

**Reef Fish Advisory Panel
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Meeting Summary
January 5 – 6, 2022**

The meeting of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) Fishery Management Council's (Council) Reef Fish Advisory Panel (AP) was convened at 9:00 AM EDT on January 5, 2022. The agenda for this meeting, and the minutes from the February 24, 2021, webinar meeting were approved as written. [Minutes and materials from past meetings can be reviewed here.](#)

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Captain Ed Walker was elected as the Chair, and Captain Troy Frady as the Vice Chair.

Review of Reef Fish and IFQ Program Landings

Ms. Kelli O'Donnell (National Marine Fisheries Service [NMFS] Southeast Regional Office [SERO]) reviewed reef fish commercial individual fishing quota (IFQ) landings and stated that more detailed breakdowns of landings for some species may be available for the January 2022 Council meeting. Gag grouper, red grouper, and red snapper remained open for the entirety of 2020 and 2021. Gag grouper landings were similar in 2020 and 2021, only reaching approximately 50% of the quota. Red grouper and red snapper landings approached 100% of the quota in 2021; in 2020, red snapper reached 99.0% of the quota but red grouper landings were lower (78.9% of the quota).

Ms. O'Donnell followed with a presentation reviewing recreational and non-IFQ commercial landings, noting that all 2021 landings are preliminary and that no new landings updates have been made since the October 2021 Council meeting except for the jacks and mid-water snapper complexes, which include landings through wave 4 (July/August). The 2021 recreational landings estimates do not yet include Texas landings data. All recreational landings provided are in Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) or Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) units to correspond with the monitored annual catch limits (ACLs). Gag grouper recreational landings have rebounded since 2020 and remain consistent with the 2018-2020 average. The red grouper and gray triggerfish recreational ACLs were exceeded, resulting in sector closures; gray triggerfish ultimately reopened later in the season after it was determined the ACL had not been exceeded. Stock closures occurred for lane snapper and the midwater snapper complex. Lane snapper landings in the past three years have exceeded the ACL, the fishery reopened on December 23, 2021 when the new 2021 stock ACL became effective (1,028,973 lbs in MRIP- Fishing Effort Survey [FES] data currency). An AP member asked what caused the midwater snapper complex closure. Ms. O'Donnell stated that a majority of the commercial landings were composed of wenchman snapper, followed by silk snapper caught by the recreational sector. Cubera snapper also exceeded its ACL in 2021, making it likely that a projected closure will occur in 2022; this would mark the first time this stock may

experience a quota closure. The jacks complex stock ACL was also exceeded in 2021, making a 2022 projected closure likely. A majority of the commercial landings were almaco jack, with a majority of the recreational sector landings coming from banded rudderfish. An AP member asked why NMFS is so delayed in publishing landings data. Ms. O'Donnell replied that an increased workload makes it difficult to parse out MRIP wave 4 (July and August) species-specific landings data when they are received; thus, landings data are provided as updates only at certain Council meetings.

Review of SEDAR 72: Gulf of Mexico Gag Grouper Stock Assessment

Council staff reviewed an abbreviated version of the SEDAR 72 presentation previously given to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). SEDAR 72 used updated recreational catch and effort information from the MRIP Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) and FES; the latter results in increases in estimates of recreational catch and effort, and in the uncertainty about those estimates. SEDAR 72 found Gulf gag grouper to be overfished and undergoing overfishing, due to variables including successive episodic mortality from red tide events, and generally depressed recruitment over the last decade. In evaluating SEDAR 72, the SSC determined that the current proxy for fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (F_{MSY}), currently set at F_{MAX} , was likely not appropriate for Gulf gag grouper, and recommended a new proxy of $F_{30\%SPR}$ that will need to be considered by the Council. The SSC also recommended using the Ecospace model results to estimate natural mortality based on the severity of the 2020/2021 red tide event in the yield projections.

