

**Reef Fish Committee Report
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
John Greene-Chair, January 26-27, 2015**

Red Snapper Update Assessment

Shannon Calay reviewed the red snapper update assessment, and Will Patterson summarized the SSC recommendations for OFL and ABC (**Tab B, No. 4**). Steven Atran reported the results of the ACL/ACT control rule, which recommend an ACT buffer of 19% for the recreational sector and 0% for the commercial sector (**Tab B, Nos. 5a,b**). Dr. Calay's presentation included a recalculation of ABCs using the SSC's input parameters and provisional 2014 recreational landings.

Mara Levy advised that the SSC would need to review and approve the recalculated ABCs with the provisional landings before the Council could establish ACLs and ACTs based on them. In order to have the new ACLs and ACTs implemented by June 1, the SSC would need to meet in February and a special Council meeting via conference call/webinar to take final action would be needed by March 1.

By a vote of 7 to 0, the Committee recommends, and I so move, to ask staff to prepare a framework action to increase the ACL for red snapper based on the ABC recommendations by the SSC, using the provisional 2014 estimates.

Committee members indicated that, if the SSC does not approve the provisional ABCs, staff should proceed with developing the framework action using the SSC approved ABCs.

Reevaluation of Gag OFL and ABC for 2015-16

Will Patterson reviewed an analysis by David Chagaris of Florida FWC which indicated that the 2014 red tide event only had 4% to 7% of the mortality relative to the 2005 event. Consequently, the SSC revised its OFL and ABC projections, which earlier had assumed that the 2014 event equaled the impact of the 2005 event. Committee members observed that if the ACL and ACT are increased, the recreational sector might not be able to catch their allocation unless the July 1 season opening date is moved to earlier in the year.

By a vote of 7 to 0, the Committee recommends, and I so move, to direct staff to begin a framework amendment to adjust ACL/ACT and the season options for Gag.

Draft Framework Action – Greater Amberjack

Will Patterson reviewed the analysis by Nancie Cummings on the projected rebuilding times under the ACL options in the draft greater amberjack framework action. He noted that the SSC deemed the analysis sufficient to inform management actions by the Gulf Council. John Froeschke then reviewed the actions and options in the options paper for the greater amberjack framework action (**Tab B, No. 7**).

Action 1 – Modifications to the Greater Amberjack Annual Catch Limits and Annual Catch Targets

Committee members noted that sub-options Options 2a and 3a that would not use an ACT buffer would not be considered by the Council.

**Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 1, to remove sub options 2(a) and 3(a) to considered but rejected.
Sub-Option a. No ACT buffer (i.e., ABC = ACL = ACT); note this option would require modification of the accountability measures.**

The Committee made no motions regarding Action 2.1 – Modify the Recreational Minimum Size Limit for Greater Amberjack, or Action 2.2 – Modify the Recreational Closed Seasons for Greater Amberjack.

Action 3 – Commercial Management Measures

Committee members noted that the trip limits are in whole weight, but commercial fishermen land greater amberjack gutted. This creates confusion as to what the allowed landing weight actually is. It was explained that the assessment uses whole weights and ABCs are expressed in whole weights. The Committee passed a motion that all whole weights for trip limits (in Action 3) in the Amberjack Framework document be specified as gutted weight.

By a vote of 8 to 0, the Committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 3, to specify trip limit in pounds gutted weight and include whole weight in parentheses for each option.

Options Paper – Update Minimum Stock Size Threshold for Reef Fish Stocks with Low Natural Mortality

Staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in the options paper to set minimum stock size thresholds (MSST) for reef fish stocks with low natural mortality. It was noted that, at MSST = 50% of B_{MSY}, it was likely that snapper would no longer be overfished, although it would still be in a rebuilding plan. The framework action also includes an action to set a default MSST for all reef fish stocks not affected by Action 1. A suggestion was made to allow for exceptions to the default MSST in Action 2. Mr. Atran stated that staff will develop the options paper into a draft framework action for consideration at a subsequent Council meeting.

Red Snapper Poaching by Mexican Lanchas

After an introduction by Capt. Joe Hester, LCDR Jason Brand and LT Beth Denicola reviewed an analysis of incursions into U.S. waters off of Texas by Mexican lanchas. These vessels typically target red snapper and sharks using longlines and gillnets. Detected incursions and seizures increased over 70% since 2008. About 20% of the detected incursions were seized. When a lancha is seized, the gear and catch are seized, the vessel is destroyed, and the crew is deported back to Mexico. An estimated 1,525,715 pounds of red snapper were poached from U.S. waters by Mexican lanchas over the past 2 years. An impact analysis model indicates that the Coast Guard may be detecting only about 12% to 18% of the incursions. A committee member suggested making these illegal harvest estimates available to the stock assessment scientists to incorporate into future assessments.

