



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Melvin Bell, Chair | Carolyn N. Belcher, Ph.D., Vice Chair
John Carmichael, Executive Director

REVISED AGENDA

Snapper Grouper Committee

The Beaufort Hotel
Beaufort NC 28516

Tuesday, December 7, 2021 8:30 am – 5:30 pm

Wednesday, December 8, 2021 8:30 am – 12:00 noon

Approval of Agenda

Approval of September 2021 Minutes

1. Ecopath project on red snapper recruitment (*Attachments 1a, 1b, and 1c*)
 - a. Modeling team discussion – Lauren Gentry, FWRI
 - b. SSC comments – Genny Nesslage, SSC Chair
 - c. **Committee Action:** Review project results.

2. Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Revisions
 - a. AP comments and recommendations (*AP Report*) – Jimmy Hull, AP Chair
 - b. Release mortality Reduction Framework (*Attachment 2a*)
 - c. Update from Private Recreational Workgroup – Spud Woodward
 - d. Red Snapper Response and Holistic Management Approach (*Attachment 2b*) – Chip Collier
 - e. White Paper on Commercial Snapper Grouper Permits (*Attachments 2c and 2d*) – John Hadley
 - f. **Committee Action:** Consider information presented in items a-e and provide guidance on information needs and timing of amendment development.

3. SEDAR 68 Atlantic Scamp Research Track Assessment (*Attachment 3*)
 - a. Presentation – Francesca Forrestal and Katie Siegfried, NMFS SEFSC
 - b. SSC Recommendations – Genny Nesslage, SSC Chair
 - c. **Committee Action:** Review assessment results and discuss implications for future management.

4. Snowy Grouper (SG Amendment 51) (*AP Report; Attachment 4*)
 - a. AP comments and recommendations – Jimmy Hull, AP Chair
 - b. Overview – Allie Iberle
 - c. **Committee Action:** Review options paper and consider approval for scoping

5. Golden Tilefish (SG Amendment 52) (*AP Report; Attachment 5*)
 - a. AP comments and recommendations – Jimmy Hull, AP Chair
 - b. Overview – Roger Pugliese
 - c. **Committee Action:** Review options paper and consider approval for scoping

6. Gag (SG Amendment 53) (*AP Report; Attachment 6*)
 - a. AP Comments and recommendations – Jimmy Hull, AP Chair
 - b. SSC recommendations – Genny Nessler, SSC Chair
 - c. Overview – Allie Iberle
 - d. **Committee Action:** Review options paper and consider approval for scoping

7. Greater Amberjack (SG Amendment 49) (*Attachments 7a and 7b*)
 - a. Overview
 - b. **Committee Actions:** Review draft amendment and consider approval for public hearings

8. Yellowtail Snapper (SG Amendment 44) (*Attachment 8a and 8b*)
 - a. Overview – Myra Brouwer
 - b. AP comments and recommendations – Jimmy Hull, AP Chair
 - c. **Committee Action:** Review scoping comments and provide guidance for further amendment development

9. Red Porgy (SG Amendment 50) (*Attachments 9a and 9b*)
 - a. Overview – Myra Brouwer
 - b. **Committee Action:** Review and approve all actions.

10. AP comments on items not covered – Jimmy Hull, AP Chair

11. Updates on South Atlantic Red Snapper Count and Greater Amberjack Count – Myra Brouwer and Chip Collier

12. Other Business

Adjourn

Committee Members

Jessica McCawley, Chair
Kerry Marhefka, Vice-chair
Robert Beal
Dr. Carolyn Belcher
Mel Bel
Chester Brewer
Chris Conklin

LT Robert Copeland
Tim Griner
Judy Helmey
Trish Murphey
Tom Roller
Andy Strelcheck
Laurilee Thompson
Spud Woodward
Mid-Atlantic Members: Sonny Gwin, Dewey Hemilright

Attachments:

AP Report: Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) Report – October 2021