In reviewing the data included in the assessment, AP members remarked that the magnitude of the recreational landings and effort in 1990s and earlier was implausible. An AP member asked whether the MRIP-FES dataset accounts for the number or type of boats that are used for fishing. Mr. Ryan Rindone (Council staff) replied that the number of boats is considered but not the type of boat. AP members noted that private vessels were rarely observed far offshore in the 1980s and 1990s: and therefore, were likely not harvesting such high levels of gag grouper. AP members expressed a lack of confidence in the MRIP data and question their use in management decision making. An AP member continued, stating that it didn't seem feasible that private vessels landed more fish than for-hire vessels in the 1980s. Navigation capabilities were more rudimentary compared to today, the number of vessels was much lower, and the engine technology available to private anglers may have also been a limiting factor. An AP member asked about the large peak in recreational landings in 1983. Mr. Rindone replied that this was likely due to very high landings from a very small number of intercepts. Council staff noted that there are many data used in the assessment, and despite differences in how the data are collected, these different surveys are all indicating a general decline in the gag grouper stock. An AP member thought re-examining the assessment using Florida's State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS) was appropriate given the uncertainty and unreliability of the MRIP-FES data.

Motion: To recommend to the Council, SEFSC, and SSC that we use SRFS data to rerun SEDAR 72 stock assessment model for gag and get away from glaring and significant estimation issues clearly seen in current 'private recreational and shore landings data, 1965-1995' inputs being used in stock assessment. We urge the Council,

SEFSC, and the SSC to ensure this review is completed prior to formulating a rebuilding plan or management changes.

Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Rindone noted that the last strong year class for gag was in 2006-2007. An AP member added that the fishery was experiencing a strong year class now (2021), and that gag grouper seemed to have stronger year classes follow red tide events. Another AP member noted observing recent landings on headboats of gag of very similar sizes (26" – 29" total length [TL]). An AP member thought there was a need to use more contemporary information for management, given the time lag between the data collected and when management changes are implemented. Mr. Rindone replied that interim analyses can be used to more quickly update catch limits, and the potential remains to automate the adoption of those catch limits, should the Council decide to do so.

An AP member recalled the new requirement to carry descending devices when fishing for reef fish species, and asked whether that requirement would reduce discard mortality. Mr. Rindone replied that anglers would be required to carry, not to use, those descending devices and education on proper venting techniques would be needed before any of those associated data could be considered for use in a stock assessment.

An AP member asked to see the projected yields by sector, assuming the ACL equals the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), and reiterated that high private recreational discards was the main issue with managing gag grouper. Those recreational discards are hundreds of thousands of fish annually and commercial discards are in the thousands of fish annually. The mortality resulting from private recreational discards is the most substantial source of mortality for gag grouper, second only to red tide in any given year.

AP members generally agreed the gag grouper stock is in better shape than estimated by the SEDAR 72 assessment. AP members thought the Council should consider the longest rebuilding timeline to ensure higher yields in the near-term, and to afford more time for scientists to investigate the stock. Ms. Emily Muehlstein's (Council staff) review of the Council's Something's Fishy tool for gag grouper corroborated the observations of AP members, in that fishermen in late 2020/early 2021 reported seeing larger numbers of juveniles. This observation was reported again by AP members in the fall and early winter of 2021. AP members discussed the issue of private angling discards and thought that anglers were likely less aware of the effect of discard mortality, and that additional outreach and education on reducing discard mortality would be critical.

Motion: The Reef Fish AP recommends to the Council and the Council's SSC that we do not close the gag grouper fishery in order to avoid loss of fisheries dependent data.

Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: If the Council must decide on gag management that includes the options presented to the SSC, the Reef Fish AP recommends adoption of the longest time series: $F_{30\%SPR}$ under the medium 2021 red tide severity scenario, setting $F_{Rebuild}$ at T_{minX2} .

Motion carried unanimously.

