

**Reef Fish Management Committee Report
August 11, 2015
Johnny Greene-Chair**

Public Hearing Draft Amendment 39

Staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in the document (**Tab B, No. 4**). In *Action 1*, the Committee discussed the process and timeline for submitting conservation equivalency plans, or CEPs. Dr. Crabtree suggested the establishment of a technical review committee to initially review the CEPs. The review committee would include State representatives, thereby further involving the States in the regional management process.

By a voice vote of 6 to 2, the Committee recommends, and I so move in Action 1, to change the Preferred Alternative to Alternative 4.

Alternative 4: Establish a regional management program in which a state or group of adjacent states (regions) submit proposals to a **technical review committee** describing the **conservation equivalency measures** the region will adopt for the management of its portion of the recreational sector ACL. The proposals must specify the red snapper season and bag limit. To be a CEP, the plan must be reasonably expected to limit the red snapper harvest to the region's assigned portion of the recreational red snapper ACL. The technical review committee reviews and may make recommendations on the plan, which is either returned to the region for revision or forwarded to NMFS for final review. If a region does not participate or its plan is determined by NMFS to not satisfy the conservation equivalency requirements, then the recreational harvest of red snapper in the federal waters adjacent to such region would be subject to the federal default regulations for red snapper.

In *Action 2*, Alternative 4, to ensure that regions do not propose separate management for the recreational components, the addition of the phrase "as a single unit" was suggested.

By a voice vote with one opposing, the Committee recommends, and I so move in Action 2, to accept the language in Alternative 4 to include the phrase "as a single unit."

After an initial motion to make Alternative 2 the preferred alternative, a substitute motion was made to select Alternative 4 as preferred.

By a roll call vote of 6 to 3, the Committee recommends, and I so move in Action 2, to make Alternative 4 the preferred alternative.

Alternative 4: Remove the sunset and **end** the separate management of the federal for-hire and private angling components upon implementation of this amendment, and have this amendment **apply to the entire recreational sector**. The private angling and federal for-hire components would be managed *as a single unit* by each region under regional ACLs based on the allocation selected in Action 6.

Roll call vote:

| | | |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Riechers – Yes | Bademan – Yes | Williams – No |
| Fisher – Yes | Crabtree – No | Lucas – Yes |
| Matens – Yes | Walker – No | Boyd – Yes |

The Committee discussed *Action 5*, addressing closures in federal waters of the Gulf. To facilitate comparison between the alternatives, staff recommended the addition of the Proposed Alternative 3, and removal of Options 2a and 2b. Dr. Crabtree noted that if a region intends to use Preferred Alternative 2 in its CEP, additional rulemaking would be needed and this could delay approval of the region’s CEP. Staff noted that regions could establish zones with different fishing seasons under Alternative 1, and that federal waters would not need to be closed. A motion to make Alternative 1 the preferred alternative failed. In *Actions 6 and 7*, no further changes were made to the preferred alternatives.

Updated Option Paper-Framework Action to Set Gag Recreational Season and Gag and Black Grouper Minimum Size Limits

Staff reviewed changes to the draft options paper (**Tab B, No. 5**). At the last meeting, the Council voted to retain the status quo ACLs and ACTs. Therefore, all of the alternatives for modifying ACLs and ACTs were moved to considered but rejected. New actions were added to consider increasing the gag (Action 1) and black grouper (Action 2) recreational minimum size limits from 22 inches total length (TL) to 24 inches TL, which would establish consistency with the South Atlantic size limits and would extend the recreational gag season. In Action 3, which sets the gag recreational season, Alternatives 3 and 4 were modified so that changes in the gag recreational season length are based on changes in the size limit rather than changes in the ACL. Estimates of season length are shown in Tables 2.3.1 and 2.3.2. Following review of the revised options paper, the Committee passed the following motions.

Action 1 – Gag Recreational Minimum Size Limit

By a vote of 7 to 1, the Committee recommends and I so move, to make Alternative 2 the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 2: Set the recreational minimum size limit for gag at 24 inches TL.

Action 2 – Black Grouper Minimum Size Limit

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to make Alternative 2 the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 2. Set the recreational minimum size limit for black grouper at 24 inches TL.

For *Action 3 – Modifications to the Recreational Gag Fishing Season*, Committee members deferred selection of a preferred alternative until full Council (except for Alternative 2 to eliminate the December 3-31 fixed closed season, which is already a preferred alternative).

