

TAB E

Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report April 17, 2018 Dr. Paul Mickle – Chair

The agenda was approved with the addition of an item under Other Business, and the minutes of the January 29, 2018 Committee meeting were approved as written.

Revised Policy Statement on the Use of Descending Tools and Venting Devices (Tab E, No. 4)

Staff reviewed revisions to the draft policy statement. At the Chairman's invitation, Captain Dylan Hubbard (Hubbard's Marina, Madeira Beach, Florida) explained that for large groupers and amberjack (30-50 pounds), the venting tools currently available are too small to adequately vent the fish. Captain Hubbard had a machinist create larger venting tools out of aluminum rods. While more effective, they left a large hole in the fish. He found the most effective tool for venting these larger fish was a thin knife where he could control the amount of penetration into the fish using his thumb.

Dr. Stunz felt that the policy and purpose statements could be revised to better indicate the rationale, and presented proposed revisions to help clarify the statements.

Suggested Revisions to the Gulf Council Policy Statement:

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council **strongly** encourages the use of descending devices **and/or** venting tools as appropriate when releasing **deep-water** fish, **such as snappers, groupers and other reef fish, whenever necessary. Proper and widespread use can significantly increase the likelihood of survival of released fish and in turn contribute to the overall stock productivity and sustainability. As such, decreased levels of fishing mortality through higher survivorship of released fish should lead to increased fish population abundance.**

Suggested Revisions to the Gulf Council Purpose Statement:

Add as last sentence:

Implementation of the Council's policy on the use of descending devices and venting tools is intended to reduce bycatch and discard mortality, which may lead to increases in abundance and eventually higher allowable catch limits.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, to accept the suggested revisions to the Gulf Council Policy Statement and the Gulf Council Purpose Statement.

Staff presented a series of tables and graphs displaying the number of red snapper total discards and dead discards from 1981 to 2011. The data was taken from the SEDAR 31 assessment in 2013. A new red snapper assessment is currently underway. Dr. Stunz felt that the information was presented in a manner that would be confusing in an outreach program, and he made the following motions to simplify and update the presentation.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, to have staff provide a summary table that includes discard mortality estimates used in the current assessment

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and average (~ 5 years) discards by sector (private recreational, for-hire, headboat, and commercial) for red snapper and other key reef species (as available).

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move to have staff provide a preliminary estimate of the reduction in mortality (numbers of fish) for red snapper and other key reef species (as available) by sector that may occur if these devices were actively used in the fishery.

Committee members suggested that, for the commercial sector, discards need to be compared both before and after the red snapper IFQ program was implemented, since the IFQ program likely reduced the dead discard rate. Another suggestion was to have the current stock assessment look at the effects of venting vs. not venting on ABC. Dr. Clay Porch responded that the assessment looks at alternative mortality rates, but does not calculate ABCs for them. These calculations could be done, but at the current state of the red snapper assessment, it would have to be as a separate project.

5-year review on inclusion/exclusion of species and species groupings in fishery management plans (Tab E, No. 5)

Staff noted that during development of the Generic ACL/AM amendment, the Council had asked that the list of species management in FMPs be reviewed by the Council staff and SSC every 5 years for inclusion/exclusion. This was the first 5-year review. SSC representative Dr. Luiz Barbieri reported that the SSC reviewed a list of species that have currently or previously been included in FMPs, but it was unclear what criteria were used to add or remove species. Dr. Barbieri stated that there were methods that could be used to detect changes in landings trend over time that might trigger a need for more in-depth analysis. Other suggestions from Committee members included using MRIP data to determine species that recreational fishermen identified as target species, and whether they were species currently managed by the states. Mara Levy added that the National Standard 1 guidelines provided guidance on determining whether species are in need of conservation measures. A suggestion was made to have the SSC review the relevant NS1 guidelines.

Discussion of Historical Captain Permits (Tab E, No. 6)

At the January 2018 Council meeting, the Council expressed interest in the potential to convert for-hire historical captain permits to standard for-hire permits that are fully transferable. Dr. Froeschke provided a presentation (Tab E, No. 6) describing decision points about passenger capacity and options for transferability. Committee members recommended removal of an option to include consideration of recently terminated permits so it will not be included in the document. Based on the Committee discussion, staff will develop an abbreviated framework action with an option to convert active historical captain permits to fully-transferable, for-hire permits. The current permitted passenger capacity would be retained for each permit and the document will be provided for committee review at the August 2018 meeting.

Madam chair, this concludes my report.