

**Reef Fish Management Committee Report
April 5-6, 2016
Johnny Greene, Chair**

Update on 2015 Recreational Red Snapper Landings and Recreational Season Projections for 2016

Nick Farmer gave a presentation summarizing several model runs for projecting the 2016 private recreational and for-hire seasons. Projections for the private recreational season ranged from 6 to 9 days with a median of 8 days. Projections for the federal for-hire season ranged from 38 to 56 days with a median of 48 days. Specific season dates will be announced at a later time.

Final Action – Framework Action to Modify Red Grouper ACL (Tab B, No. 4a,b,c)

Staff provided a presentation on the framework action, public comments, and Reef Fish AP report. The Committee discussed the differences between the alternatives in the framework document compared to the new Alternative 5 that the Reef Fish AP recommended. After discussion the committee passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, that the Council select Alternative 4 as a Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 4: Use the constant catch OFL and ABC recommended by the SSC but set the ACL and ACT below the constant catch OFL and ABC. Base the ACL and ACT on the minimum ABC of 10,770,000 lb gw from the declining yield stream. Use the current allocations on the minimum ABC to establish ACLs. Set ACTs for each sector where the commercial ACT (quota) is set at 95% of the commercial ACL and the recreational ACT is 92% of the recreational ACL.

The Committee then moved to recommend approval of the framework action and associated codified regulations.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, that the Council approve the Framework Action to Modify Red Grouper ACL and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation, and deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document. The Council Chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate.

Options Paper for Amendment 46 – Modify Gray Triggerfish Rebuilding Plan (Tab B, No. 5)

Staff reviewed the background information and draft options paper. The document is in the initial stages of development and staff is looking for feedback on the range of options currently in the document. This range of options will be used for the analyses request and review at the June SSC meeting. After discussion the Committee passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, that the Council add an alternative 4 to Action 3: To add a recreational closed season starting January 1 through Feb 28, open March 1st, and keep June 1 through July 31 a closed season.

Draft Amendment 41 – Red Snapper Management for Federally Permitted Charter Vessels (Tab B, No. 6)

Staff reviewed the amendment, noting the updated information and new alternatives requested by the Council. The recommendations of the Ad Hoc Red Snapper Charter For-hire Advisory Panel were presented alongside Actions 1 through 3.

The Committee discussed the new Action 2 and whether non-participating vessels would have access to red snapper under an allocation-based management program. The Committee then passed the following two motions. Staff may update the wording of the alternatives to further clarify the intent from the Committee discussion.

With one in opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, that in Action 2, add a new Alternative 5:

Alternative 5: Establish a red snapper management program for charter vessels. The program would include only charter vessels with a valid or renewable federal for-hire permit for reef fish who elected to join the red snapper management program for charter vessels. An endorsement to the federal for-hire permit for reef fish would be issued to those charter operators who elected to join the red snapper management program for charter vessels. Opportunities to opt in to the red snapper management program for charter vessels are offered every year.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, that in Alternatives 2-4 in Action 2, to add a sentence in each one that any vessel opting out from the federally permitted red snapper charter for-hire program will not be able to harvest red snapper.

Staff reviewed the alternatives in Action 3 and the AP's recommendations. A Committee member expressed concern with using regional landings to distribute quota, noting that Mississippi has no charter landings for some years due to low sampling. The Committee passed the following motions.

With one in opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, that in Action 3,

to adopt the Advisory Panel’s recommendation to add a new alternative to distribute quota using the parameters in Alternatives 2, 3 and 5:

- Distribute quota equally among charter permit holders (Alt 2)
- Based on the lesser of the COI of the vessel or permit capacity (Alt 3)
- Distribute quota based on historical/regional landings (Alt 5)

Options for the previous motion’s new alternative:

	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D	Option E
Alt 2 (equal)	25%	20%	30%	40%	75%
Alt 5 (regional history)	50%	50%	40%	30%	12.5%
Alt 3 (passenger capacity)	25%	30%	30%	30%	12.5%

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, that in Action 3, to add 2 new options to Alternative 5:

Option 5d: use average landings for years 2003 to 2012, excluding landings in 2010.

