

Summary Report

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting

April 25-27, 2023

The South Atlantic Council's Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) convened in Charleston, SC on April 25-27, 2023.

The AP approved the transcript from the October 2022 meeting and the agenda for the April 2023 meeting.

1. Committee Vice Chair Remarks

Kerry Marhefka, Vice Chair of the Snapper Grouper Committee for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council), provided opening remarks along with a framework for what the Council was expecting from the AP at the meeting.

2. Updates

Recent Amendments: Council staff updated the AP on the status of recent and developing Council actions that were not scheduled for discussion in this AP meeting, including Snapper Grouper Amendments 50 (Red Pogy Rebuilding and Allocations), 49 (Greater Amberjack and Recreational Annual Catch Targets), 51 (Snowy Grouper), 52 (Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish), 46 (Recreational Permitting and Reporting), and 44 (Yellowtail Snapper), as well as the Comprehensive Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule Amendment.

Citizen Science: Staff presented an update on the Council's Citizen Science Program and pilot projects highlighting activities that have occurred since the Fall 2022 Snapper Grouper AP meeting, including a summary of 2022 SAFMC Release data, upcoming FISHstory scanning nights and the Citizen Science program evaluation project.

A FISHstory Scanning Event will be held in conjunction with the Fall 2023 Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel meeting. AP members are encouraged to bring hard copies and digital historic fishing photos to this meeting to contribute to the FISHstory photo archive. Several AP members indicated they would bring photos and suggested other individuals and/or organizations within their community who may be able to contribute photos. Staff will follow up with these members prior to the fall meeting.

AP members also provided feedback on the Citizen Science Evaluation research being led by Dr. Sweeney Tookes and Dr. Yandle to gather information from a broader group of fishermen on their knowledge about, confidence in, and trust in the citizen science process of collecting data to inform fisheries management. In particular, members provided suggestions on recruitment strategies for private recreational fishermen and to include language in the recruitment methods that clearly indicate this research is being done in collaboration with the Council's Citizen Science Program.

Southeast Reef Fish Survey (SERFS): Dr. Walter Bublely from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources presented the 2022 SERFS results and recent trends for many of the South Atlantic snapper grouper species caught by this survey.

3. Red Grouper Fishery Performance Report

With input from the AP, Fishery Performance Reports (FPRs) have been developed for several snapper grouper species, including red grouper in 2017. The intent of the FPRs is to assemble information from AP members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPR will be provided to the SSC, the Socio-Economic Panel (SEP), and the Council to assist in their discussions. An operational assessment (SEDAR 86) for the red grouper stock in the South Atlantic is scheduled for completion by the end of 2023.

Council staff provided an overview of the previous (2017) FPR, landings trends, and other background information. The AP focused their input based on a series of discussion questions, from which the FPR for red grouper was updated. A copy of the full report as well as other FPRs, including the previously completed FPR for red grouper will be uploaded to:

<https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/FPRAll/>.

4. Amendment 55 Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper

The Council received a presentation on the results of the SEDAR 68 stock assessment for scamp and yellowmouth grouper in March 2023. Staff provided an overview of management changes that are needed to incorporate the results from SEDAR 68 into management. The Council directed staff to initiate work on the amendment. The AP provided the following comments and recommendations:

- Habitat loss and low recruitment are a major issue with the South Atlantic scamp and yellowmouth fishery
 - Grouper species recruit in the winter when planktonic food sources are lacking
- The commercial scamp fishery has already been decimated
 - Contributing factor: loss of working waterfront
 - Decrease from 130-600 lbs per trip catch in the 80's to 20-30 lbs per trip today
- Look to gag management as a guideline for scamp and yellowmouth grouper (non-consensus)
 - A trip limit is needed for scamp and yellowmouth (non-consensus)
 - Retain the spawning season closure

5. SG Amendment 44/ RF Amendment 55 (Yellowtail Snapper)

The Council reviewed the results of the SEDAR 68 Interim Analysis and instructed staff to resume work on this joint plan amendment. This amendment will modify catch levels for South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico yellowtail snapper as well updating the jurisdictional allocation of the stock acceptable biological catch, Total South Atlantic annual catch limit, Gulf of Mexico annual catch limit, and South Atlantic sector allocations. The AP provided the following comments and recommendations:

- The SG AP recommended the South Atlantic Council take a precautionary approach throughout the amendment.
 - Consider the concerns of Gulf fishermen (commercial specifically noted by some AP members)
- The SG AP would like to make sure the season stays open year-round (both sectors)
- SG AP recommended retaining the current sector allocations but applying them to the updated ACL.
 - There was commercial and recreational agreement amongst the AP.
- Recreational AP members noted that the recreational sector does not want to lose any allocation.
- The AP noted that boosting the commercial allocation would not be feasible for the fishery to harvest.
 - The commercial sector in South Florida specifically is losing its working waterfront.
 - Some commercial AP members noted that an end of season commercial closure would be okay because that's when the fish are spawning (non-consensus) while other AP members noted that they would not want a closure as a result of shifted allocations.
- Some AP members noted that the Council should not exceed a 50/50 split.