Review of SEDAR 68: Gulf of Mexico Scamp Research Track Assessment

Council staff reviewed the SEDAR 68 Gulf of Mexico Research Track Assessment of scamp and noted that the presentation was merely for informational purposes; the operational assessment will begin in January 2022 and will be the assessment from which management advice can be recommended. Unlike other species, scamp is data-poor and does not have a uniform data set, in that there are some gaps in fishery-independent indices of relative abundance. For stock identification purposes, the Gulf stock is separated from the South Atlantic stock at the Council jurisdictional boundary. The age at which 50% of female scamp reach sexual maturity is 3.4 years, and nearly all female scamp is mature at 7-8 years. A two-gender model was used in the assessment with the first transition from female to male occurring at 3 years. The SEDAR 68 Data Workshop recommended combining spawning stock biomass (SSB) of male and female scamp, as scamp does not exhibit a 1:1 sex ratio and males are generally larger than females. Commercial discard mortality was estimated at 47% and 68% for vertical line and bottom longline gear, respectively. Recreational discard mortality was estimated at 26%; although, total recreational discards, before applying discard mortality, are self-reported and highly uncertain. Commercial landings (in pounds gutted weight) and recreational landings (numbers of fish or weight) input in the assessment spanned from 1986-2017; however, landings data will be updated in the operational assessment with more recent years of data. A comparison of landings indicates the commercial fleet harvests the majority of scamp, but charter and private recreational landings have increased in recent years. Indices of relative abundance show evidence of recent declines, except for the Reef Fish Observer Program Vertical Line Index which estimated an increase.

Mr. Rindone summarized the model configuration and stated that there were some key issues raised including: mortality of age-0 juveniles has increased and was originally considered to be too low; selectivity of fleets needs to be reconsidered; total commercial discards, before applying discard mortality, are overestimated in 2005 and prior years, but underestimated in recent years while discards in the recreational fleet are highly variable, and headboat discards are underestimated; and, the model fit for the spawner-recruit relationship is poorly defined.

A number of outstanding issues will be addressed for the SEDAR 68 operational assessment: re-evaluation of maximum and asymptotic length; the representativeness of age and length data, including 2003-2012 age data and re-estimation of the growth curve; updates to the ageing error matrix for Gulf samples; consideration of using priors or fixing some selectivity and retention parameters to stabilize the model; and, subsequently investigating retrospective bias with inclusion of more recent data.

Ms. Emily Muehlstein (Council Staff) provided an overview of the Something's Fishy tool for scamp that was deployed from February 25 to March 25, 2020. Thirty-six responses were received but only 32 were analyzed due to repeat responses. A majority of the respondents were recreational anglers. Manual overall sentiment analysis showed a greater proportion of negative responses than the automated analysis, which showed a fairly even split amongst all sectors. Most responses originated from central Florida.

An AP member asked if scamp is experiencing a downward trend overall, or if the stock is stable. Mr. Rindone responded that stock status cannot yet be estimated, as the terminal year of the research track assessment was 2017; the operational assessment will include 2018 – 2020 data and will generate management advice. AP members then reviewed the one recommendation made by the SSC that the research track assessment base model represents the best scientific information available (BSIA), and is appropriate for use in the SEDAR 68 operational assessment. Mr. Rindone stated that the SSC should have the opportunity to review the operational assessment before September 2022, after which it will be reviewed by the Council.

Review of SEDAR 70: Gulf of Mexico Greater Amberjack Operational Assessment

Council staff reviewed the projection results from SEDAR 70. The assessment determined that, despite several recent changes in management to reduce harvest, Gulf greater amberjack is overfished and undergoing overfishing. Observed recruitment has been well below the long-term average in the last ten years and is likely contributing to the depressed state of the fishery. To achieve a rebuilt stock by 2027, substantial reductions to catch levels will need to be implemented. Responses from the Council's Something's Fishy tool indicated that fishermen were generally observing greater amberjack, mostly in the western Gulf, but many respondents expressed frustration with the many recent changes to greater amberjack management. Council staff also presented catch levels at several allocation scenarios for the AP to consider.

The AP asked for clarification on what was used to inform the various allocation scenarios in the projection analysis. Council staff responded that historical catch across different years was used to explore the various allocation scenarios. In general, years where there was a substantial change in data collection procedures (the beginning of MRIP [1981], identifying greater amberjack at the species level from the generic "jack complex" [1983]) were used to establish the allocation time series considered.

The AP inquired about the Council's sector reallocation policy and asked about the mechanisms required for initiating a reallocation. The Council has two policies regarding allocation. The first policy statement outlines the procedural directives for setting allocation. The second describes the Council's allocation review policy and provides timelines for allocation review for several managed species. Currently, greater amberjack allocation is due for review in 2025; however, the Council is at liberty to review allocation at an earlier date when presented with new information that may affect allocation determinations (i.e., the recent change to MRIP FES). The AP acknowledged that the policies were important to understand and requested a presentation on the Council's allocation policies at a future meeting. Many AP members expressed concern about

how recent changes to MRIP-FES would continue to drive reallocation in greater amberjack and other recently assessed species.

