**). The base run for the black grouper stock managed by the Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils indicates that the stock is not undergoing overfishing and not overfished. The base run for the red grouper stock managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council indicates that the stock is undergoing overfishing and overfished. The necessary management response (including the implementation of a rebuilding plan for red grouper) will be included in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Take action as necessary.

B. *Oculina* Monitoring Report

Kim Iverson will outline the regulations pertaining to the *Oculina* Bank in the revised regulations brochure. Frank Helies, Program Director for Gulf & South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, will present the results of a socio-demographic study.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Take action as necessary.

C. Data Collection Presentations

Amendment 18 contains several actions with the goal to improve the accuracy, timing, and quantity of fisheries statistics collected by the current data collection program in the South Atlantic region. To accomplish this goal, the Council believes modifications should be made to the current data collection programs. Data elements improved by the action may include, but are not limited to: landings; discards; effort; biological sampling of landings and discards; fishery independent information; and economic and social characterization of the fisheries.

The Council, at their March meeting, had a lengthy discussion on several issues, including electronic dealer reporting, electronic logbook reporting for commercial and for-hire fishermen, and the verification process of voluntary-reported data. The Council requested presentations from both SEFSC and ACCSP on quota monitoring and dealer reporting systems. More specifically, the Council requested information on the dealer reporting methodology, the timing of data collection and reporting, and what Council action could improve the system. Mike Cahall, the ACCSP director, and a SEFSC representative will present information based on the request. SEFSC will also outline the pilot project testing software for electronic logbooks in the for-hire fishery and the verification process of voluntary-reported data.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Take action as necessary.

D. Amendment 17A (Attachments 8-13)

A SEDAR assessment was completed in February 2008 and indicated that the red snapper stock is undergoing overfishing and overfished (**Attachment 8**). The Council received notification, in a letter dated July 8th, 2008, of the stock status and that the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the Council to prepare a plan amendment or proposed regulations to end overfishing within one year (**Attachment 9**). Measures to end overfishing and establish a rebuilding program are being developed in Amendment 17A.

Actions proposed in Amendment 17A (**Attachment 10**) would:

- Specify an annual catch limit (ACL) and accountability measures for red snapper with management measures to end overfishing and reduce the probability that catches will exceed the stocks' ACL
- Specify status determination criteria for red snapper
- Establish a rebuilding plan for red snapper
- Require the use of circle hooks in the snapper grouper fishery
- Establish a monitoring program for red snapper

Staff has drafted a summary that outlines the need for action, issues, alternatives, and impacts in a more readable format than what has been used in the past (**Attachment 11**). The Council should review the draft proposed rule (**Attachment 12**). NMFS-SERO staff will present the public comments received on the DEIS (**Attachment 13**)

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Modify document as necessary, review the proposed rule and DEIS comments, and approve to submit the amendment/rule to the Secretary of Commerce for formal review and implementation.

E. Analysis of Closure Alternatives as a Result of Potential Changes from Benchmark (Attachment 14)

The Council is scheduled to receive the results of a SEDAR benchmark stock assessment for red snapper at the December 2010 Council meeting. The Council, over the course of the next several meetings, will discuss the necessary actions if the latest assessment requires a change in management. Andy Strelcheck, NMFS SERO staff, will present an analysis of closure alternatives as a result of potential changes that could come from the benchmark assessment (**Attachment 14**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Provide staff/Team guidance on what approaches (e.g., NMFS Area Closure Model, others) and what mechanism (Emergency/Interim Rule/Framework) to analyze for consideration at September or December Council meeting

F. Amendment 18 (Attachment 15)

Actions proposed in Amendment 18 (**Attachment 15**) would:

- Extend the range of the snapper grouper FMP north
- Designate Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) in new northern areas
- Limit participation in the golden tilefish fishery through an endorsement program
- Allow for transferability of endorsements
- Change the golden tilefish fishing year
- Change golden tilefish commercial trip limits
- Modify management of the black seabass fishery to limit participation and effort and reduce bycatch
- Improve the accuracy, timing, and quantity of fisheries data.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review alternatives in Amendment 18, modify document as necessary, select preferred alternatives where possible, provide guidance to staff, and approve for second round of public hearings.

G. Amendment 20 (Attachments 16-19)

The Council passed the following motion at the March 2010 meeting:

MOTION #26: REQUEST AN EMERGENCY RULE TO EXEMPT WRECKFISH FISHERMEN WITH SHARES AND COUPONS AND A CURRENT WRECKFISH PERMIT FROM HAVING AN UNLIMITED COMMERCIAL SNAPPER GROUPEL PERMIT [INTENT THAT THIS WILL BE IN EFFECT FOR 6 MONTHS WITH NO EXTENSION].

NMFS determined that an emergency rule was not necessary (**Attachment 17**). A representative from NMFS will present the justification for the decision to not proceed with the emergency rule.

Current regulations to fish for, possess, and sell wreckfish require that a person be a shareholder under the wreckfish individual quota program with coupons allocating annual pounds, have a wreckfish vessel permit, and possess a federal commercial South Atlantic snapper-grouper permit. If a shareholder has a wreckfish permit, but no federal commercial permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper species, that person cannot sell wreckfish and must adhere to the aggregate snapper-grouper bag limit, which includes wreckfish. Furthermore, there is a January 15 through April 15 spawning season closure.