Draft Amendment 39 – Red Snapper Recreational Regional Management

Staff from the Mid-Atlantic Council gave a presentation on summer flounder regional management (**Tab B, No.9**). Staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in the restructured regional management amendment (**Tab B, No. 8**). Committee members requested reinsertion of preferred alternatives for regional closed areas and sub-allocations in an appropriate place in the document.

Action 1 includes two new alternatives modeled after summer flounder management. If selected, regions would provide proposals describing the conservation equivalent management measures for the harvest of the region's portion of the recreational red snapper quota. Under Alternative 3, regions would submit proposals directly to NMFS for review and approval, while under Alternative 4, proposals would first be reviewed by a technical review committee followed by a NMFS review and approval. Following discussion, the Committee passed the following motion:

By a voice vote, the committee recommends and I so move, that Alternative 3, in Action 1 be the preferred alternative:

Establish a regional management program in which a state or group of states (regions) submit proposals to NMFS describing the conservation equivalent measures the region will adopt for the management of its portion of the red snapper quota. Conservation equivalency proposals would specify the red snapper season structure, bag limit, minimum and/or maximum size limits, and optionally closed areas in the EEZ for the harvest of an assigned portion of the recreational red snapper quota. If a region does not participate or its proposal is determined by NMFS to be inconsistent with the requirements of the regional management program selected in Action 1, the recreational harvest of red snapper in the EEZ off such region would be restricted to the federal default regulations for red snapper.

If the Committee motion carries here at full Council, the preferred alternative for a sunset option under Alternative 2 will be removed.

Committee members discussed how the boundary lines between regions would be used, as each region's regulations would be enforced upon landing. As an example, Dr. Crabtree said the lines are needed for closing parts of the EEZ should a state or region not have an approved conservation equivalency plan.

Staff has updated the actions and alternatives for the Council's review, and requests further guidance on the timeline for the amendment. [*provided on screen*].

Revised Public Hearing Draft Amendment 28 - Red Snapper Allocation

Staff summarized the amendment (**Tab B, No.10**) and discussed a potential timeline for taking final action. Staff noted that final action could be taken in June 2015 and indicated that the amendment will be updated to reflect the recent red snapper stock assessment. Dr. Crabtree recommended that the Committee further discuss the purpose and need for this amendment and consider the role that the recalibration of recreational red snapper landings and the change in selectivity could play in reallocation discussions. The Committee initiated preliminary discussions on these issues and staff noted that guidance from the Council would be helpful to update the amendment.

Report of the Ad Hoc For-Hire Red Snapper AP

Staff summarized the report (**Tab B, No.11**) and discussed the motions made by the AP. The Committee inquired about regional differences relative to the support for a 1-fish bag limit. It was noted that for-hire operators from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas generally opposed the bag limit reduction. The Committee noted that due to section 407(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the for-hire component may not fully harvest its quota if a split season is in effect. In response, Jim Greene, Chair of the AP, indicated that for the for-hire component, accountability is more important than access to the resource. The Committee discussed a motion to expand the for-hire management scoping document initiated in 2014 but the motion failed.

Final Action – Framework Action to Adjust Recreational For-Hire Red Snapper Management Measures

Staff summarized the alternatives in a draft framework action to adjust the red snapper bag limit on for-hire vessels (**Tab B, No. 12a**). It was noted that there was no support for a reduced bag limit in the public comments received during the last 1 ½ weeks since a video summary of the framework action was posted on the Council website. A motion to make Alternative 2 the preferred alternative, set the red snapper bag limit at 1 fish per person per day in the for-hire fishery, and make it contingent upon the approval and implementation of Amendment 40, failed by a vote of 3 to 6. No other motions were made for this action.

A supplemental action with alternatives to implement a split season for for-hire vessels was produced based on a recommendation by the Ad Hoc Red Snapper For-Hire AP (**Tab B, No.**

12b). Committee members expressed concern that there was a lack of economic and other analyses on the impacts of the alternatives. No motions were made regarding split seasons.

Other Reef Fish SSC Summary

The SSC also reviewed the proposed SEDAR assessment schedule, and recommended that a standard red snapper assessment be conducted in 2017. A standard assessment would allow new sources on information to be included, provided they were specified in the terms of reference. The SSC discussed alternative red snapper MSY proxies. There is a poor relationship between spawners and recruits, which makes it difficult to estimate the proper proxy for F_{MSY} . Following a discussion over reproductive strategies and where red snapper fit in, the Committee passed the following motion.

By a vote of 6 to 0, the Committee recommends, and I so move, to remove red snapper SPR consideration from the status determination criteria document and request Council staff develop a plan amendment to adjust the F_{SPR} levels for red snapper to alternatives for: status quo, $F_{SPR24\%}$, $F_{SPR22\%}$, F_{MAX} ($F_{SPR20\%}$). The plan amendment should also determine the timeline for $F_{Rebuild}$ at each F_{SPR} .

Other Business

A Committee member asked that an education session be scheduled at a future Council meeting on SPR. Mr. Gregory replied that explaining SPR in layman's terms was difficult, but he would look into finding someone who could provide a seminar to the Council on the topic.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my report.