Motion: Request that Council/NMFS staff compile and present discard and discard mortality data by species and sector and year for all mixed-use species in the Gulf. Commercial data should be broken down by gear type (longline, vertical line) and recreational sector data should be broken down by subsector (charter for-hire, headboat, private angler+shore), as feasible. Include data sources where available.

Motion carried unanimously.

An AP member presented a table using data from SEDAR 70 that compared the number of discards between the commercial, for-hire, and private recreational vessel fleets. These data indicated that private recreational vessels discard many times more fish than the other two sectors. Council staff clarified that discards are difficult to estimate. In the commercial sector, discards are reported by at-sea observers, but those coverage levels are low compared to total commercial effort (~ <1% of all commercial reef fish trips). In the recreational sector, discard data are self-reported and difficult to verify. Discard mortality largely comes from empirical literature sources, stakeholder input, or estimated from similar species. Another AP member reminded the group that the recent management changes to greater amberjack (size limit and seasonal closure) are likely greatly contributing to those results. Several AP members reiterated that the stock appears to be in poor shape and agreed that the recent changes to greater amberjack management should remain constant in an effort to better interpret the results of future stock assessments.

Motion: To recommend to the Council to adopt F_{Rebuild} as recommended by the SSC, for the current sector allocation, and to not make any other management changes to greater amberjack until 2026.

Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion of Draft Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 / Reef Fish Amendment 55

Mr. Rindone presented a brief summary of the status of Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 / Reef Fish Amendment 55, which is a joint amendment to both fishery management plans for the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' management of southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper. The yellowtail snapper stock was found to be healthy during the Councils' SSC review of the SEDAR 64 stock assessment, which used data through 2017 and incorporated recreational catch and effort data from MRIP-FES. At its December 2021 meeting, the South Atlantic Council recommended updating the SEDAR 64 stock assessment with data through 2020 to ensure that subsequent actions considered by the Councils use the most recent data available; the Gulf Council will consider the same decision at its January 2022 meeting.

Discussion: Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program Proposed Rule Changes

Dr. Michelle Masi (Southeast Fisheries Science Center [SEFSC] Staff) provided an updated report on the progress of the Southeast For-hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) Program. Phase II of the program, which will require the use of a vessel monitoring system (VMS), will be implemented on March 1, 2022. The update indicated that approximately 500 Gulf and 170 dual Gulf/South Atlantic permit holders have yet to register with the program. An AP member asked whether efforts had been made to reduce duplicative hail-out reporting for dual-permitted for-hire and commercial permit holders. SERO staff indicated that they were aware of the issue and were looking into a solution.

SEFHIER COLREGS

At its September 2021 meeting, the Data Collection AP suggested the use of the “International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea” demarcation lines (COLREG) as a way to reduce the multiple hail-out reporting requirements when moving short distances for non-fishing trips (e.g., fueling, supply runs, picking up customers). SERO staff indicated that the Florida Keys presented a challenge, since COLREG lines in this area are not clearly defined. A SEFHIER demarcation line could be established, but would take some time to develop and would require Council approval. SERO staff also expressed concern about fisherman awareness when crossing demarcation lines. SERO staff presented some alternatives to COLREG lines including modifying the trip declaration form to indicate that minor stops were being made before the fishing trip, or altering the declaration definition in the regulations to allow for stops before fishing. SERO staff stated that they were willing to explore other options as recommended.

An AP member indicated that SEFHIER software vendors should have the ability to construct a geofence around a homeport location that could be used as a demarcation line. SERO staff indicated that this avenue could also be explored. The AP reported that several captains are frustrated with the rollout of the program. Participant buy-in has been challenged due to overly burdensome hail-out requirements. The AP noted that several permit holders are operating without previously registering for the program, and they are not being engaged by SERO in the same manner as program participants. This is discouraging for participants who have been involved in the program for some time.

