



Tab B, No. 6(a)

Draft Reef Fish Amendment 61: Modifications to the Mid-water Snapper Complex

April 2024
Reef Fish Committee

Background

- It all began with wenchman...
 - Landings spiked in 2020 and 2021 due to incidental take in butterflyfish trawl fishery
 - SSC and GSMFC evaluated available landings, life history
 - Butterflyfish fishermen offered testimony
- Short version: wenchman landings low until 2020/21, low after; accurate annual quota monitoring problematic



Background

- SSC ultimately recommended removal of wenchman from mid-water snapper (MWS) complex (includes blackfin, queen, silk snapper)
 - Not found with other MWS species
 - Not caught like other MWS species
 - Not able to be targeted like other MWS species
- Council began work on RF61 to reconsider wenchman's inclusion in MWS and Reef Fish FMP



Actions

- Action 1: Retain/Remove Wenchman from Reef Fish FMP
- Action 2: Revise MWS Catch Limits



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- **Alternative 1:** No Action – Retain wenchman in the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources (Reef Fish FMP) in the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf).
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- **Alternative 2:** Remove wenchman from the Reef Fish FMP. This would modify the composition of the Mid-water Snapper Complex (MWS) to include only queen snapper, blackfin snapper, and silk snapper.
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Action 1: Retain/Remove

- **Alternative 3:** Remove wenchman from the MWS, but retain it within the Reef Fish FMP as an ecosystem component species. This would modify the composition of the MWS to include only queen snapper, blackfin snapper, and silk snapper.



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- **Alternative 2:**
- Under MSA, Council must consider criteria when deciding whether a stock requires federal conservation and management.
- For stocks that are not overfished or likely to experience overfishing, Council may determine whether a stock requires an FMP based on several factors:



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- (i) The stock is an important component of the marine environment.
 - E.g., is there evidence that wenchman serves a key niche role in the Gulf?
- (ii) The stock is caught by the fishery.
 - Wenchman is in the Reef Fish FMP.
 - Is wenchman a target species, or a common bycatch species, by fleets participating in the Reef Fish FMP?



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- (iii) Whether an FMP can improve or maintain the condition of the stock.
 - Wenchman's stock status is unknown relative to current status determination criteria:
 - MFMT and $F_{MSY} = F_{30\%SPR}$; $MSST = 0.75 * B_{MSY}$)
 - Has wenchman's inclusion in the Reef Fish FMP aided in its effective management?
- (iv) The stock is a target of a fishery.
 - Is wenchman a primary target species for fleets participating in the Reef Fish FMP?



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- (v) The stock is important to commercial, recreational, or subsistence users.
 - Dockside value for wenchman ranges from \$0.50 to \$2 per lb, and landings are typically under 100,000 lb ww.
 - Wenchman are not targeted by commercial vertical line or longline fleets.
 - Recreational landings of wenchman are very low.
 - There is no known subsistence fishing for wenchman.



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- (vi) The fishery is important to the Nation or to the regional economy.
 - Is wenchman important to the Nation's economy?
 - Is wenchman important to regional Gulf economies?



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- (vii) The need to resolve competing interests and conflicts among user groups and whether an FMP can further that resolution.
 - Wenchman is caught primarily in the butterfish trawl fishery.
 - When the MWS ACL is met and the season closed, trawlers must discard any wenchman caught in butterfish trawls.



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- (vii) The need to resolve competing interests and conflicts among user groups and whether an FMP can further that resolution.
 - ...
 - Trawl associated discard mortality is very high, not likely reducing fishing mortality on the stock unless effort is reduced because of closure
 - Can management of wenchman resolve this user group conflict?



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- (viii) The economic condition of a fishery and whether an FMP can produce more efficient utilization.
 - Can management in the Reef Fish FMP improve the economics of fishing for wenchman?
- (ix) The needs of a developing fishery, and whether an FMP can foster orderly growth.
 - Can management in the Reef Fish FMP foster orderly in fishing for wenchman?



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- (x) The extent to which the fishery is already adequately managed by states, by state/Federal programs, or by Federal regulations pursuant to other FMPs or international commissions, or by industry self-regulation, consistent with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- (x) The extent to which the fishery ...
 - The 5 Gulf states do not have specific regulations for management of wenchman
 - GSMFC landings history is likely the most accurate per SSC discussion, but is still incongruent with submitted written logbooks
 - Wenchman has been landed under several other names, making landings data more uncertain



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- (x) The extent to which the fishery ...
 - The US has no international cooperative management agreement for wenchman
 - There is no wenchman-specific fishery or industry
 - The Council does not manage any finfish trawl fisheries
 - Fishermen testimony indicated that wenchman are indistinguishable from other mid-water column schooling fish, like butterfish, on depth-sounding equipment



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- January 2024 Council Meeting:
 - Council requested staff add an alternative to consider inclusion of wenchman as an **ecosystem component species (EC)** in the Reef Fish FMP
 - **EC**: stock(s) that a Council or the Secretary has determined do not require conservation and management, but desire to list in a FMP in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- **Alternative 3:**
- **Ecosystem Component Species:**
 - A Council is free to designate any stock, that is determined not in need of conservation of management, as an EC species at their discretion.
 - Criteria for designation unnecessary- criteria in 600.305(c)(1)(i)-(x) ... clarify which stocks are in need of conservation and management, and therefore cannot be designated as EC species.