Attachment 1a: EwE Report

Attachment 1b: EwE Results Table

Attachment 1c: EwE Presentation

Attachment 2a: Release Mortality Reduction Framework Discussion Document

Attachment 2b (Late Materials): Red Snapper Response and Holistic Management Approach

Attachment 2c: White Paper on Commercial Snapper Grouper Permits - *revised version in late Materials*

Attachment 2d: Commercial Snapper Grouper Permits Presentation – *revised version in Late Materials*

Attachment 3: SEDAR 68 Atlantic Scamp Research Track Assessment Presentation

Attachment 4: Amendment 51 (Snowy Grouper) Options Paper

Attachment 5: Amendment 52 (Golden Tilefish) Options Paper

Attachment 6: Amendment 53 (Gag Grouper) Options Paper

Attachment 7a: Amendment 49 (Greater Amberjack) Decision Document

Attachment 7b: Draft Amendment 49 (Greater Amberjack)

Attachment 8a: Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper) Decision Document

Attachment 8b: Amendment 44 Scoping Document (November 2021)

Attachment 9a: Amendment 50 (Red Porgy) Decision Document

Attachment 9b: Draft Amendment 50 (Red Porgy)

Staff Lead: Michael Schmidtke (mike.schmidtke@safmc.net)

OVERVIEW

Snapper Grouper Committee

The Committee will approve the minutes from the September 2021 meeting and the agenda for the December 2021 Committee meeting.

1. **Ecopath project on red snapper recruitment (*Attachments 1a, 1b, and 1c*)**

The Committee will review and make comments on an Ecopath with Ecosim (EwE) model that examined the effects of high red snapper recruitment on the South Atlantic ecosystem. The EwE workgroup convened a 3-day workshop in September to review the EwE model results and comment on the findings. These were subsequently reviewed by the SSC at their October meeting, and the SSC's comments and recommendations on the EwE model will be provided to the Committee by the SSC Chair

Committee Action: Review project results.

2. **Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Revisions**

a. **AP comments and recommendations (*AP Report*)**

At their September 2021 meeting, the Council developed questions and requested comments from the AP related to reduction of discards and more holistic management for the snapper grouper fishery. Jimmy Hull, Snapper Grouper AP Chair, will present the AP's comments and recommendations.

b. **Release Mortality Reduction Framework (*Attachment 2a*)**

In September 2021, the Council received results from SEDAR 73 indicating that the South Atlantic red snapper stock is overfished and experiencing overfishing. The assessment indicated that the majority of red snapper fishing mortality occurs as discard mortality rather than through landings. Due to the multi-species nature of the snapper grouper fishery, the Council recognized that addressing the issue of discard mortality requires holistic changes to management for the entire fishery. The Council intends to address snapper grouper discards through a framework amendment addressing discard reduction based on current information and a plan amendment that would restructure management of the snapper grouper fishery to be more holistic. An discussion document has been developed by staff that provides information on previous Council discussions and actions to reduce discards, as well as some management methods used by another multispecies management plan, Pacific Groundfish.

c. **Update from Private Recreational Workgroup**

The Council's Private Recreational Workgroup will meet on December 1, 2021 to continue discussing approaches to private recreational reporting. The Workgroup Chair, Spud Woodward, will provide an update on the group's progress and next steps.

d. **Red Snapper Response and Holistic Management Approach (*Attachment 2b*)**

In September 2021, the Council directed staff to begin work on an approach to manage the snapper grouper fishery in a more holistic manner. Staff have developed a proposed work plan to address this directive, including potential timeline, participants, budget, and preliminary goals for a project evaluating management strategies for the snapper grouper fishery.

e. White Paper on Commercial Snapper Grouper Permits (*Attachments 2c and 2d*)

In 1998, Amendment 8 instituted the snapper grouper limited access permit requirement. This requirement set initial eligibility for commercial snapper grouper permits based on landings and created two commercial permits: a transferable unlimited permit (SG 1 permit) and a non-transferable permit limited to 225 pounds of snapper grouper species (SG 2 permit). In 2020, the Council responded to Executive Order (EO) 13921: Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth, identifying the “2 for 1 provision” of the SG 1 permit as an item to be evaluated and to consider if changes would provide social or economic benefits to the fishery.

