



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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SEPTEMBER 12-16, 2016 COUNCIL MEETING REPORT MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA

The following summary highlights issues discussed and actions taken at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's September 2016 meeting in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

Briefing materials, presentations, and public comments are available on the Council's website at: <http://blog.safmc.net/meeting-documents/safmc-sept-2016-council-meeting-briefing-book/>

Read further details and see images and other links at the June 2016 Council Meeting Round-up Story Map: <http://arcg.is/2cs90dT>

The Meeting News Release is available at: http://safmc.net/SAFMCNR_091616_Sept2016CouncilMeeting

Major items addressed:

Issue:	Action Taken:	Schedule:
Hogfish	Final approval for review by Secretary of Commerce	September 23, 2016 – Council sends Amendment 37 (Hogfish) for formal review
Cobia	Final approval for review by Secretary of Commerce	October 14, 2016 – Council sends Framework Amendment 4 (Cobia) for formal review
King & Spanish Mackerel	Final approval for review by Secretary of Commerce	Mid-November 2016 – Gulf Council sends Framework Amendment 5 (Modify Permit Restrictions) for formal review
Red Snapper	Direction to prepare a scoping document	December 2016 – Council reviews scoping document and approves for scoping
Dolphin/Yellowtail Snapper	Provided guidance to revise the options	December 2016 – Council reviews revised document and approves for public hearings
Mutton Snapper	Provided guidance to revise the actions/alternatives based on public hearing input	December 2016 – Council reviews final Amendment 41 (Mutton Snapper) and approves for formal review
For-Hire Reporting Amendment	Provided guidance for preparing amendment for final approval	December 2016 – Council reviews final amendment and approves for formal review

Hogfish – Approved for Formal Review

The Council:

- Specified the total ACL for the GA-NC stock in pounds whole weight; specify the ABC and total ACL for the FLK/EFL stock of hogfish in numbers of fish.
- Management measures for the GA-NC stock:
 - Increase the recreational and commercial minimum size limit from 12 to 17 inches fork length
 - Establish a recreational bag limit of 2 hogfish per person per day
 - Establish a commercial trip limit of 500 pounds whole weight
- Management measures for the FLK/EFL stock:
 - Increase the recreational and commercial minimum size limit from 12 to 16 inches fork length
 - Reduce the recreational bag limit from 5 on the Florida east coast to 1 hogfish per person per day for the FLK/EFL stock
 - Establish a recreational fishing season of May-October
 - Establish a commercial trip limit of 25 pounds whole weight
- Accountability Measure for both hogfish stocks: If commercial landings reach or are projected to reach the commercial annual catch limit (ACL), NMFS would close the commercial sector for the remainder of the fishing year. On and after the effective date of such a notification, all sale or purchase is prohibited and harvest or possession of hogfish in or from the EEZ would be limited to the recreational bag and possession limit. This bag and possession limit applies in the South Atlantic on board a vessel for which a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper grouper has been issued, without regard to where such species were harvested, i.e., in state or Federal waters. Additionally, if the commercial ACL is exceeded, NMFS would reduce the commercial ACL in the following fishing year by the amount of the commercial overage, only if hogfish is overfished and the total ACL (commercial ACL and recreational ACL) of the respective stock is exceeded.
- Approved the amendment for formal review by the Secretary of Commerce.

Cobia – Approved for Formal Review

The Council met as a “Committee of the Whole” to allow the 2 Mid-Atlantic Council representatives to vote at the Council level to address concerns about the amount of input fishermen in Virginia have in the decision process. The Mid-Atlantic Council requested the South Atlantic Council use this approach. The following preferred management alternatives were selected:

- Establish a recreational bag limit for Atlantic cobia of 1 fish per person per day
- Establish a recreational vessel limit for Atlantic cobia of 6 fish per vessel per day (increased from a proposed 3 fish per vessel per day based on public input)
- Increase the minimum size limit for Atlantic cobia for recreational and commercial harvest of Atlantic cobia from 33 inches FL to 36 inches FL
- Accountability Measure (AM#1): If recreational landings, as estimated by the Science and Research Director, exceed the recreational ACL, recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings. If necessary, the Regional Administrator shall publish a notice to reduce the length of the following fishing season to ensure that recreational landings meet the recreational annual catch target (ACT) but

do not exceed the recreational ACL, based on the recreational landings in the previous year. The length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that a reduction is unnecessary.