An AP member asked for clarification about the need to declare when fishing in state waters. SERO staff stated that since the SEFHIER program is associated with federal for-hire permits, hail-out and reporting would be required of those participants regardless of where fishing occurs. Another AP member asked whether working on the hail-out exemption would delay the implementation of Phase II. SERO staff indicated that it would likely not affect implementation timing, but cautioned that agreeing upon and establishing a demarcation line through the Council process could take time. Additionally, dual-permitted vessels have different hail out forms which are submitted to a different database, which may confound the goal of reducing duplicative reporting.

Autofill Reporting

During recent Council public testimony, several SEFHIER participants requested options for auto-filling data fields that do not change between trips. SERO staff presented that one-stop reporting (OSR) can cover data collection across multiple programs. Currently, the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program's eTrips software has the capability for OSR, but is presented quite differently from the widely used VESL application used in the SEFHIER program. While eTrips is OSR, it requires the completion of a number of other data fields not required by the SEFHIER program. The eTrips software has been conditionally approved for SEFHIER despite requiring more auto-filled fields than currently allowed for the program, to account for collection of data required by other programs. Technical specifications for the SEFHIER program do allow for auto-filling certain fields (vessel registration number, vessel name, time zone). Vendors have also created "favorites" for some fields.

Motion: In agreement with the Data Collection AP, the Reef Fish AP recommends the Council take whatever necessary action to work with NMFS to revise the SEFHIER program to allow vessels to move within a predefined demarcation line without declaring. If a vessel intends to fish, inside or landward of a predefined demarcation line the requirement to hail out would apply. If seaward of a predefined demarcation line, regardless of the intent to fish, the requirement to hail out would apply.

Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion: Draft Framework Action: Modification to Location Reporting Requirements for For-Hire Vessels

Council staff reviewed the draft framework action to allow an exemption for SEFHIER program participants in the event of VMS equipment failure. The AP discussed the draft document for the first time after its review by the Council, Data Collection AP and Law Enforcement Technical Committee earlier in 2021. Ms. Carly Somerset (Council staff) provided an overview of the draft document's purpose, background information to contextualize the content, and explained the updates that have been made to the document based on recommendations provided by the various APs and Committees that have reviewed it. The AP agreed with the Council's removal of the commercial sector from consideration in the document.

Motion: The Reef Fish AP recommends the Council continue to work on this document as it stands currently, independent of the commercial sector.

Motion carried unanimously.

AP members noted that removal of the commercial sector, and therefore any exemptions for commercial permit holders, poses a problem for dual-permitted vessels. Dual-permitted vessels must comply with the more restrictive regulations, and therefore will have to have an operational VMS onboard at all times regardless of trip type. An AP member commented that removal of the

commercial sector from the document will hopefully help progress the framework action to be finalized quickly. Ms. Somerset explained that the Council modified the document at its last meeting by removing the three-day exemption option under Alternative 2, and replacing it with a 14-day option.

Motion: The Reef Fish AP recommends for the document Framework Action: Modification to Location Reporting Requirements for For-Hire Vessels, in Action 1, Alternative 2, make new added Council sub-option of fourteen days the AP recommended alternative.

Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: The Reef Fish AP recommends for the document Framework Action: Modification to Location Reporting Requirements for For-Hire Vessels, In Action 1, Alternative 3, make option 3c the preferred.

Alternative 3: Create an exemption to the VMS requirement to address equipment failure and set a limit on the number of times a permit holder can request the exemption each calendar year, per vessel:

Option 3c: The permit holder may not request more than three exemptions per vessel per calendar year.

Motion carried unanimously.

An AP member asked if a permit holder has to apply for multiple exemptions if one 14-day exemption isn't enough time to replace or repair the unit. Discussion of the change from a 3-day option to a 14-day option noted current supply chain issues and slower shipping times. A longer exemption period would provide captains with more flexibility and time to replace or repair VMS units, especially if a failure occurs over a weekend or holiday. Ms. Somerset responded that there is currently no regulatory stipulation that prevents permit holders from making sequential exemption requests; however, Dr. Jessica Stephen (SERO) stated that multiple consecutive exemptions from multiple vessels could impact data validation. Another AP member commented that trust between SEFHIER program participants and NMFS needs to remain a priority, and that he didn't appreciate the sentiment of distrust on behalf of NMFS that captains are assumed to be trying to undermine or disregard program requirements. The AP member also requested that dual-permitted vessels be treated as having individual permits so that the exemption for for-hire permits would apply, even if the vessel has another permit with more restrictive VMS requirements.

