

Reef Fish Management Committee Report October 6-7, 2015 Johnny Greene-Chair

SSC Summary (Tab B, No. 4)

Luiz Barbieri summarized the main topics discussed at the September 16-17, 2015 SSC meeting.

Best practices for constant catch ABC projections and Constant catch ABC for hogfish

The SSC discussed four approaches to determining a constant catch ABC. Most of the interest was in method 2 (average the ABCs over a projection period) and method 4 (use an iterative projection process). Method 2 was the simplest, but could result in an ABC that exceeds OFL for some years. The iterative process takes more time, one to two weeks, but is more scientifically defensible. For hogfish, the iterative method will be used to estimate constant catch ABC. Some Committee members suggested that the averaging method could produce adequate results with less time and work needed. The SSC will compare results from the two methods for hogfish at its January 2016 meeting. The SSC also recommended that, for declining yield streams, if new yield projections are not available by the end of the projection period, the ABC should be reduced to the equilibrium ABC until new projections are produced.

SEDAR 43 gray triggerfish standard assessment and ABC

The SSC reviewed the gray triggerfish assessment and had concerns with several of the input parameters used. The SSC concluded that the assessment was the best available science and was adequate to determine current stock status, but was not adequate for making yield projections. The stock was found to be overfished but not experiencing overfishing. It does not appear to be recovering and is unlikely to reach its 10-year rebuilding target in 2017. However, anecdotal information suggests that gray triggerfish are becoming more abundant, and the most recent stock assessment predicted that age-0 recruits have increased by 66% between 2012 and 2013. The SSC recommended that a new rebuilding plan be established, and is requesting guidance from the Council on how to proceed. Roy Crabtree stated that NMFS is in the process of drafting a letter notifying the Council that inadequate progress is being made in the gray triggerfish rebuilding plan. Once that letter is sent, it will require the Council to develop new measures for implementation within two years to rebuild the stock.

The Committee discussed possible ways to get a new assessment and the yield projections needed for a new rebuilding plan. The SEDAR schedule has little room for flexibility, and the Science Center does not have the personnel, time, or budget to add a new assessment to the existing workload over the next few years. Council staff noted that the SSC had suggested using the ABC control rule tier 3b, a data poor method, to produce ABCs. This method would not produce a rebuilding yield stream, but would produce a more conservative ABC than current that could be implemented as an interim measure until a new assessment can be conducted.

One suggestion was made to contract with an outside assessment scientist to rerun the assessment taking into account the SSC's concerns. Bonnie Ponwith questioned where the funding would come from. She added that this could be even more time consuming to the Science Center staff due to the need to train the person and to provide the data inputs needed for the assessment. However, Committee members felt that it would be worth at least exploring the use of scientists from a scientific consortium to help with the assessment. It was noted that this approach had been used by the Mid-Atlantic Council.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to have the Council explore working with a consortium of scientists to begin working with stock assessments.

Council staff reviewed the Reef Fish AP's recommendations for gray triggerfish (Tab B, No. 11). Based on the AP's recommendation to include gray triggerfish in a reef fish IFQ program, a motion was made to untable Amendment 33 and include gray triggerfish in the amendment. This motion failed by a vote of 4 to 4.

In response to another AP recommendation to reduce the gray triggerfish bag limit in order to extend the recreational season, the Committee passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to ask for an analysis of a 1 fish bag limit for Gray Triggerfish.

Committee members noted that the priority was to develop a new rebuilding plan, but a bag limit change could be included as an action in the amendment.

The Committee discussed the SSC's 12 to 8 split vote to accept the gray triggerfish assessment as the best available science. Roy Crabtree asked for a verbatim transcript of the SSC meeting in order to better understand why the vote was split. He stated that most other SSCs used a consensus approach rather than parliamentary procedure when making recommendations, and felt that was a better way for the SSC to proceed. Other Committee members felt that under a consensus approach, one or two of the SSC members tend to dominate the decision-making.