- The Regional Administrator will reduce the length of the following fishing year only if the stock ACL (commercial ACL and recreational ACL) is exceeded.
- Accountability Measure (AM#2): If recreational landings, as estimated by the Science and Research Director, exceed the recreational ACL, recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings. If necessary, the Regional Administrator shall publish a notice to reduce the recreational vessel limit for the following fishing year to ensure that recreational landings meet the recreational ACT but do not exceed the recreational ACL, based on the recreational landings in the previous year. The recreational vessel limit will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that a reduction is unnecessary.
 - The Regional Administrator will reduce the recreational vessel limit for the following fishing year only if the stock ACL (commercial ACL and recreational ACL) is exceeded.
 - The AM would be a reduced vessel limit to no less than 2/vessel, and only if stock ACL is exceeded. Reduced vessel limit would be applied before a reduced season length (AM#1).
- Establish a commercial trip limit for Atlantic cobia of 2 fish per person per day, with no more than 6 fish per vessel per day, whichever is more restrictive.

The fishing year cannot be changed through the framework so the Council directed staff to work on a separate amendment to change fishing year, schedule a webinar public hearing(s) prior to December, and bring a draft document for final approval at the December 5-9, 2016 meeting in Atlantic Beach, NC:

- Modify the fishing year for Atlantic cobia from the calendar year to May 1 through April 30.

Mackerel Framework Amendment 5 (Revise Permit Restrictions) – Approved for Formal Review

The purpose of this amendment is to eliminate permit restrictions unique to commercial king and Spanish mackerel permit holders in the Gulf, South Atlantic, and Mid-Atlantic regions.

Red Snapper – Direction to Revise the Scoping Document

SEFSC staff (Dr. K. Sigfried) delivered a presentation addressing reasons why SEDAR 24 and SEDAR 41 estimated such different productivity levels for red snapper. Selectivity changes and shifts in age composition (MRIP and headboat datasets) were cited as contributing factors.

Council staff then presented an overview of options for possibly allowing harvest of red snapper while continuing to rebuild the stock. The Committee discussed options and provided guidance as follows:

- Action 2 (MSST) - Develop different Static SPR values to get over 50% SSBmsy. Add 85% of SSBmsy?
- Action 3 (ACLs) - Specify ABC/ACL in numbers of fish; include a table of red snapper landings by county

- Action 5 (optimum yield) - Remove MSA definition (Alternative 4); include an alternative for defining optimum yield: “OY is the long-term average catch, which is not designed to exceed the ACL, and will fall between the ACL and ACT.”
- Action 6 (closed area(s) to reduce bycatch) - add alternative(s) to investigate depth and discard mortality. Look at 10-foot intervals from 60 ft. to 150 ft.; look at area closure alternatives from Amendment 17A with seasonal (after May 1) and depth (98 ft. to 240 ft) components; examine area closure inshore of 98 ft. with a seasonal component; examine spatial data for red snapper abundance and overlay discards and apply seasonal (temporal) component.
- Action 7 (commercial measures) - add options for no harvest and for keeping the dive fishery closed; no commercial ACT; consider limiting harvest to non-spawning months? Trip limits both in pounds and numbers of fish; measures would specify harvest as *incidental*.
- Action 8 (recreational measures) - add alternative for season and bag limit for private recreational and for-hire combined; add alternative for headboat vessel limits; have similar options those considered for the recreational sector, add option for 75 ft to Alternative 5 and other depths listed in option 6.
- Action 9 (recreational stamp) - consider referring to “permit” instead of “stamp”; include consideration of red snapper bycatch notification system to report incidental catch of red snapper or hail in/out system; bring back information on cost of possible harvest tag program (provided during discussions on Amendment 22); need to be clear about purpose of a stamp/recreational permit program (i.e., data collection or effort control?)
- Action 10 (reporting requirements for recreational sector) – consider referring to Gulf States Commission for e-logbook enforcement. Revise Alternative 5.
- Action 11 (AMs and adaptive management) – remove Alternative 7 (develop adaptive management based fishery independent monitoring using a rumble strip approach).
- Action 12 (Best Fishing Practices) – modify Alternative 2 to require venting tool and/or descending device to be on board vessel when snapper grouper species are onboard; consider descending device requirement for certain depth(s); add options for commercial and recreational sectors.