Discussion: Draft Framework Action: Modifications to Vermilion Snapper Overfishing Limit, Acceptable Biological Catch, and Annual Catch Limits

Council staff reviewed the draft framework action to modify catch limits for vermilion snapper, based on the results of the SEDAR 67 stock assessment. This assessment indicated vermilion snapper is sustainably harvested, with 2015 and 2016 representing the best years of recruitment on record. SEDAR 67 used updated recreational catch and effort information from the MRIP APAIS and FES surveys; the latter results in increases in estimates of recreational catch and effort, and in the uncertainty about those estimates. Staff reviewed the single action in the framework action and its alternatives. AP members questioned the projected ABC values for the stock, and whether those catch limits were plausible. Staff replied that conversions to FES were not uniform by year, and varied by species. Staff added that exceptional recruitment is also contributing to projected increases in catch limits. AP members discussed the recent landings and again noted their skepticism of relying on recreational landings adjusted to MRIP-FES. The AP noted that after the results of SEDAR 42, which recommended a significant increase in red grouper catch limits, commercial fishermen remarked that the catch limits may be too high. An AP member added that given the high dockside value of vermilion snapper, if the fish were available, that commercial fishermen would be catching them. While Alternative 3 in Action 1 is the most conservative alternative currently in the document, several AP members thought that it represented a level of catch that is too optimistic. AP members agreed that their lack of confidence in MRIP-FES should not only be applied to species with depleted stock status indications.

Motion: to recommend in Action 1, the Council create an Alternative 4 to set the ACL at 75% of the ABC (5.45 mp ww) monitored in MRIP-FES.

Motion carried with one in opposition.

Discussion: Updates to Commercial Logbook Program

Dr. Julie Brown (SEFSC) presented an update on the commercial electronic logbook (eLogbook) program. On November 10, 2021 coastal commercial permit holders (including dual-permitted) within the Greater Atlantic Regional Fishery Office (GARFO) may voluntarily submit eLogbooks. Currently, there are no modifications to the commercial reporting the Gulf and catch information will still be required within seven days. However, the SEFSC is interested in exploring developing the commercial eLogbook program in this region, and has proposed moving towards set-level reporting and collecting more precise spatial data. These long-term goals will be developed from stakeholder workshops to help balance reporting requirements with program goals.

The AP expressed appreciation that SEFSC staff had considered the input of the Council's APs and encouraged continued engagement with the industry. An AP member inquired as to whether an announcement had been distributed alerting commercial permit holders about the November 10, 2021 modification to electronic reporting. Dr. Brown indicated that SEFSC had not sent an announcement but that GARFO should have alerted its fleet, since all permit holders would be affected by the change. Another AP member asked if the electronic submission software was ready for testing, inquired about a possible timeline for mandatory submission, and requested information on the availability of a desktop application in addition to mobile software. Dr. Brown stated that the software submission process was live and that a testing application was not available. However, she clarified that anyone holding a commercial permit with GARFO is

encouraged to begin working with the new eLogbook. Currently, eTrips is the only application that allows for dual compliance options between GARFO and the SEFSC. She continued that mandatory reporting would not be implemented for some time, as the SEFSC generally aims for a voluntary period (a minimum of one year) to smooth out any potential issues with the program. The eLogbook is accessible on a desktop via webpage. SEFSC staff indicated that a policy document creating an analogous electronic form of the existing paper form could work through the Council process first before addressing possible additional data collection fields needed to achieve long-term program goals.

Public Comment

Mr. Zachary Istre requested future mandatory reporting for all recreational fishermen in the Gulf so that more accurate data are provided for Gulf fisheries, and asked if his request was feasible. Council staff responded that it is theoretically possible to require recreational mandatory reporting; however, the infrastructure required for this endeavor would require considerable effort and a long-term commitment to allocation of resources. Mr. Istre commented that he anticipated the reporting to be a long-term project, but thought it the only way to gather more accurate data and would be feasible considering currently available technology. He realized the idea may be unfavorable but thought it necessary. AP members commented that everyone wants to see better data but until then, getting the word out about current fisheries data collection applications is beneficial and imperative.