Actions proposed in Amendment 20 would modify and update the wreckfish ITQ program. In March, the Council moved all actions pertaining to wreckfish (with the exception of updating the ITQ program) to the Comprehensive ACL amendment.

Staff has three documents for Council review. The first document is the options paper that will replace Chapter 2 of Amendment 20 (**Attachment 16**). The second document is a summary of the wreckfish shareholders meeting held at the end of March (**Attachment 18**). The third set of documents are comment letters from wreckfish shareholders and other fishermen (**Attachment 19**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Receive an update on Amendment 20 and provide guidance to staff.

H. Comprehensive ACL Amendment (Including Results from Black and Red Grouper Assessment) (Attachments 1 & 20-24)

The Comprehensive ACL amendment will specify the ABC Control Rule, ABCs, ACLs, ACTs, AMs, and allocations for species in the Snapper Grouper, Coral, Sargassum, and Dolphin Wahoo fishery management units (**Attachment 20**). The amendment contains options for grouping species; NMFS-SERO staff will present the analysis for species groupings (**Attachment 21**). In addition, the amendment contains rebuilding plan alternatives for red grouper. The SSC chair will present the SSC's recommendations for OFLs and ABCs earlier in the meeting (**Attachment 1**). The amendment contains options for ABC calculated in other ways; those ABC values are included (to the extent possible) in **Attachment 22**. The Council should compare trends in landings (**Attachment 23**) to the ABC values to determine the necessary management action.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Modify document as necessary and provide guidance to Team.

I. Amendment 21 – Comprehensive Catch Shares

The Council passed the following motion at the March 2010 meeting:

MOTION #23: AMENDMENT 21 IS TO INCLUDE TRIP LIMIT ACTIONS; EFFORT & PARTICIPATION REDUCTION AND ENDORSEMENT ACTIONS; CATCH SHARE ACTIONS FOR QUOTA SPECIES (EXCEPT SNOWY GROUPER): VERMILION, GOLDEN TILEFISH, BLACK SEA BASS, GAG, GREATER AMBERJACK, RED GROUPER, AND BLACK GROUPER; ITQ, COOPERATIVE, RFA AND CDQ COMPONENTS, AND REGIONAL OR STATE BY STATE QUOTA ANALYSIS.

In addition, The Council passed the following in the Timing and Task Motion at the March 2010 meeting:

APPLY WRECKFISH OPTIONS PAPER SKELETON TO AN OPTIONS PAPER FOR VERMILION SNAPPER, GOLDEN TILEFISH, RED SNAPPER, BLACK SEA BASS AND CONSIDER SHALLOW WATER GROUPER AND DEEP WATER GROUPER CATEGORIES. CONSIDER WAYS FOR NOAA TO ASSIST IN THIS TASK

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Provide guidance to staff on actions/alternatives to be included in the amendment.

J. Amendment 22 – Long-term Red Snapper Management

The Council passed the following motion at the March 2010 meeting:

MOTION #25: DIRECTED STAFF TO DEVELOP A PLAN FOR PREPARING AMENDMENT 22 TO ADDRESS LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT FOR RED SNAPPER AND IDENTIFY THE LEVEL OF RESOURCES THAT WOULD BE NECESSARY.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Provide guidance to staff on actions/alternatives to be included in the amendment.

K. Potential Interim Rule Request for Black Sea Bass, Vermilion Snapper & Gag Trip Limits (Attachment 25)

The Council passed the following in the Timing and Task Motion at the March 2010 meeting:

STAFF ANALYZE TRIP LIMITS FOR MOST OF OR THE ENTIRE SEASON FOR BLACK SEA BASS AND VERMILION SNAPPER AS POSSIBLE INTERIM MEASURES BY THE JUNE MEETING.

NMFS-SERO staff has performed a trip limit analysis for black sea bass, vermilion snapper, and gag (**Attachment 25**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review the trip limit analysis and provide guidance to staff in terms of action.

L. Other Business (Attachment 26)

Amendment 15B implemented measures to minimize the impacts of incidental take on sea turtles and smalltooth sawfish. More specifically, the Council/NOAA Fisheries required sea turtle bycatch release equipment, and sea turtle and smalltooth sawfish handling protocols and guidelines in the permitted commercial and for-hire snapper grouper fisheries. These gear requirements went into effect on February 15, 2010.

Concerns have been raised that the gear requirements are unnecessary for for-hire fishermen. Some believe that the required specifications for bolt cutters, dehookers, and disentanglement tools is appropriate for “heavy duty” equipment and should not be required by non-longline vessels. For example, dehooking and disentanglement tools that are included are the line cutter which must be capable of cutting 2.0–2.1 mm (0.078 in - 0.083 in) monofilament line (400-lb test) or polypropylene multistrand material known as braided or tarred mainline; bolt cutters, which must be able to cut hard metals, such as stainless or carbon steel hooks, up to 1/4-inch (6.35 mm) diameter; and dehookers built out of 5/16” stainless steel. Evidently, these items were intended for use with pelagic longline tackle, and are therefore relatively “heavy duty.” The effectiveness and necessity of these dehooking and disentanglement tools when used with lighter rod and reel tackle has been called into question. NMFS-SERO staff has drafted options for the Council’s consideration (**Attachment 26**).

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Review options and provide guidance to staff in terms of action.