Joint Dolphin/Wahoo and Snapper Grouper Amendment – Provided guidance based on input from scoping meeting and written comments

The Council provided the following guidance:

- Direct staff to develop an action in the allocation amendment that will look at the long term average catch in the recreational sector for dolphin so that Optimum Yield will be the long-term average catch, which is not designed to exceed the Annual Catch Limit (ACL), and will fall between the ACL and the Annual Catch Target (ACT).
- Removed consideration of allocating the commercial ACL based on gear type.
- Move Alternatives 3 & 6 in Action 2 (Revise sector allocations for dolphin) to the considered but rejected appendix.
- Replace Alternative 7 in Action 2 with new wording.
- Remove Alternatives 6 & 7 in Action 3 (Revise sector allocations for yellowtail snapper) and add a new alternative.

- Clarify throughout the document that all alternatives in all actions will allow ACL transfers to either sector.
- Direct staff to develop an action that would address authorized gear aboard a vessel on which dolphin and wahoo are onboard. This surfaced to allow offshore American lobster vessels to land dolphin/wahoo caught with hook-and-line or rods/reels while fishing lobster traps.

Mutton Snapper – Revisions based on input from public hearings and actions by the FWC:

The Council specified the following as preferred management measures:

- Revised catch level specifications including annual catch limits in numbers of fish
- Designate April-June as the spawning months
- Retain mutton snapper in the 10 snapper aggregate bag limit and set the mutton snapper bag limit as 5 per person per day year-round (increased from 3 per person preferred taken to public hearings)
- Specify a commercial trip limit for mutton snapper during the “spawning months” in the South Atlantic of 5 per person per day (increased from 3 per person preferred taken to public hearings)
- Establish a commercial trip limit for mutton snapper during the “regular season” (i.e., non-spawning months) in the South Atlantic of 500 pounds (increased from 300 pounds preferred taken to public hearings)
- Increase the minimum size limit for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic region from 16 to 18 inches TL

For-Hire Reporting Amendment – Guidance for Final Approval in December

- The Council was asked to review the revised amendment document and provide any comments to staff.
- There was discussion on the importance of ensuring compliance with reporting requirements and the role of law enforcement and administrative provisions in ensuring compliance.
- Review the amendment for final approval at the December 5-9, 2016 meeting in Atlantic Beach, NC.

For-Hire Control Date & Limited Entry – Guidance for scoping document

The Council established June 15, 2016 as the control date for the three open access charter vessel/headboat permits (Snapper Grouper, Mackerel/Cobia, and Dolphin/Wahoo); the notice will publish in the Federal Register in the near future and the public will be provided an opportunity to comment. The Council discussed components of a limited entry program, discussed information they want provided at the December meeting, and directed staff to develop a scoping document for a limited entry amendment for these three for-hire fisheries. The scoping document will be reviewed at the December 5-9, 2016 meeting in Atlantic Beach, NC, and the Council will determine whether to approve the document for scoping.

Information & Education Committee

The Council received a summary of the recent Council Communications survey that was conducted in July 2016. The summary included an overview of:

- How stakeholders are using existing outreach and communication products and programs of the Council; stakeholder preferences for receiving communication from the Council;
- How stakeholders are using existing outreach and communication products/programs from other agencies/organizations;
- Feedback on the current use and possible improvements to the Council's mobile app, *SA Fishing Regulations*;
- Feedback on potential new outreach strategies from the Council; and
- Other recommendations for improving Council communications.

The Council provided guidance on each of these items; see the Final Committee report for details.

Red Grouper SAFE Report

Dr. Mike Errigo, Council Staff, presented an overview of the information in the Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report. The Committee provided guidance to include options to explore spawning season closure modifications in both Visioning Amendments (commercial and recreational) for discussion at December 2016 meeting.

Stock Assessment Schedule & Appointments

Regarding SEDAR 50 (Blueline Tilefish) the Council was informed that the recent age workshop concluded that reliable ages could not be assigned to structures at this time. The assessment will proceed as scheduled, with a January 2017 Data Workshop and SSC review in October 2017. Results will be presented to the Council in December 2017.

