



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Private Recreational Reporting Workgroup

December 1, 2021
Meeting Summary

1. Prior Meeting Report

The Workgroup was provided a draft report from the previous meeting, held May 26, 2021. No changes were requested.

2. Permitting Requirements

Workgroup members representing each state provided an overview of their existing recreational permit structure and their process for implementing permits, and SAFMC staff gave a brief on the Atlantic HMS general recreational permit. All states have a general recreational saltwater license. The group discussed federal and state permitting options for the recreational snapper grouper fishery. State terminology varies, so for purposes of this report the term “permit” will be used to refer generically to a means of permitting retention and fishing for snapper grouper species.

Florida is the only state with a permit for recreational snapper grouper fishing activity. Licenses are established by the legislature and funds provided through the Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) (with legislative oversight through the budget process). Changes in permits are approved by the FWC. The reef fish endorsement covers 13 primary species and is supported by dockside and at-sea sampling and a mail survey.

North Carolina has licenses, permits and endorsements implemented through the legislature and Marine Fisheries Commission. Legislative action would likely be necessary to implement a snapper grouper endorsement.

Licenses in South Carolina are implemented through the General Assembly; there is no marine fisheries commission as exists in some other states.

Licenses in Georgia are also implemented by the legislature. Additionally, license changes would need to go through the state wildlife agency which supports license sales.

The HMS Division of NMFS requires permits for possession tunas, sharks, and billfish. It was also noted that the MAFMC recently implemented permits and mandatory reporting for tilefish.

State permitting and licensing processes are varied and in many cases may require legislative action. New permits will add costs which may not be offset by permit fees. Imposing additional

permit requirements for a federal fishery resource through the state systems is not considered very likely.

The Workgroup suggested that a federal solution is the most appropriate course of action for a federal fishery. In some ways the discussion of a snapper grouper endorsement is a logical next step to the recreational angler registry and state marine recreational fishing licenses. The basic concept of a general permit supported by additional endorsements for specialized gears, activities or species is common in commercial fisheries management and other natural resources management arenas.

The Workgroup discussed a potential recommendation for the Council to consider requiring a permit for snapper grouper fishing that is similar to the Florida reef fish permit and is administered by NMFS as is done with the HMS permit. This permit would be used to identify snapper grouper anglers to support dedicated survey efforts or specialized MRIP sampling for this specialized fishing activity. The permit would need to be accompanied by changes in MRIP sampling or new sampling and survey programs to provide the desired improvements in catch and effort estimates.

3. Census vs Survey Approaches

The Workgroup discussed census and survey sampling approaches as they pertain to recreational snapper grouper catch estimation. The choice of an approach depends on the objective of improved sampling. Census sampling is appealing in many ways, but a true census is difficult to achieve and would add considerable burden to users and costs to the agency. In reality, multiple approaches may be required to provide adequate estimates of the wide variety of species in the snapper grouper complex. Both survey and census options could be explored through pilot studies.

4. SAFMC Recreational Data Needs

Improving catch and effort estimates for the recreational snapper grouper fishery was an impetus for creating this Workgroup. For this topic, the Workgroup was asked to consider additional needs in the fishery and discussed the following:

- Census approaches may be needed for some species (e.g., rare species with very low catch rates)
- Improved information on discards is needed. The Workgroup noted that discard data are self reported and unvalidated. Observers as used in commercial fisheries are likely not practical for private recreational vessels so other approaches will be required to obtain and validate discard information.
- Fishing power (ie catchability) has undoubtedly changed since MSA implementation in 1976. Studies are needed to evaluate these changes and improve our understanding of catch and effort time series’.

5. Recreational Data Developments

The Workgroup was updated on the NAS study and the revised schedule for the GMFMC Red Snapper Data Workshop.

6. Topics for the next meeting

The Workgroup requested holding a meeting in the first quarter of 2022 to finalize recommendations for presentation to the Council in March 2022. An in-person meeting is preferred.