

**Reef Fish Committee Report
January 29-30, 2019
Ms. Martha Guyas – Chair**

The Committee decided to rearrange the agenda (Tab B, No. 1) to hear the summary of the January Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) webinar first (Tab B, No. 12), followed by the remainder of the agenda beginning on the morning of January 29th. The agenda was adopted as amended, along with the minutes from the October 2018 Committee meeting (Tab B, No. 2).

SSC Summary Report (Tab B, No. 12)

Staff reviewed the summary from the SSC webinar held on January 9, 2019. The SSC discussed and approved terms of reference for update assessments for Gulf of Mexico migratory groups of king mackerel and cobia, and for a standard assessment for vermilion snapper. The schedule for the vermilion snapper assessment was also approved, and volunteers were provided for the workshops associated with vermilion snapper and scamp. Lastly, the SSC approved the 2021 Gulf stock assessment schedule, which includes a research track assessment for red grouper.

Draft Amendment 50: State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper and Individual State Amendments (Tab B, Nos. 5a-f)

Staff provided a summary of the public hearing comments and the motions made by the Ad Hoc Headboat and Charter Advisory Panels (APs). Staff then reviewed the actions and alternatives. In Action 2 of the Program Amendment, the Committee discussed a new alternative for dividing the quota among the states and passed the following two motions.

By a vote of 15 to 1, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 2, to add an Alternative 8 that would allocate the private angling annual catch limit (ACL) as follows:

AL	26.298%
FL	44.822%
LA	19.120%
MS	3.550%
TX	6.210%

By a vote of 11 to 4, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 2, to make the new Alternative 8 the preferred.

Alternative 8 would allocate the private angling ACL as follows:

AL	26.298%
FL	44.822%
LA	19.120%
MS	3.550%
TX	6.210%

Staff reviewed the new Action 3, which would establish a procedure for allowing a Gulf state to request the closure of federal waters adjacent to state waters to red snapper recreational fishing. The Committee then passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 3, to make Alternative 2 the preferred alternative.

Alternative 2: Establish a procedure to allow a state to request NMFS close areas of federal waters adjacent to state waters to red snapper recreational fishing. The state would request the closure by letter, providing dates and geographic coordinates for the closure. If the request is within the scope of the analysis in this amendment, NMFS would publish a notice in the Federal Register implementing the closure. The closure would apply to the recreational sector component(s) included in that state's approved management program.

The Committee discussed state data collection programs, which will be used to determine each state's red snapper landings. Committee members inquired about data quality and reporting timeliness and whether the data would be comparable across state programs. Committee members expressed interest in the states providing further information on their respective data collection programs under state management.

The 2-year exempted fishing permits (EFPs) include an overage adjustment based on 2018 landings, but do not include an overage adjustment following the 2019 fishing year. The five state amendments include a preferred alternative to establish a state-specific overage adjustment. The Committee discussed linking landings under the EFPs to state management by applying an overage or underage adjustment based on each state's 2019 landings. The Committee then passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: To add the appropriate language to the Individual State Amendments' Action 2: Post-Season Quota Adjustments to specify that the overage/underage adjustment would be implemented in 2020 based on each state's 2019 landings under the EFPs. Thus, each state's quota under the first year of state management in 2020 would reflect a quota adjustment (overage/underage) based on that state's 2019 landings.

Reef Fish Landings Update

Ms. Gerhart reviewed the commercial and recreational landings for various reef fish stocks. She noted that the commercial landings of greater amberjack and gray triggerfish have marginally exceeded the ACL, and the 2019 greater amberjack ACL will be reduced by a payback due to its overfished status. Recreational landings were below the ACL for gag and red grouper; however, gray triggerfish landings were over by 83%. Recreational landings of red snapper by the for-hire component were right at the ACL. Recreational landings of red snapper by the private angling component were 13.1% over the state's ACL for Florida, 0.2% over for Alabama, 4.4% under for Mississippi, and 0.8% under for Louisiana. Mr. Riechers stated that Texas was 24.5% under based

on the most recent available data.

A Committee member requested the 2018 landings of gray triggerfish from state versus federal waters, and details about which states were non-compliant with federal management for gray triggerfish. The Committee noted that for red snapper, a goal of the management measures in Reef Fish Amendment 50 is to eliminate the non-compliance issue, and reduce the likelihood of the related overages in the future. Delays in the receipt of timely landings data was identified as a possible cause of the overage related to recreational gray triggerfish in 2018.