Final Action – Framework Action to set Gag Recreational Season and Gag and Black Grouper Minimum size Limits (Tab B, No. 5a)

Staff reviewed the draft framework action Reef Fish AP recommendations (Tab B, No. 11), and written comments received. The Council had previously adopted preferred alternatives for Action 1 (gag recreational minimum size limit) and Action 2 (black grouper minimum size limit) to set a 24-inch recreational minimum size limit, and a preferred alternative in Action 3 to eliminate the December 3-31 recreational fixed closed season. This would result in a recreational gag season of July 1 through December 31, or until the ACL was projected to be reached. Other alternatives in Action 3 could extend the season, but Committee members felt that a precautionary approach was warranted until a new stock assessment is conducted. Mara Levy reviewed the codified regulations (Tab B, No. 5b), and noted that they reflected the current preferred alternatives.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, that the Council approve the Final Framework Action for Gag and Black Grouper 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 – Amendment to Define Gulf of Mexico Hogfish Stock, and set ACL and Status Determination Criteria (Tab B, No. 7)

Council staff reviewed the options paper for hogfish. There are three actions: 1) define the geographic boundary between the Gulf and East Florida/Florida Keys hogfish stocks; 2) establish status determination criteria (MFMT, MSST, and MSY proxy); and 3) set ACL and optionally ACT for the Gulf hogfish stock. Staff noted that Action 2 to define status determination criteria could be moved into the MSST amendment that is being developed concurrently. Also Action 3 is not yet complete because the constant catch ABC needed for one of the alternatives is not yet available. Council staff reviewed the Reef Fish AP's recommendations, which included a motion to increase the minimum size limit to 14 inches FL.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to add an action to look at increases to the minimum size limit for Hogfish.

Revised Public Hearing Draft Amendment 39 – Regional Management of Recreational Red Snapper (Tab B, No. 6)

Staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in Regional Management of Recreational Red Snapper and the Reef Fish AP's recommendations for each action (Tab B, No. 11). In Action 1, the Committee discussed the proposed timeline and required analyses for delegation and conservation equivalency plans. A Committee member noted that the 3-year sunset provision adopted by the Council for sector separation was not a long time to evaluate the new management structure, and the Committee passed the following motion.

By a voice vote of 4 to 3, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 1, to add Alternative 5 Option b as a preferred alternative.

**Alternative 5: Establish a provision to sunset regional management after:
Option b: 5 calendar years of the program.**

In Action 2, staff reviewed the new tables and figures that provide the regional allocations and estimated season lengths for the alternatives, based on the Council's current preferred alternatives for allocating the recreational sector ACL in Action 6. After an initial motion to make Alternative 2 the preferred, the Committee passed the following substitute motion.

By a voice vote of 5 to 3, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 2, to make Alternative 4 the preferred alternative.

Alternative 4: 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.

In Action 5, Committee members discussed the pros and cons of allowing regions to close portions of federal waters adjacent to the regions. NMFS staff explained the additional rulemaking that would be required to close areas of federal waters. Lt. Cmdr. Brand raised the issue of the Coast Guard's role, as enforcement would primarily occur dockside.

In Action 6, staff noted the addition of Table 2.6.8, which compares estimated season lengths for all alternatives. Dr. Crabtree stated that rationale was needed for why the current preferred alternatives were fair and equitable, given that quota would shift to the western Gulf compared with status quo. Committee members noted that the preferred alternatives incorporate both the longest time series of landings and more recent landings. The recent short seasons in federal waters for red snapper occur during times of low effort in the western Gulf and high effort in the eastern Gulf. By giving weight to the longest time series of historical landings, the Council's preferred alternative accounts for the increased proportion of landings in the eastern Gulf in more recent years.

In Action 7, staff provided a suggested revisions to the alternatives that simplify the language and are more consistent with other actions and alternatives in the document.

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, that in Action 7, remove Alternatives 3 and 4, and add Options a and b, as proposed by staff.

Option a: If a region has both a private-angling ACL and a federal for-hire ACL, the reduction will be applied to the component(s) that exceeded the applicable ACL.

