

Shrimp Committee (Tab B, No. 8a)

SSC Recommendations on Shrimp Effort Estimation Model

- Mr. Dettloff (Southeast Fisheries Science Center [SEFSC]) presented on a new method for estimating effort in the Gulf shrimp fishery.
- Vessel position data for Gulf shrimp vessels are collected by cellular electronic logbooks (cELBs).
 - New methods continue to use vessel position data to generate effort estimates.
- Effort now scaled to the total fleet.
 - Matching of trip tickets with vessel position data is no longer required.
- Effort estimates under the current and new approaches for the areas monitored for red snapper bycatch are similar.

- The SSC noted that despite some concerns with data collection, it had no issues with the new effort estimation model.

Motion: To test to the extent practicable, given currently available data, the five assumptions underlying the analysis used to estimate fishing effort in offshore waters for the GOM shrimp industry and that those results be brought back to the SSC for consideration.

- 1. ELB devices are capturing all fishing activity.**
- 2. There is no systematic bias in classification of effort from ELB devices .**
- 3. CPUE of vessels with ELBs on board is representative of the total fleet .**
- 4. Spatial distribution of ELB vessels is representative of the total fleet.**
- 5. Reporting of landings is similar between ELB vessels and non-ELB vessels.**

Motion carried without opposition.

Motion: The SSC supports NMFS' continued examination of new technology and its potential acceptance in the industry for passive spatial monitoring in the offshore GOM shrimp industry to aid in meeting the assumptions of the current methods of calculating effort.

Motion carried 21-1 with 3 abstentions and 2 absent.

Motion: The SSC supports consideration of universal adoption, among other levels of coverage, of a passive electronic monitoring system for federally permitted vessels in the GOM shrimp industry.

Motion carried 19-2 with 1 abstention and 2 absent.

Reef Fish Committee (Tab B, No. 8a)

SSC Review and Recommendations for:

1. Scamp / YMG Updated Projections
2. Evaluating Bottom Fishing Seasonal Closures
3. Greater Amberjack Discard Mortality
4. Great Amberjack Count Update
5. Evaluating Wenchman and Mid-Water Snapper Landings

Scamp/YMG Updated Projections within Shallow-Water Grouper Complex

- Dr. Skyler Sagarese (SEFSC) presented updated projections for the Council's shallow-water grouper (SWG) complex, which includes scamp, yellowmouth grouper, black grouper, and yellowfin grouper.
- Scamp and yellowmouth grouper were recently assessed in SEDAR 68, which examined both species together as a complex, and found these species to be healthy.
 - At MSY proxy of $F_{40\%SPR}$, SSB is above MSST, but below MSY
- Dr. Sagarese reviewed updated projection settings for scamp and yellowmouth grouper with a version beginning in 2024, and assuming landings in 2023 will be the same as those from 2022, which were based on the average from 2019 – 2021.

- The SSC discussed options for how to set the OFL and ABC, while retaining all four SWG species within the complex.
 - Dynamic nature of IFQ program may make modifications difficult
 - Break scamp and yellowmouth grouper out of SWG?
- The SSC thought it was most appropriate to address the results of SEDAR 68, and provide an OFL and ABC to the Council for scamp and yellowmouth grouper. The SSC could then discuss how to address black grouper and yellowfin grouper at a subsequent meeting.
- Some SSC members expressed concern about not providing combined OFLs and ABCs for the whole SWG complex, as it is presently managed.

Motion: The SSC moves to accept the updated projections for the SEDAR 68 Gulf of Mexico Scamp and Yellowmouth OA. Accordingly, the SSC recommends that catch level recommendations for OFL and ABC for the period 2024-2026 be set as the yield (million pounds gutted weight; mp gw) at $F_{40\%SPR}$ and ABC as the yield (mp gw) at $0.75 * F_{40\%SPR}$.

Year	OFL (mp gw)	ABC (mp gw)
2024	0.271	0.203
2025	0.263	0.203
2026	0.257	0.203

- *Motion carried 19 – 2, with 3 absent.*

- The SSC will discuss how to address black grouper and yellowfin grouper at a subsequent meeting.
- The SSC determined that it would need recreational and commercial catch for black grouper and yellowfin grouper, dating back to 1986, with recreational catch in MRIP-FES data units.
- These data would then be considered under Tier 3a for establishing an OFL and ABC.
- For discussion, reference periods reflective of those considered in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment, and for the last 10 years (2012 – 2021), could be provided.

Evaluating Bottom Fishing Seasonal Closures in the Recreational Fishery

- Dr. David Chagaris (SSC) provided a presentation titled *Recreational Seasonal Closures: Tradeoffs and Uncertainties due to Species Seasonality and Angler Effort Dynamics*.
- Examined whether a bottom reef fish fishing season for the Gulf private recreational sector would result in conservation gains and expanded fishing opportunities.
- The study was based around two major considerations:
 - 1: What would anglers do if a ‘bottom fishing’ closure was implemented; and,
 - 2: Consider seasonal patterns, because timing matters and some species may be more readily accessible during certain seasons than other species.

- The investigators built a multispecies model to evaluate bottom fishing closures in the Gulf recreational reef fish fishery.
- Multiple models were linked together for the private recreational fleet,
 - Analyzed gag, red snapper, red grouper, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish, and vermilion snapper.
- Dr. Chagaris reviewed two important limitations of the model:
 - 1) can only model closures in addition to existing (2012-2015) species-specific harvest closures, with no catch rate data for an “all open” scenario; and,
 - 2) single-species harvest seasons were fixed, and do not adapt to changes in stock status.

