

**Reef Fish Committee
Action Guide and Next Steps for Tab B**

Agenda Item IV: Review of Reef Fish and Individual Fishing Quota Program Landings

Action: Presentation and discussion

Council input and next steps: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff will review the status of reef fish, for-hire red snapper, and individual fishing quota (IFQ) program landings relative to catch limits. Following, representatives of the five Gulf states will brief the Committee on their respective 2023 fishing seasons for the private recreational component of the red snapper fishery. These landings data are provided for the Committee’s information only and require no action by the Committee.

Agenda Item V: Presentation: 2024 Gag and Red Grouper Recreational Season Projections

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: SERO staff will review updated gag and red grouper recreational fishing season projections for 2024. The 2023 fishing year landings for both species were estimated using the federal Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey for private recreational vessels, and resulted in significantly high landings estimates compared to previous fishing years. SERO collaborated with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the NOAA Office of Science and Technology to review these landings and determine whether any intercepts or other data require further analysis. The results of this collaboration, and the resultant season projections, will be presented here. The Committee should consider the information presented and make any recommendations to the Council as appropriate, including whether to proceed with the development of this management modification.

Agenda Item VI: Discussion of Conservation and Management of Wenchman in the Mid-water Snapper Complex

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: Council staff will present draft options for consideration of removal of wenchman from the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Wenchman is in the mid-water snapper complex, which also includes blackfin snapper, queen snapper, and silk snapper. Wenchman landings are almost entirely attributed to bycatch from the state-managed commercial mid-water trawl fishery targeting butterfish. In May 2023, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) recommended to remove wenchman from the mid-water snapper complex, and set a new overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) for the mid-water snapper complex, excluding wenchman. In June 2023, the Council passed a motion to

consider removing wenchman from the Reef Fish FMP. Here, Council staff will walk the Committee through considerations provided in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), which are used to determine whether a species requires federal conservation and management. The Committee should review the information presented and provide feedback to staff and the Council. The Committee should also evaluate its justifications for consideration of including wenchman as an ecosystem component species within the Reef Fish FMP, and provide feedback to staff and the Council.

Agenda Item VII: Draft Options: Reef Fish Amendment 58: Modifications to Shallow Water Grouper Complex Catch Limits and Management Measures

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: Council will present an updated version of a presentation given in August 2023. Between the March and May 2023 SSC meetings, the SSC made separate OFL and ABC recommendations for scamp and yellowmouth grouper, and black and yellowfin grouper, respectively. In February 2024, the SSC re-specified its OFL and ABC recommendations for black grouper and yellowfin grouper, correcting an error in the landings provided to the SSC at its May 2023 meeting. These four species are included in the shallow-water grouper (SWG) complex under a single annual catch limit (ACL), with a commercial ACL and annual catch target (ACT) specified to allow for the functioning of the SWG component of the commercial Grouper-Tilefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. Because OFLs and ABCs were specified explicitly for the aforementioned pairs of groupers, these species can no longer be managed under a single complex with one quota because of the possibility of overfishing occurring on either pair. Council staff will present revised options for the Committee to consider regarding specifying status determination criteria, SWG complex structure, catch limits, accountability measures, and IFQ share allocation. The Committee should consider the information presented and make recommendations to staff about the types of management options it would like to explore, so that the appropriate data can be collected and analyzed. Following working on these Committee recommendations and requisite analyses, staff will present revised options to the Committee at a subsequent Council meeting.

Agenda Item VIII: Review: February 2023 Gulf SSC Meeting Summary

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: Dr. Jim Nance (SSC Chair) will review several agenda items from the SSC's February 2024 meeting. Dr. Nance will review the SEDAR 85 stock assessment of yellowedge grouper, which is a component of the deep-water grouper complex with snowy grouper, warsaw grouper, and speckled hind. The SSC recommended revising the Maximum Sustainable Yield proxy to fishing yield at 30% spawning potential ratio ($F_{30\%SPR}$), provided advice to the data analysts about which recruitment years to inform the projection analysis, and set the OFL and ABC. The SSC also reviewed and revised the OFL and ABC for the three remaining deep-water grouper species, separate from the yellowedge grouper catch limits, using

Tier 3b of the ABC Control Rule. The SSC evaluated the peer-review of the SEDAR 74 research track for Gulf red snapper and provided recommendations for consideration for the next benchmark assessment which is to start at the end of 2024. The SSC received a presentation from the SEFSC comparing the economic performances of the Gulf reef fish and South Atlantic snapper grouper fisheries, and another presentation on the 2024 Gulf red grouper interim analysis (without catch advice). The Committee should review the information presented, ask questions of the SSC chair, and provide feedback as appropriate.

Agenda Item IX: Presentation on Reef Fish Amendment 60: Individual Fishing Quota Programmatic Distributional Issues

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council Input and Next Steps: Staff will give a presentation on the goals and objectives of the red snapper and grouper/tilefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) programs and on Reef Fish Amendment 60, a regulatory action considering alternative approaches to distributing shares and annual allocations in the IFQ programs. Reef Fish Amendment 60 is being developed in response to the Council’s October 2023 motion directing staff to initiate a plan amendment that evaluates options for equitably distributing shares currently held by NMFS, and recovering and redistributing shares associated with inactive accounts. Potential management measures to consider in Reef Fish Amendment 60 could include the equitable distribution of shares held by NMFS (from Reef Fish Amendment 36A), of shares and annual allocation recovered from inactive IFQ accounts and, of shares and allocation recovered from divestment by shareholders who do not meet requirements that will be set in Reef Fish Amendment 59. Reef Fish Amendment 60 would also address the handling of shares from deceased shareholders’ accounts. The Committee should discuss the information presented and make recommendations, as warranted. In particular, the Committee should discuss and detail how it envisions the equitable distribution of IFQ shares and allocation. The Committee should also advise on next steps, as needed.

Agenda Item IX: Other Business

Action: Additional items that can be brought up for discussion

Council Input and Next Steps: Additional items may be brought up for discussion by Committee members during the adoption of the agenda, time permitting. If the Committee wishes to pursue action, then action can be scheduled at a future Council meeting.