Public Hearing Draft Amendment 51: Establish Gray Snapper Status Determination Criteria, Reference Points, and Modify Annual Catch Limits (Tab B, No. 6)

Staff reviewed draft Reef Fish Amendment 51 that would establish status determination criteria and modify the ACLs for gray snapper. The Committee reviewed four actions that would establish or modify the status determination criteria and an action to modify the ACLs. Action 1 would establish a maximum sustainable yield (MSY) proxy for gray snapper. The SSC recommended that the MSY proxy be set at the yield when fishing at $F_{30\% SPR}$ based on their review of the SEDAR 51 stock assessment. However, staff stated that the biology of the species and the characteristics of the fishery may allow for a MSY proxy below $F_{30\% SPR}$, which would allow for a larger harvest for a given stock size; however, the SSC recommended not going below the $F_{30\% SPR}$ MSY proxy for gray snapper.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 1, to add an Alternative: For gray snapper, the MSY proxy is the yield when fishing at 26% spawning potential ratio ($F_{26\% SPR}$).

A Committee member did express concern about Alternative 4 in Action 1. This alternative would allow the Council to modify the MSY proxy based on an SSC recommendation after reviewing a stock assessment. This would allow for a more streamlined management approach, but the Committee requested that the intent of the alternative be clarified and cautioned against allowing the MSY determination to be modified outside of the current Council process. The IPT will review and clarify this language in a subsequent draft.

Next, the Committee considered Action 2, which would modify the maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT). The Committee discussed that the MFMT should correspond to the MSY definition in Action 1. They requested an alternative be added to the document that is complementary to the new alternative proposed in Action 1.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 2, to add an alternative: The definition for the gray snapper MFMT is equal to $F_{26\% SPR}$.

The Committee reviewed Action 3, which defines the minimum stock size threshold (MSST). This criterion allows for a buffer between the stock size at MSY and the stock size which the species is declared overfished, and allows for some variability in the stock without automatically requiring a rebuilding plan if biomass falls below the biomass at MSY.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 3, to make Alternative 4 the preferred alternative.

Alternative 4. The minimum stock size threshold for gray snapper = $0.50 * B_{MSY}$ (or proxy).

Action 4 considers alternatives to define optimum yield (OY). This is a long term value required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act that is based on MSY but reduces the harvest to account for relevant economic, social, and/or ecological factors.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 4, to make Alternative 2, Option 2c the preferred alternative.

Alternative 2. Set an OY for gray snapper that is the long-term yield that implicitly accounts for relevant economic, social, or ecological factors by fishing at:

Option 2c. 90% of $F_{MSY Proxy}$.

Finally, the Committee considered alternatives that would modify the ACLs for gray snapper based on the 2018 stock assessment. The Committee considered the range of alternatives and discussed the need for an alternative based on the yield when fishing at 26% spawning potential ratio ($F_{26\% SPR}$) that was added to Action 1.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 5, to add a new alternative that mirrors Alternative 2 and Alternative 4 using $F_{26\% SPR}$.

Draft Options: Red Grouper Framework Action (Tab B, No. 7)

Staff reviewed the purpose and need for the framework action, noting that it is in response to both the recent decrease in landings for red grouper and the interim analysis on the health of the stock provided to the SSC by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. Two alternatives to the current combined commercial and recreational ACL of 10.77 million pounds gutted weight (mp gw) were provided: ACL equal to 4.600 mp gw, which is based on the SSC's recommendation from the interim analysis; and the ACL equal to 4.154 mp gw, which is based on the combined landings from 2017. When requesting the emergency rule (ER) from the NMFS, the Council requested that the ER set the ACL for 2019 at the lower of 4.600 mp gw or the landings from 2017. The NMFS indicated that the ER would reflect 4.154 mp gw ACL for 2019, and that the proposed rule for the ER should publish in April 2019. The Committee decided to reflect the action taken in the ER, with the goal of revisiting the red grouper ACLs and annual catch targets (ACTs) after receiving the results of the SEDAR 62 stock assessment in late summer 2019.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move: In Action 1, to make Alternative 3 the preferred alternative.

Alternative 3: Modify the red grouper ACLs and ACTs based on the combined landings

from the 2017 fishing season. Allocations and the recreational ACT are applied as appropriate.

Year	OFL	ABC	Total ACL	Comm ACL	Rec ACL	Comm ACT/Quota	Rec ACT
2019+	14.16	13.92	4.154	3.157	0.997	2.999	0.917

* Values are in millions of pounds, gutted weight.