- Effort was quantified as:
 - long-term – effort in each year is predicted as a function of fish abundance in the prior year, summed over all species; and,
 - short-term – some fraction of affected trips are allowed to redistribute to open months.
- The investigators incorporated species seasonality in monthly catch, harvest, and discard rates estimated from 2012-2015.

- Dr. Chagaris noted tradeoffs occur in almost all 16 modeled scenarios, but highlighted the spring versus fall closure on gag and red snapper.
- Therein, affected trips accumulate into months with higher catch rates, causing a net increase in harvest and declines in biomass.
- Next, he noted that closures occurring in late winter and early spring (March and April) were anticipated to successfully reduce discards and improve harvest efficiency. Over the long term this could result in greater SSB.

- Dr. Chagaris noted that results are sensitive to angler response, and timing of any scenario is likely to have disproportionate impacts across all species.
- The SSC completed the discussions with future efforts focusing on the need to incorporate seasonal and regional considerations, and updating effort information due to the changes in the recreational data collection programs.

Greater Amberjack Discard Mortality

- Dr. Kelly Boyle (University of New Orleans) presented the results of a post-release mortality study on Gulf greater amberjack (GAJ).
- Data were collected on release condition, how quickly the fish was able to descend on its own, depth, swim patterns, and tagging methodology (i.e., internal versus external placement).
- Depredation was not incorporated as predation events were not visually captured.
- Overall survivorship was calculated at 85%.

- No signs of barotrauma were observed during the study and the use of descending devices did not suggest an increase in post-release mortality.
- The overall post-release mortality estimates are similar to the scenarios used in the stock assessment.
- The higher mortality rates observed for legal-sized fish may be an area to be explored further.

Great Amberjack Count Update

- Dr. Sean Powers (SSC) and Dr. Mark Albins (Dauphin Island Sea Lab) provided an update on the *GAJ Count*, a project funded by the US Congress.
- Different than the *Great Red Snapper Count* (GRSC) project, this effort does account for/collaborate with NMFS data.
- Sampling efforts include habitat characterization, video and acoustic data collection, environmental DNA (eDNA) technology, and calibration to understand potential biases with each data collection method.

- Currently at the calibration and sampling design stage.
- Goal is to have even dispersion of conventional tags across all sites.
- Preliminary video and acoustic results indicate the presence of many mixed schools of *Seriola* spp. (GAJ, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish) at all locations.
- Habitat synthesis includes a list of artificial reefs and scalable maps.
 - Will be used to extrapolate a habitat-specific GAJ abundance estimate.
- The project is expected to be completed by April/May 2025 and will undergo a peer-review similar to the GRSC.

Evaluating Wenchman and Mid-Water Snapper Landings

- John Mareska (ALDNR) and Donna Bellais (GSMFC), presented historical wenchman state trawl landings.
- Previously, the SSC recommended removing wenchman from the mid-water snapper complex, but could not set an OFL without first determining the magnitude of historical trawl landings.
- Mr. Mareska provided abundance and length composition data from fishery-independent surveys, age composition, and reviewed commercial harvest to refine reference years for an OFL.

- Wenchman appears to be caught more so as bycatch to butterflyfish, and very infrequently otherwise, which can cause landings to reach or exceed the ACL for the mid-water snapper complex.
- SSC members agreed that the data available are unreliable for establishing catch limits for wenchman.
- Based on the data deficiencies (erratic landings, large time period averages with large standard deviations), life history unknowns, and outstanding questions as to the large increase in wenchman landed in 2020 and 2021, some SSC members contemplated if wenchman should be considered as an ecosystem component species, or if it should be removed from the FMP.

- The Council would need to consider how or if to manage wenchman if there is not enough reliable data to set an OFL or ABC.
- Once the Council decision is made, the SSC could reconvene to look at the landings for the remaining species in the complex.
- The SSC reiterated their previous motion and added language regarding the lack of data.

Motion: The SSC reiterates their previous recommendation to the Council that GOM wenchman be removed from the mid-water snapper complex. However, due to the commercial catch data confidentiality limits, and the near absence of recreational landings available to the SSC, the SSC currently cannot recommend catch advice for GOM wenchman.

Motion carried without opposition.

Sustainable Fisheries Committee (Tab B, No. 8a)

SSC Report on Allocation Approaches Presentation

- Dr. John Ward gave a presentation on an alternative allocation approach based on a model that could integrate economic, social, biological, and ecological variables.
- He reviewed the assumptions and steps to consider in the proposed modeling approach, including a surplus production model and derived biomass and effort levels.
- He discussed:
 - 1) interactions between ecological and human dimensions and considered the effects of these interactions on markets; and,
 - 2) various scenarios including open access and fisheries managed with an ACL and an IFQ program.

- The SSC asked whether either approach proposed could be used to assist in allocating resources between the recreational and commercial sectors. Dr. Ward replied that it would depend on the manner in which the different user groups are specified in the function to maximize.
- It was noted that the bioeconomic simulation he presented could help determine optimal allocation of fishery resources.
- The SSC thought more information was needed to develop a clear understanding of the approach presented, including model documentation .