Option b: If a region has both a private-angling ACL and a federal for-hire ACL, the reduction will be applied equally to both components.

Options Paper – South Florida Management Issues (Tab B, No. 8a)

Staff briefly reviewed the updated actions in the Draft Options Paper on South Florida Management Issues stating that there were some South Atlantic Council motions regarding yellowtail snapper. Dr. Larkin was asked to provide an update on yellowtail snapper landings in 2014 for both the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils since they had now been finalized. At the September South Atlantic Council meeting, the final 2014 commercial landings were lower than previously estimated. In 2014, the commercial sector in the South Atlantic jurisdiction landed 1.2 million pounds, approximately 76% of their ACL, and the Gulf jurisdiction landed 760,395 pounds or 84% of the stock ACL. The South Atlantic Council was informed by NMFS-SERO that the commercial yellowtail snapper landings are projected to reach their ACL before the end of 2015. The South Atlantic Council is therefore requesting that the Gulf Council consider establishing sector ACLs, and managing the yellowtail snapper sector ACLs and accountability measures jointly.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move: to begin a separate amendment with the South Atlantic that would address management issues with the

yellowtail snapper. The amendment would address consolidating the ABC/ACL and yellowtail snapper AMs (remove these from S. FL amendment), as well as the commercial fishing year start date, and recreational/commercial allocations in both Gulf and South Atlantic jurisdictions.

Remaining Gulf Committee motions regarding the South Florida Document are from June 2015 Committee Report.

Staff reminded the Committee that were outstanding motions on the South Florida Options Paper that the Council did not have time to address during the joint June 2015 Council meeting with the South Atlantic Council.

Action 7 – Partial Delegation of Recreational Management of Black Grouper to the State of Florida in Federal Waters Adjacent to the State of Florida

The Gulf Reef Fish Committee recommends, and I so move: Motion: To have Action 7 apply to the waters adjacent to the State of Florida.

Motion carried.

The Gulf Reef Fish Committee recommends, and I so move: In Action 7, Alternative 2d be moved to considered but rejected.

Option 2d: Minor modifications to existing allowable gear

Motion carried.

The Gulf Reef Fish Committee recommends, and I so move: To remove Actions 10 and 11 in the Options Paper and replace them with Actions 6, 7 and 8 in the Restructured Document.

Motion carried.

The following actions would be removed under the above motion.

Action 10 – Modify Black Grouper Fishery Closures and Bag Limits in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic

Action 11 – Harmonize bag and size limits for species in shallow-water grouper complex seasonal closures in Federal Waters Adjacent to Monroe County, Florida

The following actions would be added under the above motion.

Action 6: Standardize Recreational Seasonal Closures for Grouper in the South Florida Management Area within the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Councils' Jurisdictions

Alternative 1: No action. Retain the existing respective shallow-water grouper recreational seasonal closures in the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' areas of jurisdiction.

Alternative 2: Remove the shallow-water grouper recreational closures for all affected grouper species.

Alternative 3: Adopt the Gulf Council’s recreational shallow-water grouper seasonal closure (excluding gag) of February 1 - March 31 outside the 20 fathom depth contour.

Alternative 4: Adopt the South Atlantic Council’s recreational shallow-water grouper seasonal closure of January 1 - April 30.

Alternative 5: Establish a gag recreational season closure for any of the following months in the South Florida management area:

Option 5a: January

Option 5b: February

Option 5c: March

Alternative 6: Establish a black grouper recreational season closure for any of the following months in the South Florida management area:

Option 6a: January

Option 6b: February

Option 6c: March

Alternative 7: Establish a red grouper recreational season closure for any of the following months in the South Florida management area:

Option 7a: January

Option 7b: February

Option 7c: March

Action 7: Recreational Grouper Bag Limits in the South Florida Management Area within the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Councils’ Jurisdictions

Alternative 1: No Action. Maintain currently established bag limits in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, with black grouper included as a component of the shallow-water grouper and reef fish aggregate bag limits.

