

**Reef Fish Management Committee Report
January 25-26, 2016
Johnny Greene-Chair**

SSC Summary (Tab B, No. 4a)

Will Patterson summarized the SSC meeting. The following items in the presentation refer to agenda items or other business later in the Committee meeting: gray triggerfish OFL/ABC, west Florida hogfish OFL/ABC, recreational red snapper ACT buffer, red grouper OFL/ABC.

Draft Amendment 43 – Hogfish (Tab B, No. 5)

Staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in the draft amendment, and requested recommendations for public hearing locations. A more complete draft of the amendment will be presented to the Council in April to select preferred alternatives and approve for public hearings. Hearing will be held after the April Council meeting. By consensus, the Committee recommended the following hearing locations:

St. Petersburg/Pinellas County area
Naples
plus a webinar hearing

Draft Framework Action – Modify Gear Restrictions for Yellowtail Snapper (Tab B, No. 6)

Staff reviewed the action and alternatives in the draft framework action and brought up the potential issue of bycatch of other finfish on yellowtail snapper trips. Currently, if the circle hook requirement is lifted for commercial yellowtail snapper fishermen, those fishermen would not be able to retain any other species in the reef fish FMP for which circle hooks are still required. A Gulf-specific, trip length-delineated analysis has been requested by staff and is scheduled to be available by the end of February. Staff asked the Committee if there were alternatives which could be removed:

A motion to remove Action 1, Alternatives 2 and 3 to Considered but Rejected was withdrawn after discussion.

Staff noted that a proposed season change for commercial and recreational yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic has been sent to the Secretary of Commerce for approval. Adopting such a measure in the Gulf would ensure homogeneity in fishing seasons between the Councils, and was proposed in a plan amendment examining yellowtail snapper ACLs at the Gulf Council's October 2015 meeting. The South Atlantic has since abandoned efforts to consolidate yellowtail

snapper ABC/ACLs and sector allocations in the Atlantic. Staff crafted a season change action to be included in the circle hook framework action.

Motion: To add Action 2 to the document as recommended by staff.

Action 2. Modify the Fishing Year for Gulf Yellowtail Snapper

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not modify the fishing year for yellowtail snapper. The fishing year (commercial and recreational) is the calendar year, January 1 through December 31.

Alternative 2: Modify the fishing year for the commercial sector for yellowtail snapper:

Option a: June 1 through May 30

Option b: July 1 through June 30

Option c: August 1 through July 31 (South Atlantic Council Adopted) Option d: September 1 to August 31

Alternative 3: Modify fishing year for the recreational sector for yellowtail snapper:

Option a: June 1 through May 30

Option b: July 1 through June 30

Option c: August 1 through July 31 (South Atlantic Council Adopted) Option d: September 1 to August 31

Motion passed.

Discussion of Scoping Document for Amendment 33 – Reef Fish Limited Access Privilege Program (Tab B, No. 7)

Staff provided an overview of the amendment and discussed the steps previously taken by the Council in the development of this amendment. The Committee discussed the list of species included in the amendment. The Committee did not advise staff to continue work on this amendment.

Discussion of Amendment 36 – Red Snapper IFQ Modifications (Tab B, No. 8)

Staff reviewed the potential actions being considered for modification of the red snapper IFQ program and the Committee discussed several items. A motion to remove allocation caps from the document failed. Staff will continue developing a draft amendment.

Final Action – Amendment 39 – Regional Management of Recreational Red Snapper (Tab B, No. 9a)

Staff summarized the concerns of the Law Enforcement Technical Committee regarding reliance on dockside enforcement under regional management. Staff then summarized the written comments received on the amendment and those from public hearings.

Staff reviewed the amendment's actions and preferred alternatives. In Action 2, motions to make each of Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 the preferred alternative failed by roll call vote. Therefore, there is no preferred alternative for Action 2.

The Committee further discussed enforcement issues. Lieutenant Commander Brand expressed concerns with relying on dockside enforcement, noting that many anglers return to private docks. A Committee member noted that the public expressed concerns about enforcement during public hearings.

For-Hire Management - Draft Amendments 41 and 42 (Tab B, No. 10)

Staff summarized the comments from the scoping workshops.

For Amendment 41, staff reviewed the document structure and actions. The Committee suggested additional alternatives be included in Action 2, distribution of quota to charter vessels. Staff noted that the additional actions described at the end of the document would be developed in future drafts, including an action to address voluntary participation.

For Amendment 42, staff discussed the organization of the amendment and management actions. The Committee discussed the use of auctions for initial allocations and inquired about public support for cooperatives. Committee members requested the addition of an action that would allow headboats to opt-out of the program.

Draft Options – Red Snapper Recreational ACT Adjustment (Tab B, No. 11)

Staff reviewed the options paper to revise the recreational red snapper ACT buffer. It was noted that the SSC could not establish scientific justification to either change or retain the buffer due to numerous sources of uncertainty and only two years of landings data under the 20% buffer. Committee members suggested that action on the options paper could be deferred, but they would like to review it again once 2015 landings are finalized. It was also suggested that different buffers be considered for the private and for-hire components based on appropriate risk tolerance.

Gray Triggerfish OFL, ABC, and Rebuilding Plan Parameters (Tab B, No. 12)

Staff reviewed the OFL and ABC recommendations provided by the SSC. The time to rebuild in the absence of fishing mortality (T_{MIN}) is 6 years, and ABC for the first 3 years of rebuilding were presented for 8, 9, and 10-year rebuilding timelines. The earliest an update assessment can

be scheduled is 2019. Staff will develop an options paper for an amendment to establish a new rebuilding plan based on the ABCs provided. A Committee member asked that the amendment also look at reducing the bag limit, increasing the minimum size limit, and providing a later opening date.

Discussion - Ad Hoc Private Recreational AP (Tab B, No. 13)

Committee members noted that a new private group has been formed, the Gulf Angler Focus Group, to develop recommendations for the private recreational component. Ken Haddad (American Sportfishing Association) explained that the group is holding meetings facilitated by the Florida State University's FCRC Consensus Center to develop consensus positions for recreational fishermen. Mr. Haddad felt that forming an AP through the Council process at this time would be counter-productive to the group's efforts, and suggested that the Council wait at least a year before forming an AP. Several Committee members agreed that the Council should wait and give the private group a chance to work.

Other Business

Red Grouper Stock Assessment Results

Staff noted that the SSC presentation had included a review of the red grouper stock assessment and a 5-year OFL and ABC yield stream. Staff suggested that work could begin on a framework action to adjust the red grouper ACL and asked for guidance from the Committee.

Extension of Sector Separation Sunset Provision

Committee members noted that sector separation will sunset after three years. Work will need to begin soon if the Council wants to extend the sunset provision before sector separation expires. A motion to develop a plan amendment to either modify or eliminate the sunset provision failed.

Re-opening Red Snapper Recreational Season to Reach Annual Catch Limit (ACL)

Committee members expressed an interest in developing a procedure to allow the Regional Administrator to re-open the recreational season if the ACL has not been reached. The Regional Administrator currently has the authority to re-open the recreational fishery if the quota (ACT) has not been reached, but not to re-open it to allow the ACL to be reached.

Motion: To start the development of an action to develop a mechanism to allow the red snapper season to reopen in the event that the ACL is not exceeded during the initial season.

Motion passed with no opposition