Option 5e: establish a timeline as found in Amendment 40:

50% 1986-2013 plus 50% 2006-2013, excluding landings from 2010.

Following discussion of Action 3, the following motions were provided.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, that in Action 1, add an alternative to establish a PFQ program that uses annual allocation but not shares.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, that staff time permitting, to reconvene the Charter For-hire Advisory Panel, prior to the June Council meeting, in order to continue their work on recommendations for Amendment 41.

A motion for a new alternative in Action 1 to establish a harvest tag program that provides recreational anglers with annual allocation distributed in the form of harvest tags to be used specifically on charter vessels had previously failed by a vote of 7 to 7. A Committee member suggested that it could be useful for the Advisory Panel to discuss the proposed alternative. The Committee passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, that the AP take up the harvest tag program that provides recreational participants with annual allocation distributed in the form of harvest tags and specifically evaluate this Alternative 5.

Staff noted that at its January 2016 meeting, the Council removed the alternative to form fishing cooperatives from Amendment 42. The Advisory Panel also recommended to the Council that the establishment of fishing cooperatives be removed from the document. The Committee then passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to move Alternative 3 in Action 1, and Section C – Fishing cooperatives, to the considered but rejected section.

With the exception of fishing cooperatives, it is likely that any of the allocation-based management alternatives would trigger the mandate for a referendum. A Committee member noted it would be useful for charter operators to be able to compare management under an allocation-based management program or under traditional management tools, such as seasons and bag limits. The Committee then passed the following motion.

With a vote of 9 to 4, the Committee recommends and I so move, to have staff examine the following traditional measures and report back to the Council how these measures impact season length for the charter for hire sector.

- 1) 1-fish bag limit**
- 2) Split seasons**
- 3) A range of size limits**

Draft Amendment 42 – Federal Reef Fish Headboat Management (Tab B, No. 8)

Staff reviewed the purpose and need and the management alternatives. Staff also discussed the need for a control date to define the universe of vessels that would participate in the headboat management plan. Following a discussion on distinctions between headboat survey vessels and charter for-hire vessels, the Committee approved the following motion:

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to ask NMFS to publish a control date of December 31, 2015 for participation in the reef fish headboat program.

Staff noted that the Reef Fish Headboat AP will meet in early May and that their recommendations will be presented during the June Council meeting.

Public Hearing Draft Amendment 43 – Hogfish Stock Definition, SDC, ACL, and Size Limit (Tab B, No. 9)

The Committee selected preferred alternatives for actions as follows.

Action 1 – Definition of the Management Unit. No change from the previously selected Preferred Alternative 2 (stock boundary line is south of Cape Sable at 25° 09' N latitude).

Action 2 – Status Determination Criteria for Hogfish in the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Unit. Alternative 3 had previously been selected as the Preferred Alternative, but no Preferred Option for MSST had been selected. An initial motion was made to make Option 3(a) the preferred option ($MSST = (1-M) * SSB_{30\% SPR}$), but was replaced with a substitute motion to make Option 3(b) the preferred option.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, that in Action 2, under Preferred Alternative 3, Option 3(b) be the Preferred Option for MSST.

Preferred Alternative 3: MSY = equilibrium yield at $F_{30\% SPR}$

MFMT = $F_{30\% SPR}$

MSST =

Preferred Option 3b: $0.75 * SSB_{30\% SPR}$

Action 3 – Annual Catch Limit and Annual Catch Target for Hogfish. An initial motion was made to make Alternative 3 with Option 3(a) the Preferred Alternative and option, but some Committee members were concerned about the provision that would reduce the ACL to 159,300 lbs after 2018 if there were no new ABC projections. The motion was withdrawn after staff noted that the current ACL has been exceeded just twice, in 2012 and 2013

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, that in Action 3, the Preferred Alternative be Alternative 1.

