

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

Agenda Item IV: Review of Reef Fish and IFQ Program Landings

Action: Information only

Council input and next steps: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff will review the status of reef fish and individual fishing quota (IFQ) program landings relative to catch limits, which is provided for the Committee’s information only. In addition, Dr. Cody with the NOAA Office of Science and Technology will brief the Committee on the progress made thus far by the MRIP Transition Team on its work related to the calibration of private vessel landings collected by the Gulf state surveys. These data are part of an ongoing report to the Council that requires no action by the Committee.

Agenda Item V: Draft Amendment 54: Modifications to the Greater Amberjack Catch Limits and Sector Allocations, and other Rebuilding Plan Modifications

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: Council Staff will review management alternatives considered in Draft Amendment 54 to the Reef Fish fishery management plan, which considers modifications to sector allocations and catch limits in response to the results of the SEDAR 70 stock assessment. SEDAR 70 determined that greater amberjack was overfished and experiencing overfishing as of the end of the 2018 fishing year, and that reductions in harvest would be necessary to immediately end overfishing and rebuild the stock by 2027 as required by the current rebuilding plan. SEDAR 70 incorporated new recreational catch and effort data calibrated to the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES). These alternatives follow the SSC’s recommendations for updated catch advice. The Committee should review the information presented, provide feedback to staff on the range of alternatives, and make recommendations as appropriate. Staff will develop a public hearing draft for the August 2022 Council meeting. The Council should determine if in-person public hearings are necessary for this action or if virtual hearings and utilization of the Fish Rules app will suffice.

Agenda Item VI: Draft Emergency Rule to Modify Greater Amberjack Management in 2023

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: SERO Staff will review management options to be considered in an emergency rule to modify greater amberjack seasons for the 2022/2023 recreational and 2023 commercial fishing seasons, in response to the overfished stock status from SEDAR 70. The intent of this proposed emergency rule is to reduce overfishing to prevent an overage of the

commercial and recreational annual catch limits expected to take effect when Amendment 54 is implemented (anticipated Spring 2023). The Committee should review the information presented, provide feedback to staff on the range of alternatives, and make recommendations as appropriate.

Agenda Item VII: Draft Options: Modification of Catch Limits for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: Council staff will review the options in the draft framework action to modify catch limits for red snapper, following the review of an updated catch analysis by the Council’s SSC. At its March 2022 meeting, the SSC reviewed updated estimates of absolute abundance of red snapper derived from the Great Red Snapper Count (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas) and by LGL Ecological Associates, Inc (Louisiana). The resulting catch analysis conducted by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) used the combined estimate of 85.6 million age-2 and older red snapper to estimate a revised overfishing limit (OFL; 18.91 million lbs whole weight [mp ww]) and acceptable biological catch (ABC; 16.31 mp ww). The Council transmitted two previous framework actions: one to revise red snapper catch limits and one to calibrate catch limits for Gulf state survey quota monitoring; neither of these framework actions have yet been implemented. If the draft framework action being presented at the June 2022 Council meeting is ultimately implemented, its proposed regulations would take the place of those previously submitted by the Council but not yet implemented.

Agenda Item VIII: Presentation and Discussion of Gulf of Mexico Gag Grouper Interim Rule

Action: Presentation, discussions, and recommendations

Council input and next steps: The SEDAR 72 assessment was presented at the SSC’s September 2021 meeting, and used updated recreational catch and effort data from MRIP-FES, and an ecosystem-informed model for incorporating episodic mortality from red tide. During its November 2021 meeting, the SSC determined that gag grouper is overfished and undergoing overfishing, and recommended revising the proxy for determining fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield. Council staff will review an analysis of gag grouper landings with the Committee to illustrate trends and magnitude of changes, considerate of the yields estimated from the projections from SEDAR 72. Council staff will also review regional fishery dynamics with the Committee to demonstrate the differences in fishing practices and preferences throughout gag grouper’s range. SERO staff will then present options for the proposed interim rule for gag grouper, which is intended to reduce fishing mortality ahead of the development and implementation of Amendment 56, which proposed a rebuilding plan for gag grouper. The Committee should consider the information presented, ask questions, and make recommendations as appropriate.

Agenda Item IX: IFQ Focus Group Meeting Update

Action: Information

Council input and next steps: Council Staff will provide a brief update concerning the initial meeting of the IFQ Focus Group, which will be held August 2-3, 2022, in Tampa, Florida.

Agenda Item X: Review of SEFSC Analysis of Historical Red Grouper Stock Assessments using Alternative Marine Recreational Information Program Landings Data

Action: Presentation and discussion

Council Input and Next Steps: Dr. Jim Nance (SSC Chair) will briefly review the SEFSC's recent analysis of historical red grouper stock assessments using alternative private vessel recreational landings data, which was presented to the SSC in May 2022. This analysis first corrected for an identified error in SEDAR 42 related to the model's initial conditions (virgin total and spawning stock biomass, and virgin recruitment), and also updated the estimate of red tide mortality from 2005. Recreational landings data informed by MRIP-FES through SEDAR 42's terminal year of 2013 were then used to supplant historically used MRIP recreational data informed by the former Coastal Household Telephone Survey. Catch limits for these two versions of SEDAR 42 were then projected and compared to those proposed by SEDAR 61, which also included red tide mortality in 2014. The Committee should review the information presented and ask questions as appropriate. No action is necessary, as this fulfilled a Council request.

Agenda Item XI: Discussion of Goliath Grouper Closure and Federal Catch Limits

Action: Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

Council Input and Next Steps: Dr. Nance will review the SSC's May 2022 discussion of the goliath grouper federal closure and federal catch limits, as was requested of the SSC by the Council in April 2022. Amendment 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico (Reef Fish FMP) was implemented in 1990, and set a 50-inch total length minimum size limit on goliath grouper, which was not included as part of the shallow- or deep-water grouper complexes. Amendment 2, implemented later in 1990, prohibited the harvest of goliath grouper to provide complete protection for this species in federal waters in response to indications that the stock biomass was depleted throughout its range. Amendment 18B included a rebuilding plan for goliath grouper, based on the then-pending results of the SEDAR 6 (2004) stock assessment, and would have set total allowable catch, MSST, and MFMT for the stock. When the stock assessment was not accepted for use in management, the development of the amendment was stopped. Successive SEDAR assessments of goliath grouper (SEDAR 23 2010; SEDAR 47 2015) also were not accepted for informing fisheries management. The SSC also reviewed the proposed limited harvest program recently approved in state waters by the Florida

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The Committee should review the information presented, ask questions, and make recommendations as appropriate.

Agenda Item XII: Presentation: Return ‘Em Right

Action: Informational presentation and discussion

Council Input and Next Steps: Mr. Nick Haddad with Florida Sea Grant will review the development and rollout of the Return ‘Em Right program, which aims to increase survival of reef fish that are caught and released in the Gulf. Project partners include Florida Sea Grant, University of Florida, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, NMFS, and a coalition of anglers, industry groups, state agencies, universities, government and non-government organizations. The project provides training and gear to Gulf anglers to improve the survival of reef fish and benefit the health of the fisheries. These efforts are intended to increase the survival of live discards, and provide improved fishing experiences for anglers. Funding for Return ‘Em Right comes from \$30 million from the *Deepwater Horizon* Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group as part of the 2019 Open Ocean Restoration Plan. The Committee should review the information presented, ask questions, and make recommendations as appropriate.

Agenda Item XIII: 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.
