

**Standing, Reef Fish, and Socioeconomic SSC
and
GMFMC Independent Consultants
Review of *The Great Red Snapper Count*
March 30 – April 2, 2021**

Council Statement regarding Independent Peer-review

The Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) Fishery Management Council (Council) would like to clarify the nature of the independent peer-review being conducted at this meeting. At its January 2021 meeting, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) made a motion to have independent reviewers assist with their peer-review of the Great Red Snapper Count (GRSC), as the relevant results of this study would be incorporated into a red snapper interim analysis. Thus, this meeting has two distinct components: the first is the peer-review of the GRSC; and the second is the formal SSC meeting to evaluate the interim analysis completed by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). A number of SSC members have participated in the development of the GRSC. Under National Standard 2, which addresses formal peer-review, these SSC members have been asked to abstain from any motions and voting regarding whether the absolute abundance estimate from the GRSC, and its variance, is reliable and consistent with input data and population biological characteristics for red snapper in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. The peer-review evaluation of the GRSC will thus be limited to the SSC members not directly involved in the GRSC, and the three independent reviewers contracted by the Council. Once this evaluation is complete, the second part of the meeting will serve as the formal SSC meeting, during which the analyses conducted by the SEFSC for the red snapper interim analysis will be discussed. During this second portion of the meeting, the SSC members who participated in the GRSC are again asked to abstain from any motions and voting on whether the analyses represent the best scientific information available (BSIA) and/or are suitable for use in generating management advice, in keeping with historical SSC practices regarding the evaluation of one's own work. After the deliberation of the BSIA determination, these SSC members that served as GRSC investigators are asked to participate thereafter in any motions regarding recommended catch levels to the Council.