Staff plans to bring the framework action back to the Council for final approval in April 2019.

Draft Amendment 36B: Modifications to Commercial IFQ Programs (Tab B, No. 8)

Staff reviewed the recommendations from the Ad Hoc Red Snapper/Grouper-Tilefish IFQ AP and a statement from the Law Enforcement Technical Committee regarding estimated weights in landing notifications. The Committee discussed the purpose and need, and the actions and alternatives in the amendment. The Committee discussed access to quota and short and long-term participation in the fishery. The Committee passed the following motion.

With three opposed, the Committee recommends and I so move: To add language to the purpose and need section that states the purpose will be to increase access to shares to actively fishing eligible commercial fishermen.

Review Draft Options of Red Snapper Reallocation Document (Tab B, No. 9)

Staff presented the revised objectives of the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The Committee then made the following motions:

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Table 1.2.1 (Objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico, Post-October 2018 Council Meeting), to revise Objective 2 to read: “To achieve robust fishery reporting and data collection systems across all sectors for monitoring the reef fish fishery which minimizes management uncertainty.”

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Table 1.2.1 (Objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico, Post-October 2018 Council Meeting), to add an Objective “To promote and maintain accountability in the reef fish fishery.”

If the Reef Fish Committee motions are approved by the full Council, the new Reef Fish FMP objectives would be stated as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico, Post-January 2019 Council Meeting.

Number	Objective
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1	To prevent overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks.
2	To achieve robust fishery reporting and data collection systems across all sectors for monitoring the reef fish fishery which minimizes management uncertainty.
3	To conserve and protect reef fish habitat.
4	To minimize conflicts between user groups.
5	To minimize and reduce dead discards.
6	To manage Gulf stocks at OY as defined in MSA.
7	To revise the definitions of the fishery management unit and fishery to reflect the current species composition of the reef fish fishery.
8	To encourage and periodically review research on the efficacy of artificial reefs for management purposes.
9	To promote stability in the fishery by allowing for enhanced fisher flexibility and increasing fishing opportunities to the extent practicable.
10	To avoid to the extent practicable the "derby" type fishing season.
11	To provide for cost-effective and enforceable management of the fishery.
12	To promote and maintain accountability in the reef fish fishery.

Staff reviewed the draft Purpose and Need before presenting draft options for reallocation of red snapper between the commercial and recreational sectors. Staff noted that the Committee should focus on the timeframes in Options 1 and 2, as Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) data recalibration may affect the listed percentages. Dr. Crabtree noted that the document will need to consider when reallocation would be in place, such as following the acceptance of the next stock assessment. The Committee then made the following motions:

With one opposed, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 1, to add additional sub-options to Options 3 and 4 that would include percentages on historical distributions as determined in Options 1 and 2.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 1, to add an option that uses historical landings between 1979 and 2006.

Staff then presented draft options for reallocation of red snapper between the private angling and federal for-hire components. Staff noted that the Committee should focus on the timeframes in Options 1 through 3, as MRIP data recalibration may affect the listed percentages. Ms. Levy asked the Committee to consider whether it is appropriate to include 2017, since the Department of Commerce reopened the private angling season for additional days. Dr. Crabtree noted that the percentages based on the preferred timeframe under Amendment 40 would be affected by the MRIP data recalibration. The Committee then made the following motion:

With two opposed, the Committee recommends and I so move: In Action 2, that Options 1, 2, and 3 have a terminal year of 2016.

Ad Hoc Reef Fish Headboat Advisory Panel Meeting (Tab B, Nos. 10a-b)

Staff presented a summary report for the December 11, 2018 AP meeting. Staff noted that AP members discussed the decision tool built to estimate individual initial allocation for the species included in Amendment 42. Staff presented the motions approved by AP members.

Ad Hoc Red Snapper Charter For-Hire Advisory Panel Meeting (Tab B, Nos. 11a-g)

Staff reviewed the summary for the meeting of the Ad Hoc Red Snapper Charter AP. The Committee discussed with Capt. Green, the AP Chair, if it would be productive to convene another joint meeting with the Ad Hoc Reef Fish Headboat AP. Capt. Green stated that the Ad Hoc Red Snapper Charter For-Hire AP would be open to such a meeting. He also stated that Reef Fish Amendment 41 may benefit from being postponed while electronic logbook (ELB) data are collected. Given the AP's motion to consider allocation-based management in the future when adequate ELB data are available, Mr. Swindell inquired as to a timeline for collection of ELB data. Dr. Crabtree stated that it would take a few years.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.