Final Action – Amendment 28 - Red Snapper Allocation

Staff presented the amendment (**Tab B, No 6a**) and noted that the Council’s preferred reallocation

is Preferred Alternative 8. A motion to make Alternative 1 the Preferred Alternative failed. Council and NMFS staff summarized public comments and DEIS comments. Finally, staff indicated that the codified text for Amendment 28 was included in the briefing book.

Final Action – Framework Action to Retain a Portion of the Commercial Red Snapper Quota in 2016

Staff summarized the framework action (**Tab B, No 7a**) and noted that the percentage of the 2016 commercial quota that would be retained would be determined by the preferred reallocation alternative selected in Amendment 28. Staff indicated that the codified text for this action was included in the briefing book.

By a voice vote with no opposition the committee recommends and I so move that in Action 1 of the Framework Action, make Alternative 2 the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 2: Before the distribution of the 2016 red snapper commercial quota to RS-IFQ account shareholders, **withhold up to 34.7 % of the red snapper commercial quota**. The exact amount to be retained for later distribution will be determined by the percentage of the red snapper commercial quota that would be reallocated to the recreational sector under Reef Fish Amendment 28.

Draft Framework Action – Modify Gear Restrictions for Yellowtail Snapper

Staff reviewed the draft options paper for the framework action to modify commercial yellowtail snapper gear requirements (**Tab B, No. 8**). Commercial yellowtail snapper fishermen in federal waters in the Gulf are currently required to use non-stainless steel circle hooks (50 CFR 622.30). These fishermen argue that their fishing practices are such that using circle hooks has no added conservation benefit, and decreases the efficiency with which they operate. Alternatives to the status quo were presented which would remove the circle hook requirement for commercial yellowtail snapper fishermen either throughout the Gulf of Mexico EEZ, only south of 28 degrees North latitude (approximately Tampa Bay), or only south of 25 degrees, 23 minutes North latitude (approximately Shark Point in west-central Monroe County, Florida).

The Council accepted the alternatives presented in the draft options paper for further analyses.

By a unanimous vote, the Committee recommends and I so move to accept the language in Action 1.

Options Paper – Amendment 42 – Federal Reef Fish Headboat Management

Council and NMFS staff summarized the draft options paper for Amendment 42 (**Tab B, No. 9**). The scope of the amendment, purpose and need and management approaches were presented. Management approaches include traditional measures such as size and bag limits and allocation-based measures such as permit-based fishing quotas, individual fishing quotas, cooperatives and regional organizations. The Committee started to discuss scoping hearings and indicated that the discussion would continue with Amendment 41.

Options Paper – Amendment 41 – Federal Charter-For-Hire Red Snapper Management

Staff reviewed the document (**Tab B, No. 10**), which included options for management approaches similar to Amendment 42. In contrast to Amendment 42, this amendment would apply to all federally permitted for-hire vessels that do not participate in the Southeast Headboat Survey. Staff noted that the goals and objectives for the management of charter vessels should guide the design of appropriate management measures. Staff identified recommendations made by the Charter AP, noting that the complete report was provided in the appendix.

Following review of both Amendments 41 and 42, the Council passed the following motion.

By a voice vote of 5 to 3, the Committee recommends and I so move to take Amendment 41 and 42 Options Papers out to scoping meetings.

Ad Hoc Private Recreational AP Discussion, State Directors Comments, Past Council Efforts

The state agency representatives each summarized the results of meetings their state had held to get fishermen's attitudes and recommendations on red snapper management, or input they had received from attending fishing society meetings and speaking directly with anglers (**Tab B, No 11a-e**). Staff then reviewed the results of series of Recreational Angler Participation (RAP) Sessions held in 2014 plus recommendation from two meetings of the Ad Hoc Recreational Data Collection AP held in 2012 and 2013 (**Tab B, No. 11f-h**). It was noted that these meetings were held before the 20% red snapper recreational ACT buffer and sector separation were implemented.

The Council had voted at the last Council meeting to establish an Ad Hoc Recreational AP, but had directed staff not to do any work on creating the AP until after the Council received the above summaries. If the Council moves forward with this AP, it needs to develop a charge for the AP, and determine the make-up of the Panel.

Other Business

Johnny Greene stated that he had been approached by many fishermen concerned about the status of gray triggerfish. These fishermen had suggested that a pro-active increase in the gray triggerfish size limit be considered. Several other Council members indicated that they had received similar comments. Mr. Greene noted that a new gray triggerfish stock assessment is about to be produced, and suggested that whatever action is developed as a result of that assessment would likely be the appropriate vehicle to consider a size limit change. Staff added that they expect the assessment to be available on about August 25, and it will be reviewed by the SSC at their September 1-2 meeting.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my report.