Other Business

Retention of Reef Fish by Captain and Crew

Captain Josh Ellender stated that the captain and crew of for-hire vessels fishing for reef fish cannot retain a recreational bag limit. Capt. Ellender thought that it was unfair to limit these individuals in this manner. Staff clarified that this restriction applied only to red snapper. Other AP members remarked that the original limitation on captain and crew for red snapper was an effort to extend the fishing season. AP members also noted that federally permitted for-hire vessels must adhere to the more restrictive of the state and federal for-hire fishing regulations.

Cooperative Monitoring of Ecosystem Stressors in the Gulf of Mexico

Dr. Brendan Turley (University of Miami) presented ongoing work in the Gulf on cooperative monitoring of ecosystem stressors. This research has been supported by state and federal partners and fishing associations. Marine ecosystems face an increasing number and intensity of stressors, and measurement of these stressors is lacking. Surveys can only cover so much space and time, and at best sample once every couple of months. In this manner, fishermen can help fill gaps in knowledge. An example of fishermen being instrumental in informing the spatial and temporal effects of these stressors is with red tide on the west Florida shelf. Fishermen collaborators reported red tide and other algae while fishing offshore, and provided the locations of these

observations to researchers who could then go and collect samples. In a more hands-on example, fishermen directly assisted scientists by collecting samples over known grouper habitats, thereby filling a gap in knowledge about red tide over those habitats. With respect to red grouper, this work resulted in a less conservative catch limit, reflective of the estimated mortality from red tide. In the future, Dr. Turley's team wants to expand water quality monitoring, build a network of communication among fishermen, integrate additional NOAA and FWC data, track red tide with satellites (remote sensing), and nowcast/forecast hypoxia events.

Leasing Federal Commercial Fishing Permits

Mr. Martin Fisher discussed creating the ability for a federal commercial permit holder to lease a permit to a vessel that does not currently have a federal commercial permit attached. Mr. Fisher noted that a permit cannot be attached to a vessel with a federal commercial permit in the name of another entity.

Motion: The GMFMC's Reef Fish AP recommends that the Council initiate an action to allow the leasing of federal commercial fishery permits from one entity/vessel owner, directly to another entity/vessel owner.

Motion carried with four abstentions.

Modification of the Commercial Gray Triggerfish Trip Limit

Capt. Buddy Guindon discussed increasing the federal commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to between 32 and 40 fish per trip to increase the probability of the commercial sector catching the commercial allocation.

Motion: To raise the commercial triggerfish trip limit to 32-40 fish.

Motion carried unanimously.

Recreational Data Collection Program

Capt. Buddy Guindon discussed the creation of a formal and mandatory recreational data collection program. He thought that a mobile application-based system, such as or similar to iSnapper, may be an appropriate method. Another AP member thought that implementation of such a program may be better facilitated by the Gulf States, and may need to be implemented in stages. Another AP member asked if such a system would replace the current state data collection programs. Capt. Guindon replied that he did not want to see any state data collection program collecting valuable data end.

Motion: To recommend the Council establish a more real time data collection system for the private recreational sector and have it implemented in a mandatory way within the next three years.

Motion carried with one in opposition.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 am eastern time on January 6, 2022.

Meeting Participants

Reef Fish AP Members

Ed Walker, *Chair*
Troy Frady, *Vice Chair*
Brenda Ballard
Charles Bergmann
Jane Black-Lee
Douglass W. Boyd
Steve Buckner
Patrick Cagle
Ronald Chicola
Harold Dauterive
Jason DeLaCruz
Joshua Ellender
Martin Fisher
John Greene, Jr
Keith “Buddy” Guindon

Dylan Hubbard
Chris Jenkins
Kyle Johnson
Gregory Mercurio
John Marquez, Jr
Mike Prasek, Jr

Council Representative

Susan Boggs

Council Staff

Ryan Rindone
John Froeschke
Carrie Simmons
Camila Shireman
Charlotte Schiaffo