Alternative 1: No Action. ACL = 208,000 lbs ww, and ACT = 179,000 lbs ww. Weights are based on the Generic ACL/AM Amendment and Tier 3a (using 1999-2008 landings) of the ABC control rule.

Action 4 – Hogfish Minimum Size Limit for Commercial and Recreational Sectors. Staff noted that the current SAFMC preferred alternative is 16 inches FL, and the size of 50% transition from female to male hogfish occurs at about 16.8 inches FL.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, that in Action 4 the Preferred Alternative be Alternative 4.

Alternative 4: Set the hogfish minimum size limit at 16 inches FL.

Action 5 – Use of Powerheads to Harvest Hogfish in the Stressed Area.

Without Opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, that in Action 5, Alternative 2 be the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 2: Remove the provision in 50 CFR 622.35(a)(1) that exempts hogfish from the prohibition on the use of powerheads to take Gulf reef fish in the stressed area.

Public hearings have been scheduled in May. The amendment will be brought back to the Council for final action in June.

Draft Amendment 45 – Extend or Eliminate the Red Snapper Sector Separation Sunset Provision (Tab B, No. 10)

Staff reviewed the amendment. A motion to remove the sunset provision for sector separation failed. A motion to extend sector separation for 10 years was proposed. However, following discussions, the Committee approved the following substitute motion:

By a voice vote of 9 to 6, the Committee recommends and I so move to select Alternative 2 with Option 2a as the Preferred Alternative and Preferred Option.

Alternative 2: Extend the separate management of the federal for-hire and private angling components (sector separation) for an additional:

Option 2a: 3 calendar years (to be effective through the end of the 2020 fishing year).

The Committee discussed alternative public hearing methods and approved the following motion:

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: to take Amendment 45 to in-person public hearings to the following locations:

Alabama:	Mobile
Texas:	Houston/Galveston Port Aransas
Mississippi	Biloxi
Louisiana	Baton Rouge
Florida	St. Petersburg Panama City Beach/Panama City

Preliminary Options and Discussion – Mechanism to Allow Recreational Red Snapper Season to Re-open if ACL is Not Exceeded (Tab B, No. 11)

Staff reviewed the preliminary actions and alternatives for addressing underharvest of recreational red snapper ACL, which consisted of a number of steps to move toward a fall supplemental season. Dr. Crabtree noted that the proposed revisions to the National Standard 1 guidelines will allow carryover of unused ACL to the next fishing year, which may be a better alternative than reopening the current season. An IPT will be formed to review and further develop the alternatives for this options paper.

Final Action – Framework Action to Modify Commercial Gear Requirements and Recreational/Commercial Fishing Year for Yellowtail Snapper (Tab B, No. 12a)

Staff reviewed the alternatives in Action 1, noting the area for which the circle hook exemption would apply for each respective alternative. The Gulf Reef Fish AP had previously commented that they preferred that the area for which the gear exemption would apply be as small as possible; a sentiment which was shared by received oral and written public comments. An analysis of the potential for bycatch of other species was reviewed with respect to Action 1, which demonstrated a low probability of biologically significant bycatch if the gear exemption were implemented. A Committee member asked why the recreational sector was not being considered as part of the gear exemption. Staff replied that the manner in which the commercial fishery is prosecuted is very specific to targeting yellowtail snapper, and recreational reef fish

fishing generally employs bottom fishing techniques which are less discriminate to specific species of fish.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 1, to make Alternative 5 the preferred alternative.

Alternative 5: Remove the requirement to use circle hooks when commercial fishing with natural bait for yellowtail snapper south of 25° 09' north latitude on the west coast of Monroe County, Florida (Cape Sable) south to the Gulf Council jurisdictional boundary.

The Council's preferred alternatives in Action 2 (changes to the fishing year) were reviewed, and no changes were recommended by the Committee. Staff noted that the codified text would be updated prior to the Full Council session on Thursday.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, that the Council approve the Framework Action to Modify Commercial Gear Requirements and Recreational/Commercial Fishing Year for Yellowtail Snapper and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my report.