

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

Agenda Item IV: Discussion: Gag and Black Grouper Management Alternatives

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: The Council developed Amendment 56 in response to the results of the alternative run of SEDAR 72 using the State of Florida’s State Reef Fish Survey landings data for private recreational vessels. This assessment determined that Gulf gag is overfished and undergoing overfishing as of 2020. The Council transmitted Amendment 56 for implementation in June 2023. The Council also directed staff to work on a follow-on document to explore other measures such as a recreational bag and vessel limit, and spatial restrictions.

Black grouper was included in this follow-on document due to the historic potential for misidentification of black grouper and gag. Council staff will present options requested by the Council, including a recreational bag and vessel limit and modifications to spatial area management, as well as consideration of commercial spawning season closures. The Committee should consider the information presented and make recommendations to staff about the types of management options it would like to explore further, so that the SSC can consider these goals when reviewing and discussing the current data and information available for gag. Following working on these analyses and recommendations from the SSC, staff will present revised options to the Committee at a subsequent Council meeting.

Agenda Item V: Discussion: Shallow-water Grouper Complex Management

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: Between the March and May 2023 Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) meetings, the SSC made separate overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) limit recommendations for scamp and yellowmouth grouper, and black and yellowfin grouper, respectively. These four species are presently included together in the Council’s shallow-water grouper (SWG) complex under a single annual catch limit, with a commercial ACL and annual catch target 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 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 analyses, staff will present revised options to the Committee at a subsequent Council meeting.

Agenda Item VI: Draft Framework Action: Modifications to Recreational and Commercial Greater Amberjack Management Measures

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: Council staff will review a presentation considering modifications to recreational (fixed closed seasons) and commercial management measures (trip limits) for greater amberjack. A draft of Chapters 1-3 has been made available for the Committee's consideration. Both Actions 1 and 2 have been updated based on changes requested by the Council at the June meeting. A presentation will also be given to highlight the analyses that were used to inform Action 2 (commercial trip limit). These measures are being considered to facilitate access to the stock while the stock rebuilds. The Committee should evaluate the measures proposed and consider selecting a preferred alternative for Action 2 so staff can develop a final action document.

Agenda Item VII: Draft: Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 / Reef Fish Amendment 55: Catch Level Adjustments and Allocations for Southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: Council staff will review the proposed management alternatives for Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 / Reef Fish Amendment 55, which evaluates modifications to Southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper management. Staff will update the Committee on any changes made to the alternatives as a result of previous discussions on possible data discrepancies. The South Atlantic Council will also be evaluating sector allocations and other management measures to be applicable within its jurisdiction; the Gulf does not currently have a sector allocation for yellowtail snapper. The Committee should review the proposed management actions and alternatives, ask questions, and provide feedback to staff as appropriate. Staff will plan to bring revised document back to the Gulf Council in October 2023 after the South Atlantic Council reviews the amendment at its September meeting.

Agenda Item VIII: Status Update on the Anticipated Endangered Species Act Proposed Rules and Section 7 Related Updates

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council Input and Next Steps: Ms. Jennifer Lee (Southeast Regional Office) will review a NOAA Fisheries proposed rule to designate critical habitat for six green sea turtle distinct population segments (DPSs) listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), including the DPS that occurs within waters managed by the Council. The ESA requires the NOAA Fisheries to designate critical habitat to the maximum extent prudent and

determinable. In 2016, NOAA Fisheries listed DPSs of green sea turtles, which triggered the requirement to also designate critical habitat. This critical habitat designation will aid the recovery of green sea turtles by protecting access to nesting beaches and use of reproductive areas, migratory corridors, and feeding and resting areas. Proposed marine critical habitat includes nearshore waters (from the mean high-water line to 20 meters depth) off the coasts of Florida and Texas. Proposed critical habitat also includes *Sargassum* habitat (from 10 meters depth to the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone) in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean.

Critical habitat designations do not typically directly affect people engaged in recreational activities, such as recreational boating and fishing. NOAA Fisheries is announcing a 90-day public comment period and several informational meetings / public hearings, which will be held jointly with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. All comments for the proposed rule will be considered before finalizing the critical habitat designation. Public comments will be accepted until October 17, 2023. The Committee should review the proposed rule and make any recommendations for comments as appropriate.

Agenda Item IX: Status and Timeline Update for Revised IFQ Goals and Objectives

Action: Informational Presentation

Council Input and Next Steps: Council staff will provide an update on the development of a reef fish amendment considering management measures to address the Red Snapper and Grouper-Tilefish individual fishing quota programs (IFQs) goals and objectives adopted by the Council in June 2023. The Committee should discuss the information provided, ask questions, and make recommendations as warranted.

Agenda Item X: Status Update on Recreational Initiative

Action: Informational Update and Discussion

Council Input and Next Steps: Mr. Andy Strelcheck will review the progress of the Southeast Regional Office with respect to the Council’s motion covering several recreational fisheries management initiatives. The Committee should ask questions and provide feedback as appropriate.

Agenda Item XI: 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.
