

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



December 2022

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina, December 5-9, 2022. Below is a summary of salient discussions.

Commercial Electronic Logbook Amendment

This amendment is being developed jointly with the Gulf Council to require commercial logbooks be submitted via electronic reporting forms instead of the currently used paper-based forms for the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper, Atlantic Dolphin Wahoo, Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Coastal Migratory Pelagics, and Gulf Reef Fish Fishery management plans. The Council reviewed progress on the amendment, a revised timeline, and input from advisory panels that met in fall 2022. The South Atlantic and Gulf Councils will consider approving this amendment for public hearings in March and April 2023, respectively.

Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule Amendment

The Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule Amendment revises the ABC Control Rule for the Dolphin Wahoo, Golden Crab, and Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plans and establishes criteria and processes for the Council to phase in ABC changes and carry over unused portions of an annual catch limit in specific situations. The Council approved the amendment for submission to NMFS.

Snapper Grouper Amendments and Projects

Discard Mortality Reduction & Red Snapper Catch Levels (Regulatory Amendment 35)

Regulatory Amendment 35 was initiated to revise red snapper catch levels to be based on the most recent acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations from the SSC and to reduce dead discards of snapper grouper species in response to concerns over impacts of dead discards on allowable catches of snapper grouper species, most notably red snapper.

The Council selected a preferred alternative for adjusting red snapper catch levels (ABC=ACL). An action that would have prohibited use of electrically or hydraulically powered reels to fish recreationally for snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic was removed from consideration. The Council retained an action that proposes to require use of single-hook rigs in the recreational snapper grouper fishery. It was clarified that the action would prohibit multiple separate hooks

for the recreational sector, the existing circle hook regulations would continue to apply, and fishing for bait using sabiki rigs would not be affected.

The Council approved the amendment for public hearings (6 in-person and 1 webinar) to be held in January 2023.

Best Fishing Practices (BFP) Outreach

During its September 2022 meeting, the Council requested an outreach campaign be included as an appendix to Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 35 to help improve release survivorship in the recreational fishery by increasing the overall use of BFP and improving stakeholder awareness of the BFP regulations currently in place. Staff presented a proposed plan, including the addition of a BFP Outreach Specialist to compliment current efforts and continuation of support for the Citizen Science Project Coordinator. The Council supported including the expanded education and outreach plan as an appendix in Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 35 and authorized the immediate implementation of the actionable items within the plan.

Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation Update

The Council has contracted Blue Matter Science to conduct a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to explore long-term management strategies for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. Council staff, the Snapper Grouper AP Chair, and the SSC Chair provided updates and comments based on presentations by the contractors and subsequent discussions at the most recent AP and SSC meetings. The Council requested an in-person presentation during the March meeting with enough time extended discussion.

Private Recreational Permitting (Amendment 46)

Amendment 46 considers the establishment of a private recreational permit for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The Council received feedback from its Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting Advisory Panel and the joint workgroup to address Section 102 of the Modern Fish Act. The Council provided guidance on options to include for scoping and removed consideration of a reporting requirement. Scoping will be conducted via webinar ahead of the March 2023 Council meeting.

Snowy Grouper (Amendment 51), Golden and Blueline Tilefish (Amendment 52) and Gag (Amendment 53)

The Council approved Amendment 51 for submission to NMFS. The amendment proposes a reduction in catch levels for snowy grouper, revises sector allocations, and modifies recreational accountability measures. The amendment also shortens the annual recreational season from May-August to May-June.

The Council approved Amendment 52 for submission to NMFS. Amendment 52 considers an increase in catch levels for golden tilefish and proposes delaying onset of commercial harvest of golden tilefish with longline gear by two weeks to avoid oversupplying the market in the first part of January and extending the harvest into the Lenten season when prices tend to be relatively high. The amendment also proposes a reduction in the recreational bag limit of blueline tilefish from 3 to 2 fish per person per day, prohibits retention of the blueline tilefish bag limit by

captain and crew, and modifies recreational accountability measures for both golden tilefish and blueline tilefish. The Council removed consideration of modification to the recreational season for blueline tilefish.

The Council removed consideration of a spawning season closure modification for gag and black grouper in Amendment 53. The Council provided guidance on vessel limit alternatives and prohibiting retention of gag and black grouper by captain and crew. Public hearings for Amendment 53 are being held in January via webinar.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendments and Projects

Gulf King Mackerel (Amendment 33)

At their October meeting, the Gulf Council passed a motion to stop work on Amendment 33. Additionally, the Gulf Council recommended additional modifications to CMP Fishery Management Plan Objectives. Both councils must concur on the goals and objectives of the CMP FMP before any modifications can be adopted. The Council agreed that it was important to continue discussing the CMP FMP objectives but did not want to finalize anything until port meetings had been completed (see below).

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel

At the September 2022 meeting, the Council requested the SEFSC rerun the SEDAR 78 assessment model with new landings to address uncertainty with MRIP estimate in the terminal year. The SSC reviewed the changes at their October 2022 meeting. Additionally, in September 2022, the Council requested staff apply the allocation decision tool to the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery, considering both sector and regional commercial allocations. Staff explained that because catch level recommendations were not provided following the October 2022 SSC meeting, the Atlantic Spanish mackerel ACL remained in MRIP CHTS, whereas the data that need to be used in the allocation decision tool are in MRIP FES. Therefore, the Council chose to wait to discuss the allocation decision tool once catch level recommendations are available.

The Council requested that the SSC provide catch level recommendations for Spanish mackerel at their April 2023 meeting, either from the updated assessment or using a data-limited approach.

False Albacore/Little Tunny

Staff presented a white paper examining little tunny with respect to the Magnuson-Stevens Act criteria for conservation and management. Based on the information presented, the Council did not wish to consider adding little tunny to the management unit at this time. Instead, the Council directed staff to develop a fishery performance report for the species (including a fishery overview) every three years.

Port Meetings

During their October 2022 meeting, the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel requested the Council conduct port meetings to gain a comprehensive understanding of the commercial and recreational king and Spanish mackerel fisheries to improve management efforts for these fisheries. The Council directed staff to begin developing a plan for conducting the meetings and include other Councils (Gulf, Mid-Atlantic, and New England) and the ASMFC in planning and discussion. A draft plan will be reviewed by the Council at their March 2023 meeting.

Dolphin Wahoo Amendments and Projects

The Council received a presentation on the SEFSC-led management strategy evaluation (MSE) for dolphin. Several stakeholder workshops have been held with more scheduled for January 2023. The Council directed staff to delay discussion of Regulatory Amendment 3 (Minimum Size Limit and Recreational Retention Limits for Dolphin) until June 2023, pending the completion of the stakeholder workshops. The Council also directed staff to delay discussion of an amendment to modify pelagic longline measures in the dolphin wahoo fishery until after the completion of the MSE in mid-2024.