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- Ecosystem Component Species:
 - Because the designation of EC species may be done to accomplish several different goals, NMFS does not believe it is appropriate to prescribe specific guidance on the requirements for managing and monitoring EC species.
 - <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2016-24500/p-29>



Action 1: Retain/Remove

- Ecosystem Component Species:
 - What ecosystem management objectives does the Council have, which would be achieved by designating wenchman as an EC species?
 - Not a known prevalent or important prey item
 - Not a known keystone predator
 - Not a habitat engineer
 - No identified mutually beneficial relationships with other species



Action 2: Revise Catch Limits

- This action is heavily influenced by decisions made in Action 1.
 - If wenchman is removed from the FMP, then it will **not** be included in an updated catch limit calculation
 - If wenchman is listed as an ecosystem component species, then it will **not** be included in an updated catch limit calculation
 - If wenchman remains in the Reef Fish FMP and the MWS complex, then the Council should evaluate the necessity of this amendment



Action 2: Revise Catch Limits

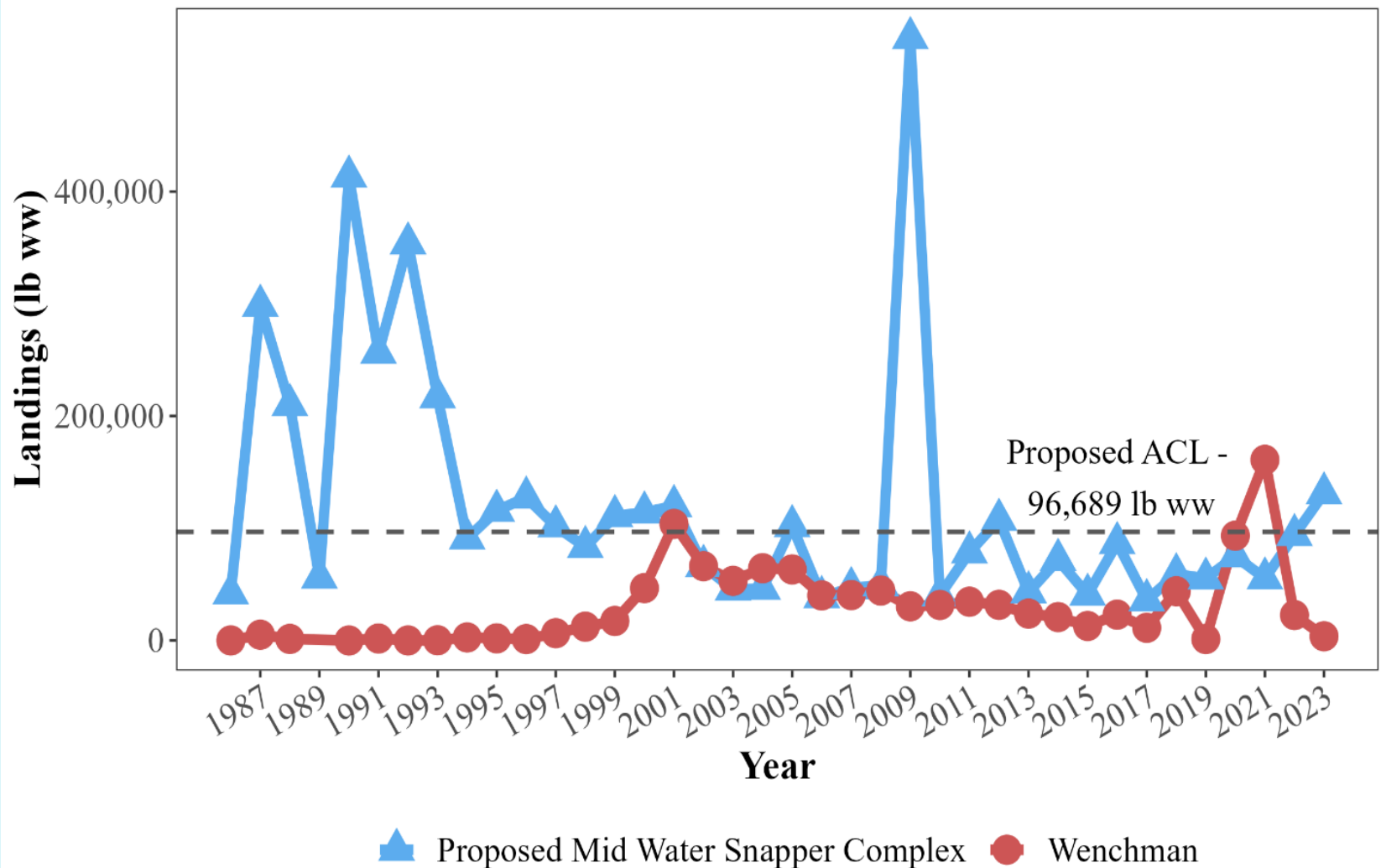
- Alt 1: Current Limits: (*in MRFSS data units*)

Midwater Snapper Complex	OFL	ABC	ACL	ACT
Silk snapper	209,000 lb ww	166,000 lb ww	166,000 lb ww	136,000 lb ww
Queen snapper				
Blackfin snapper				
Wenchman				

- Alt 2: Proposed Limits: (*in MRIP-FES data units*)

Midwater Snapper Complex	OFL	ABC	ACL	ACT
Silk snapper	107,904 lb ww	96,689 lb ww	96,689 lb ww	-
Queen snapper				
Blackfin snapper				

Action 2: Revise Catch Limits



Questions?