Dr. Erik Williams provided a presentation on the research track proposal via webinar. The Committee supports moving ahead with the research track pilot planned for the 2018 scamp assessment. Efforts to increase assessment productivity are supported and encouraged, as long as opportunities for adequate public involvement and data evaluation are retained. Clarification was provided that the research track process applies to assessments conducted through the Center, and not to those conducted by other Cooperators (such as the Commissions and state agencies) and reviewed by SEDAR.

The Council had previously requested a cobia benchmark assessment in 2018, and to include cobia in the SEDAR stock ID workshop in 2017. The Council supported the assessment priorities approved at the prior meeting (shown below), and requested conducting the next assessment of Tilefish sooner if an opening arises earlier in 2019. The Council also requested delaying the Cobia assessment until 2019 data can be included, and prioritize Gag for 2018. The Council's recommendations will be considered by the SEDAR Steering Committee when they meet September 20-21, 2016 in Charleston, SC. The Council previously requested the Scientific and Statistical Committee provide recommendations at their October 18-20, 2016 meeting for stocks to consider for data limited assessment methods.

Year	Quarter	1	2	3	4	FL FWCC	Extra
2016	1	RSGT	RSGT				SA tile
	2	RSGT				1	SA tile
	3	BL	BL		RG	GG	
	4	BL	BL		RG	GG	
2017	1	BL	BL	<i>BSB-S</i>	RG		
	2	BL	BL	<i>BSB-S</i>			
	3	BL	BL		VS	BLG	
	4			MRIP	VS	BLG	
2018	1	S/RT	<i>COBIA</i>	MRIP	<i>RP-S</i>	BLG	KM
	2	S/RT	<i>COBIA</i>	<i>GAJ-S</i>	<i>RP-S</i>	BLG	KM
	3	S/RT	<i>COBIA</i>	<i>GAJ-S</i>		YTS	KM
	4	S/RT	<i>COBIA</i>			YTS	KM
2019	1	S/RT	<i>COBIA</i>			YTS	KM
	2	S/RT		<i>GAG-S</i>	<i>SpMack-S</i>	YTS	
	3			<i>GAG-S</i>	<i>SpMack-S</i>		
	4			<i>SNG-S</i>	<i>Tile-S</i>	<i>Hog, N-U</i>	
2020	1	<i>GT-B</i>	<i>WhG-B-</i>	<i>SNG-S</i>	<i>Tile-S</i>	<i>MS-S</i>	
	2	<i>GT-B</i>	<i>WhG-B</i>			<i>MS-S</i>	
	3	<i>GT-B</i>	<i>WhG-B</i>	<i>RS-U</i>	<i>RG-U</i>		
	4	<i>GT-B</i>	<i>WhG-B</i>	<i>RS-U</i>	<i>RG-U</i>		

Code	Species	Code	Species	Code	Species
gT	golden Tilefish	BL	Blueline Tilefish	RS	Red Snapper
S/RT	Scamp, Research Track Pilot	RG	Red Grouper	GAG	Gag Grouper
DS	HMS Dusky Shark	VS	Vermilion Snapper	SBS	Sandbar shark
GBt	Gulf Blacktip Shark	GAJ	Greater Amberjack	YTS	Yellowtail Snapper
RSGT	Red Snapper, Gray Triggerfish	ABt	Atlantic Blacktip Shark	GDL	Gulf Data Limited
BLG	Black Grouper (review only)	ABP	Best Practices, Assessments	GS	Gray Snapper, start time TBD
MRIP	Revision Updates for MRIP Data	GG	Goliath Grouper (review only)	SID	Stock ID and Meristics
CDL	Caribbean Data Limited	KM	King Mackerel		

Vision Blueprint Recreational Amendment - Fisheries Seasonality and Retention

The Committee/Council reviewed an options paper containing possible actions to modify recreational bag limits and the annual 4-month closure for shallow water groupers. The Committee/Council provided the guidance below and requested that a revised options paper be prepared for the December 2016 meeting to approve for scoping in early 2017.

- Include an alternative for an aggregate bag limit that would include the species in the existing 10-snapper aggregate and the 20-fish aggregate. The alternative would maintain current restrictions for individual species within that aggregate but would address the Council’s intent to simplify regulations.
- Include an alternative that would eliminate the 10-snapper aggregate and allow specification of individual bag limits for those species.