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend the Council consider the following alternatives:

Action 1: 80% South Atlantic, 20% Gulf of Mexico jurisdictional allocation

Sub-Action 2a: Alternative 5 (ACL/OY = Lowest ABC)

Action 3: Option 1, retain the current allocations, applied to the updated ABC.

6. Amendment 48 (Wreckfish)

A review of the Wreckfish ITQ Program was completed in 2019 and included recommendations for improvement, particularly with respect to confidentiality issues and related constraints; moving away from a paper coupon-based program to an electronic program; cost recovery; wreckfish permit requirement; allocation issues; offloading sites and times; and economic data collection. The Council solicited public comment on this amendment during their March 2023 meeting and is scheduled to consider the amendment for formal approval in September 2023. The AP provided the following comments and approved the following motions:

- The SG AP was opposed to changing the current sector allocations, noting that during the short open season recreational fishermen do occasionally catch wreckfish. AP members were concerned that one MRIP intercept would result in exceeding the recreational ACL.
 - The trend of recreational fishermen catching wreckfish is likely to increase as fishermen move into deeper water to avoid non-target snapper grouper species.
- To gather more information on private recreational harvest of wreckfish (and other deepwater species) the SG AP recommended a wreckfish permit and reporting requirement.
 - The AP noted that citizen science applications may provide an excellent avenue reporting and the small size of the wreckfish fishery makes it an ideal candidate for pilot testing broader private recreational reporting of snapper grouper species.

- The SG AP noted that Action 3/Alternative 4 would allow the widest participation by facilitating leasing of wreckfish shares/allocation and would facilitate new entrants into the fishery because they would not have to purchase shares directly.
 - The requirement to have a snapper grouper unlimited permit helps aid in accountability.
- The SG AP noted that offloading site and time requirements do not exist for other snapper grouper species and given challenges with offloading during set hours they should be removed from the wreckfish ITQ fishery.
 - AP members acknowledged that often offloading takes place outside of daylight hours due to other infrastructure or environmental restrictions.

MOTION 1: AP RECOMMENDS ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) BE CONSIDERED FOR THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 1. Revise sector allocations and sector annual catch limits for wreckfish.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain the current commercial sector and recreational sector allocations as 95% and 5%, respectively, of the total annual catch limit for wreckfish.

APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION 2: RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL REQUIRE, FOR THE PRIVATE RECREATIONAL SECTOR, A WRECKFISH PERMIT AND REPORTING REQUIREMENT, USING EXISTING RECREATIONAL REPORTING APPS, SUCH AS THE CITIZEN SCIENCE APP SCIFISH.

COULD BE USED AS A PILOT FOR FUTURE RECREATIONAL REPORTING FOR OTHER SNAPPER GROUPER SPECIES.

APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

MOTION 3: RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL SELECT ALTERNATIVE 4 AS PREFERRED.

Action 3. Modify the requirement to possess a commercial vessel permit for wreckfish.

Alternative 4. To commercially harvest or sell wreckfish, a commercial permit for South Atlantic snapper grouper (unlimited) must have been issued to the vessel, the permit must be on board.

APPROVED BY AP (14-0-3)

MOTION 4: REMOVE THE 8A-5P OFFLOADING TIME REQUIREMENTS FOR WRECKFISH FISHERMEN TO BE CONSISTENT WITH OTHER SNAPPER GROUPER SPECIES.

Action 5. Modify offloading site and time requirements for wreckfish.

Alternative 4. Remove the requirement to offload wreckfish between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., local time. Wreckfish must be offloaded only at the fixed facility of a dealer with a Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Dealer Permit. Wreckfish may be offloaded at a location other than a fixed facility of a dealer who holds a Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic dealer permit, if the wreckfish shareholder or the vessel operator advises the NMFS Office for Law Enforcement of the location not less than 24 hours prior to offloading.

APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

7. Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation Input

The Council is conducting a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to explore long-term management strategies for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. Dr. Adrian Hordyk of Blue Matter Science presented progress thus far, and the AP provided input to further develop the MSE:

- The AP indicated the 100 foot line seemed to be pretty good for defining zones for three reasons: 1) barotrauma begins to increase, 2) most recreational trips occur in shallower depth, and 3) most red snapper were caught in less than 100 ft. Grouper will typically be deeper.
- The AP described the regional differences in fishing effort along the coast.
- The AP recommended several different ideas for defining a trophy fish including 70% of state records or state citation.

8. Amendment 46 (Recreational Permitting)

Council staff presented an overview of Amendment 46 which considers establishing a private recreational permit and education component for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The AP provided the following comments and recommendations, and approved the following motions:

DRAFT Action 1. Establish a private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess Snapper Grouper species in the South Atlantic Region

MOTION 5: THE SNAPPER GROUPE AP RECOMMENDS A VESSEL-BASED RATHER THAN AN INDIVIDUAL ANGLER-BASED PERMIT BE REQUIRED FOR THE PRIVATE COMPONENT OF THE RECREATIONAL SECTOR IN AMENDMENT 46.

APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT FOR MOTION:
RECOMMEND ALTERNATIVE 2 IN ACTION 1.

Alternative 2. Require a federal recreational permit for any vessel participating in the private angler component of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic region.

General Comments:

- A vessel-based permit would help identify the universe of participants and is consistent with existing federal permits issued in the Southeast.
 - The vessel owner is typically the one taking people out fishing and the responsible party for the trip.
- The logistics of implementing a vessel based permit program would likely be easier than an angler-based permit due to fewer permits that would need to be issued.

MOTION 6: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL SELECTS ALTERNATIVE 2 (ALL SPECIES WITHIN THE SNAPPER GROUPE COMPLEX).

DRAFT Action 2. Specify the species that would be covered by a private recreational snapper grouper permit

Alternative 2. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

General Comments:

- While it could help to match the Florida State Reef Fish Survey species for consistency, some important Snapper Grouper species are not included in that list so it would be advisable to go with all species within the complex to be comprehensive regionally.
- Choosing all species in the Snapper Grouper complex could make it easier for permit holders to comply with the permit requirement since they would not need to remember which of the species fall under the permit and which ones do not.

DRAFT Action 3. Specify the area where a private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required to fish for, harvest, or possess Snapper Grouper species in the South Atlantic Region

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- There was no support for Alternative 1 (No Action)
- Some support for Alternative 2 (8 in support)
- Some support for Alternative 3 (6 in support)

Alternative 1 (No Action). A federal permit is not required for a private angler or vessel when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.

Alternative 2. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required to fish for, harvest, or possess applicable snapper grouper species caught in or from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

Alternative 3. A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required to fish for, harvest, or possess applicable snapper grouper species caught in or from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone or state waters.

General Comments:

- Some members felt that the permit should only cover fishing activity in the EEZ.
 - Covering state waters may lead to kickback from some states in the Southeast.
- Other felt that state waters should also be covered, as there is notable fishing activity, particularly in South Florida, that occurs for some species.
 - It was noted that some species may be kept from state waters even when closed in federal waters due to differing regulations.
 - Covering state waters would help better identify the full universe of participants. Permitting efforts should be more inclusive than less.
 - Including both state and federal waters could be less confusing to constituents and make compliance with a permit requirement easier.

Education component-related actions (DRAFT Actions 4-6)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Recommend a new alternative that would immediately implement a mandatory education component to go along with a permit but to not delay implementation of a permit.
 - There was clarification that an education component still should move forward independently of permit if necessary.
- Strong support for developing an education component as soon as possible.

General Comments:

- The education requirement could be modeled along the lines of what HMS requires for sharks.
- Int eh education materials, include links to encourage anglers to use existing reporting and regulation apps.
- Potentially consider implementing an education requirement that is valid for as long as a permit is maintained and up to date. If a permit lapses or a new permit is issued, the permit holder would need to go through the education requirement again.

9. Impacts of Space Center Operations on Fishing Activities off Florida

During the December 2022 Council meeting Council member Laurilee Thompson noted that the rocket launches from Cape Canaveral which have been increasing in frequency are expected to continue and expand significantly in 2023 and beyond. In order to ensure public safety, temporary Safety Zones have been established to limit all vessel access during splash down and recovery efforts which affects local fishery activities.

One AP member, Andy Fish, has previous work experience as a recovery diver for space materials that had been discharged into the ocean. He provided information on the process of timing and notice given to fishermen and other boaters prior to a launch. Other AP members from central Florida also described their experiences with launches and Safety Zone closures:

- Areas are closed to boating activities during launch times, some time before through some time after. Boats in the area must move out.
- Space launches more likely to occur on fair weather days?
- Closures due to launches go into effect based on the launch schedule, but may be held longer if launch is delayed (e.g. by weather).
- Launches and associated closures have occurred in the past but have been more frequent in the most recent years. Plans for future years include further increasing the frequency of launches.
- The AP raised questions about potential environmental impacts about what is entering the ocean from debris that is not recovered.
- What can the Council do?
 - Can the time of closures be shortened or more advanced notice of start and end times be provided?
 - Compensation for missed fishing time for commercial & for-hire businesses?

- Some precedent for compensation with BP oil spill response in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Similar situations with coastal military operations in other areas (e.g. North Carolina)

10. Research Recommendations for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

The Council is developing its Research and Monitoring Plan for 2023-2027. A draft list of research priorities was presented to the AP. The AP generally agreed with the research priorities as drafted and provided the following additional comments:

- Under Assessment Research Priorities, prioritize understanding what's causing lack of recruitment for several SG species
Add under Management Research Needs: Identify and address underserved communities resulting from the structuring of commercial permitting.

11. Other Updates

SEDAR: SEDAR Staff provided an update of recently finished, ongoing, and upcoming projects. Volunteer stakeholder participants for upcoming assessments will be requested at the October AP meeting.

Best Fishing Practices Outreach: Staff provided an update on recent actions related to the Best Fishing Practices Initiative included in Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 35 and the Sea Grant Reef Fish Communication Fellowship.