Alternative 2: Standardize black grouper recreational bag limits.

Option 2a: 1 fish per person per day – current South Atlantic bag limit (black or gag)

Option 2b: 2 fish per person per day – current Gulf of Mexico bag limit (part of shallow-water grouper aggregate bag limit)

Alternative 3: Standardize gag recreational bag limits.

Option 3a: 1 fish per person per day – current South Atlantic bag limit (black or gag)

Option 3b: 2 fish per person per day – current Gulf of Mexico bag limit

Alternative 4: Standardize red grouper recreational bag limits.

Option 4a: 3 fish per person per day – current South Atlantic aggregate bag limit

Option 4b: 2 fish per person per day – current Gulf of Mexico bag limit

Alternative 5: Standardize scamp, yellowmouth, and yellowfin grouper recreational bag limits.

Option 5a: 3 fish per person per day – current South Atlantic aggregate bag limit

Option 5b: 4 fish per person per day – current Gulf of Mexico aggregate bag limit

Action 8: Modify Recreational Grouper Size Limits in the South Florida Management Area within the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Councils’ Jurisdictions

Alternative 1: No action – Retain the current respective jurisdictional size limits for species in shallow-water grouper complexes.

Alternative 2: Adopt one of the following recreational minimum size limits for black grouper.

Option 2a: 24 inches TL – current South Atlantic size limit

Option 2b: 22 inches TL – current Gulf of Mexico size limit

Alternative 3: Adopt one of the following recreational minimum size limits for gag.

Option 3a: 24 inches TL – current South Atlantic size limit

Option 3b: 22 inches TL – current Gulf of Mexico size limit

Alternative 4: Maintain red grouper recreational minimum size limits or consider another size limit.

Option 4a: 20 inches TL – current South Atlantic limit

Option 4b: 20 inches TL – current Gulf of Mexico limit

Alternative 5: Standardize scamp, yellowmouth, and yellowfin grouper recreational size limits.

Option 5a: 20 inches TL – current South Atlantic size limit for all three species

Option 5b: 16 inches TL for scamp – current Gulf of Mexico size limit;

20 inches TL for yellowfin – current Gulf of Mexico size limit;

No size limit for yellowmouth – current Gulf of Mexico size limit

Options Paper – Framework Action to set Mutton Snapper ACL (Tab B, No. 9)

Staff reviewed draft actions and alternatives for the Gulf Council proportion of the mutton snapper ABCs and establishing new ACLs and recreational and commercial management measures. Ms. Bademan stated that Florida FWC will also be conducting their own series of workshops and meetings regarding mutton snapper. Mr. Williams requested that staff work closely with the South Atlantic Council staff regarding this document to make sure we are not getting ahead of their efforts on mutton snapper since they manage 82% of the stock. Staff stated they would coordinate closely with South Atlantic staff regarding work on mutton snapper moving forward.

Options Paper – Adjust Minimum Stock Size Threshold (Tab B, No. 10)

Staff presented a PowerPoint presentation that that discussed MSST with respect to overfished definitions and MSY biomass levels (B_{MSY}), and then reviewed the actions and alternatives in the options paper. Committee members felt that the options paper was more understandable than an earlier version presented earlier in the year, and that the range of actions and alternatives was appropriate. Dr. Crabtree noted that our perception on natural mortality rates (M) has changed

over time, and other Councils have moved away from using the $(1-M) \cdot B_{MSY}$ definition of MSST. Staff will develop the options paper into a draft amendment for a future Council meeting.

Reef Fish AP Summary additional items

Staff reviewed AP recommendation for issues other than those covered in the Reef Fish Committee agenda. This included coral habitat areas of particular concern, lionfish issues, and requests for reruns of red snapper projections.

Other Business

Mara Levy informed the Committee that the litigation on Amendment 40 (sector separation) was moving forward and that oral arguments would be heard in U.S. District Court in New Orleans on October 28.

Discussion – Ad Hoc Private Recreational AP

Due to time constraints, this agenda item was deferred to full Council.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my report.