At the September 2021 meeting, the Council reviewed initial information describing background of the provision, an evaluation of trends in the commercial snapper grouper fishery, and recent input from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP). The Council was interested in further discussing potential changes to commercial snapper grouper permit provisions and requested additional feedback from the AP on the topic. The Committee will review additional information that has been gathered on commercial snapper grouper permits, ongoing data analysis efforts, and recommendations from the Snapper Grouper AP.

Committee Action: Consider information presented in items a-e and provide guidance on information needs and timing of amendment development.

3. SEDAR 68 Scamp Research Track Assessment (*Attachment 3*)

SEDAR 68 is the first research track assessment and the first assessment of Atlantic scamp through the SEDAR process. Research track assessments are used to identify the most appropriate data sources and develop methods for assessing a stock, but are not intended to provide management advice. SEFSC staff will deliver a presentation on the assessment’s results to the Committee. The South Atlantic SSC reviewed the results of SEDAR 68 in October 2021. Genny Nessler, SSC Chair, will deliver the SSC’s recommendations. An operational assessment that will use methods developed through the SEDAR 68 research track assessment to provide management advice for Atlantic scamp will begin in 2022. Terms of reference for the operational assessment of SEDAR 68 will be reviewed during SEDAR Committee. The Council should consider information provided here during the review of the terms of reference.

Committee Action: Review assessment results and discuss implications for future management.

4. Snowy Grouper (SG Amendment 51) (*AP Report; Attachment 4*)

The Council received the results of SEDAR 36 Update at their March 2021 meeting and directed staff to begin work on a plan amendment to revise catch levels and sector allocations. During the September meeting the Council reviewed AP recommendations from the April 2021 AP meeting and an options paper. The Council provided direction to staff to present the options paper to the AP to gather further input on modifications to commercial and recreational management measures and recreational accountability measures.

Committee Action: Review discussion document and consider approval for scoping

5. Golden Tilefish (SG Amendment 52) (*AP Report; Attachment 5*)

To assist in the consideration and development of management actions and alternatives following completed stock assessments, Council staff have developed fishery overview applications for recently assessed species. These overviews compile the history of management and information from the most recent stock assessment. The SEDAR 66 assessment of golden tilefish in the South Atlantic was completed in 2021 determined the stock to not be overfished and not experiencing overfishing. In June 2021, the Council initiated a plan amendment to adjust catch levels for golden tilefish. At their October meeting, the AP reviewed the assessment, fishery overview, and current regulations and provided input for the Council. The Council will review the AP recommendations and options paper and consider approval for scoping.

Committee Action: Review options paper and consider approval for scoping

6. Gag (SG Amendment 53) (*AP Report; Attachment 6*)

The SEDAR 71 assessment of gag grouper in the South Atlantic was completed in 2021 and determined the stock to be overfished and experiencing overfishing. In June 2021, the Council initiated a plan amendment to rebuild and adjust catch levels for gag grouper. New catch and rebuilding projection scenarios were requested by the Council at the September meeting. These new projection requests included additional catch projections for Gag at average and recent low recruitment scenarios and with 70% and 50% probabilities of rebuilding in 10 years. These new projection scenarios were reviewed by the SSC at their October meeting. At their October meeting the AP reviewed the assessment, fishery overview, and current regulations and provided input for the Council. The Council will review the AP recommendations and options paper and consider approval for scoping.

Committee Action: Review options paper and consider approval for scoping

7. Greater Amberjack (SG Amendment 49) (*Attachments 7a and 7b*)

In September 2021, the Committee reviewed comments provided during scoping, conducted in April 2021. Based on comments provided through public scoping and the Snapper Grouper AP, the Committee directed staff to add actions to Amendment 49 that would address recreational and commercial minimum size limits, the commercial Season 2 (September-February) trip limit, and the April spawning closure. Staff will provide an overview of the draft amendment, which includes the additional actions.