- Include an alternative for a deepwater species' aggregate that would impose the seasonal restrictions that are currently in place for snowy grouper and blueline tilefish (recreational harvest is restricted to May-August).
- Bring in alternatives originally explored in the draft South Florida Amendment.
- Remove from consideration the alternative to eliminate the 4-month shallow water grouper closure.
- Obtain input from Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel on how to address equitable access to shallow water grouper resource. For instance, gag are not available to recreational fishermen in south Florida because they migrate northward during the closure months.
- Include explanation of actions being considered in Amendment 43 (red snapper) to explain the overlap with items from the Vision Blueprint.
- Include options for red grouper.

Highly Migratory Species Committee

- Received a presentation on a proposed rule to modify the commercial retention limit for blacknose and non-blacknose small coastal sharks in the Atlantic Region.
The proposed rule will implement a commercial retention limit for blacknose sharks that is intended to allow for the better utilization of available non-blacknose small coastal shark quota due to quota linkages between the two groups while also rebuilding and preventing overfishing of blacknose sharks.
- Received a presentation on Draft Amendment 10 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan: Essential Fish Habitat.
The amendment will potentially modify and/or create new Essential Fish Habitat for bluefin tuna and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern for sandbar sharks and lemon sharks in the South Atlantic Region.
- The Council approved sending a letter of support to HMS for the blacknose shark retention limits outlined in the amendment.

Other Items:

- Parliamentary Practice Workshop – conducted by Colette Collier Trohan, PRP, CPP-T from A Great Meeting, Inc. The Council learned about communication styles, motions, and how to conduct meetings.
- The Council received a report from the Habitat Ecosystem AP, a summary of FEP II South Atlantic Food Web & Connectivity and Climate Variability & Fisheries Sections, and an overview of Habitat & Ecosystem Tools and Model Development.
- The Council approved sending a letters to NMFS:
 - Outlining the cumulative impact of species-specific estimates of unusually large/small MRIP landings/discards and the impacts on the Council process; bring back in December for review
 - Requesting that NMFS make the necessary request within NOAA to have Council managed areas (Deepwater MPAS, Coral HAPCs) included on NOAA nautical charts.

- Protected Resources
 - The snapper grouper biological opinion is in review and should be finalized in the next two to three weeks.
 - Nassau grouper were listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act due to decline in the population abundance, targeting the species at spawning aggregations (not in US), and limited enforcement in some foreign countries. Next steps include determining whether and where critical habitat should be designated and if a 4(d) rule is needed.
 - The stock assessment for Atlantic sturgeon is on schedule to be completed in 2017.
 - Red knot critical habitat is currently scheduled to be completed in September 2017 although the schedule may change due to the filing of two notices of intent, if potential litigation is forthcoming.
- Scientific & Statistical Committee – the Council voted to re-advertise the SSC vacancy once a conflict of interest policy is developed, and reconsider the appointment at the June meeting.
- Advisory Panel Changes
 - Made appointments to various Advisory Panels
 - Created a Cobia Sub-Panel on the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel. Given the high level of interest in cobia at this time, the AP Selection Committee wanted to involve more fishermen than we had open spots on the AP. They have proposed to establish a cobia sub-panel to allow more involvement of cobia fishermen while preserving the current king and Spanish mackerel expertise. There was some concern that this sub-panel was not equal in function to the Advisory Panel. The Committee discussed this and it was noted that the members proposed for the Cobia Sub-Panel were equal to members of the Mackerel Cobia AP. In fact, the Cobia Sub-Panel will be very active over the next two years as results from the stock ID workshop and pending cobia assessment become available. The Cobia Sub-Panel will meet via webinar and can also meet in person as needed. There may be times that the Council has the Mackerel Cobia AP and the Cobia Sub-Panel meet together; should this occur, the Cobia Sub-Panel members will participate and vote as full AP members.
- Public Comment Guidelines – the Council approved the method used at the June and September meetings for public comments. Having the public provide comments using the Council’s Comment Form makes them available to Council members and the public.
- Regional Operations Agreement – the Council reviewed and approved the agreement that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Council/NMFS/NOAA GC in preparing fishery management plans/amendments.