Committee Actions: Review draft amendment and consider approval for public hearings.

8. Yellowtail Snapper (SG Amendment 44) (*Attachment 8a and 8b*)

This amendment is being developed jointly with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and addresses catch level adjustments based on the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 64 2019), jurisdictional allocation between the South Atlantic and the Gulf, and sector allocations for the South Atlantic. At the September 2021 meeting, the Committee reviewed preliminary commercial and recreational season length analyses for the South Atlantic, requested specific input from stakeholder on commercial management measures (trip limits) and approved the amendment for scoping. The Snapper Grouper AP and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council provided input at their respective meetings in October 2021. Scoping hearings for potential actions affecting the South Atlantic were held on November 2 and 3, 2021.

Committee Action: Consider input from the Gulf Council and the Snapper Grouper AP and provide guidance on range of options for setting the ABC, jurisdictional allocation, and sector allocations.

9. Red Porgy (SG Amendment 50) (*Attachment 9a and 9b*)

The Committee reviewed updated analyses and held a public hearing on actions proposed in this amendment during the September 2021 Council meeting. The Committee further refined the alternatives considered under some actions and provided rationale for preferred alternatives. The amendment will be considered for formal approval at the Council's March 2022 meeting

Committee Action: Approve all actions and review draft rationale.

10. AP comments on items not previously covered (*AP Report*)

The Snapper Grouper AP met on October 19-21, 2021, and discussed a list of topics besides those addressed in this Committee meeting. Jimmy Hull, AP Chair, will deliver the AP's recommendations on items not scheduled for discussion at this meeting.

Required Committee Action: Discuss and provide guidance as appropriate.

11. Updates on South Atlantic Red Snapper Count and Greater Amberjack Count

Council staff will update the Committee on the status of research projects to obtain abundance estimates for red snapper and greater amberjack.

In 2020, the NMFS Sea Grant Consortium received funding to administer programs to solicit research on red snapper (South Atlantic) and greater amberjack (South Atlantic and Gulf). The goal is to support research that would generate absolute estimates of abundance, with accompanying measures of uncertainty, for these stocks. The intent is for this information to be used as an "anchor point" for future stock assessments. These are sister projects to the much larger "Great Red Snapper Count" that was conducted in the Gulf of Mexico. Council staff members serve on the Steering Committees for each project and will be providing updates on progress to date for each project.

12. Other Business

Correcting A Regulatory Error for the Fort Pierce Offshore Reef Special Management Zone

The Fort Pierce Offshore Reef was designated as a SMZ through implementation of Regulatory Amendment 2 to the Snapper Grouper FMP. The following gear restrictions were effective in 1989 at the site:

- Use of sea bass pot or bottom longline prohibited
- Use of powerhead to take South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper prohibited
- A hydraulic or electric reel that is permanently affixed to the vessel is prohibited when fishing for South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper

Issue

Council staff were contacted by a fisherman in 2021 with questions about rationale for the regulations that limit commercial harvest to the recreational bag limit at the Ft. Pierce Offshore Reef SMZ (50 C.F.R. §§ 622.182(a)(1)(xx) and (a)(2)). This prompted a full

investigation into why and when certain regulations went into effect for the Fort Pierce Offshore Reef SMZ.

Based on our review, as well as input from SERO staff, a mistake was made in the rulemaking for Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2 (CE-BA 2 2011) that resulted in limiting possession of snapper grouper species within the SMZ to the recreational bag limit. CE-BA 2 modified the regulations for the South Carolina SMZs, at the request of the SC Department of Natural Resources, limiting all harvest of snapper grouper and coastal migratory pelagic species to the recreational bag limit for the South Carolina SMZs. However, during the CE-BA 2 rulemaking, the Fort Pierce Offshore Reef SMZ was accidentally included with the changes for the SC SMZs and these changes were set forth in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). As a result, this retention limit has been in effect in the CFR at the site for nearly ten years.

Next Steps

General Counsel will provide an update on this issue under Other Business during the Snapper Grouper Committee and will outline how this mistake will be corrected.