

**Reef Fish Committee Report  
January 30, 2018  
John Greene – Chair**

The agenda was approved with the addition of items under Other Business. The minutes of the October 3, 2017 Committee meeting were approved as written.

**Review of Reef Fish Landings (Tab B, No. 4)**

NMFS staff reviewed preliminary reef fish landings for 2017. Commercial landings of IFQ stocks were all below their respective ACLs, with red grouper, gag, and shallow-water grouper aggregate landings at just 36% to 41% of their ACLs. For non-IFQ stocks, gray triggerfish and greater amberjack had quota closures on November 17 and June 20, respectively. Both of these stocks were under reduced ACLs due to overages in the previous year. However, both closed below their quotas in 2017, so there will be no overage adjustments in 2018.

Preliminary recreational landings are based on MRIP/MRFSS and headboat landings from January 1 through October 31, 2017 (Waves 1-5), LA Creel landings from January 1 through December 31, 2017, and TPWD data for 2017 are through May 14, 2017 (the low-use season) at this time. Gray triggerfish and greater amberjack were subject to overage adjustments and closed on January 1 and March 24, respectively. Recreational landings for each stock exceeded its adjusted ACL by 137% and 142%, respectively. For gag and red grouper, landings were just 21% and 24% of the respective ACLs.

For recreational red snapper, the for-hire component's landings have been below both the ACL and ACT from 2015 through 2017. The private angling component exceeded its ACT but was below its ACL in 2015. For 2016 and 2017, both the ACT and ACL were exceeded. In 2017, the private angling landings were 213% of the 170% of the ACL, respectively.

Committee members discussed the timing of the recreational landings data. Final landings are expected by April. NMFS anticipates that the for-hire component will get a longer red snapper season in 2018 since this component of the recreational sector has been below its ACT.

**Ad Hoc Private Recreational Red Snapper AP summary (Tab B, No. 5)**

Staff provided a summary of the Ad Hoc Red Snapper Private Angler Advisory Panel meeting held January 18, 2018, in Tampa, Florida. The Committee reviewed the AP summary and discussed their recommendation to continue investigating the impacts of illegal red snapper fishing from foreign vessels. The Committee discussed the magnitude of the removals. Dr. Porch stated that the SEFSC has provided some review of the methods used to estimate illegal harvest and determined that the methodology used to estimate illegal harvest is reasonable. He supports continued dialog about this problem including further discussion to determine if it is appropriate to consider incorporating these removals in future stock assessments.

## **State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper (Tab B, No. 6)**

Staff reviewed the actions and provided the recommendations from the Law Enforcement Committee and Ad Hoc Red Snapper Private Angler AP. Dr. Farmer presented an approach to estimate red snapper biomass off each state. The approach will be used in one of the alternatives for allocating the red snapper quota among the states. Dr. Farmer discussed data challenges with using recreational trips as an allocation metric. Staff presented the decision tool for examining the various allocation alternatives and the SSC comments were provided.

Staff noted the data issues with using 2010 landings in the historical landings time series and the Committee passed the following motion.

**The Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 2, to make Alternative 4, Option 4b the preferred.**

**Alternative 4: In calculating state apportionments under Action 2, exclude from the selected time series, as appropriate:**

**Option 4b: 2010 landings.**

Motion passed with one opposed.

The alternative including biomass and recreational trips does not specify which years to use for trips. The Committee then passed the following motion.

**The Committee recommends and I so move, in Alternative 6, to evaluate recreational trips utilizing the range of years [from Alternatives 2 and 3]:**

**Alternative 6:** Establish an allocation of the recreational sector ACL that may be used for state management programs by apportioning the private angling ACL and federal for-hire ACL among the states based on spatial abundance of red snapper biomass and recreational trips using:

**Option 6a:** 25% biomass, 75% trips.

**Option 6b:** 50% biomass, 50% trips.

**Option 6c:** 75% biomass, 25% trips.

**Range of years:**

**Option 2a:** 1986-2015.

**Option 2d:** 50% of average historical landings [trips] for the years 1986-2015 and 50% of average historical landings [trips] for the years 2006-2015.

**Option 3a:** 1986-2009.

**Option 3d:** 50% of average historical landings [trips] for the years 1986-2009 and 50% of average historical landings [trips] for the years 2006-2009.

Motion passed by a vote of 8 to 6.

Staff then reviewed the individual state amendments. Staff compiled a list of the management measures included in the states' responses to the Council's letter regarding expanded delegation and requests guidance on the delegation alternatives.

#### **Update on Implementation of the Generic For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment (Tab B, No. 7)**

Dr. Nick Farmer (SERO) provided an update on the Southeast For-Hire Implementation Team that is tasked with developing the framework to implement electronic reporting in the southeast region. He emphasized that ACCSP has been selected as the data-housing provider and that the remaining aspects of the program are under active development. The remaining details of the implementation process will be completed in the coming months, but the implementation timeline has not been finalized.

#### **Analysis of Red Grouper Indices of Abundance (Tab B, No. 11b)**

The previous red grouper assessment (SEDAR 42) provided indices of abundance through 2013. The SSC representative, Dr. Lorenzen, reviewed a presentation provided to the SSC by NMFS that updated the indices through 2016 or 2017, depending upon the index. The updated indices showed that there was a peak in 2013 and a decline in the indices in subsequent years, with the indices for 2016 at about half of 2013. It's possible that the decline could have been triggered by a red tide event in 2014, but recruitment trends have shown cycles of peaks and valleys since the 1990s. Without more information that could be provided by a stock assessment, the SSC could make no conclusions about the cause of the decline and had no scientific basis to make any recommendation to the Council. Dr. Crabtree noted that under authority he will be granted when Amendment 36A is implemented, a portion of the commercial IFQ quota could be withheld at the beginning of the year while awaiting assessment results. The next red grouper assessment will be conducted in 2018 with final results available by February 2019.

#### **Amendment 41 – Allocation-based Management for Federally Permitted Charter Vessels (Tab B, No. 8a,b,c)**

Staff gave an overview presentation of the actions in Amendment 41 and noted current Council and AP preferred alternatives. The Committee then made the following motions:

**The Committee recommends and I so move, to add a new Action 5.4 – Reclamation of Latent Shares.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

The Committee noted how setting a share cap in Action 9 would interact with the redistribution of shares in the adaptive management process. The Committee then requested that staff prepare some options for X% in Alternative 3 of Action 9.

The Committee discussed the potential for discrepancies in average fish weights from dockside sampling that would be used for converting pounds to number of fish. The Committee then made the following motion:

**The Committee recommends and I so move, to add a new Action X - Units of Measure for Quota Distribution and Reporting.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

Dr. Stephen discussed the current Action 4 in Amendment 42, which addresses an endorsement or permit for landings history vessels and the need for a similar action in Amendment 41. The Committee then requested that staff draft a similar action for inclusion in Amendment 41.

The Committee discussed their previous selection of a preferred alternative for Action 6, given that Action 6 was not applicable under the current preferred PFQ program. The Committee requested staff remove the preferred alternative notation for future drafts, and no objection was raised.

#### **Amendment 42 – Reef Fish Management for Headboat Survey Vessels (Tab B, No. 9a,b,c)**

Staff gave a presentation on the management actions and alternatives included in the amendment. The presentation highlighted the revisions requested by the Council during the October meeting. Committee members noted that the Council could select preferred alternatives during full Council.

#### **NMFS Response Regarding Referendum Requirements for Auctions**

Dr. Crabtree informed the Committee that NOAA General Counsel has determined that a referendum would not be required to consider the distribution of red snapper IFQ shares above 4.65 million pounds through an auction. Dr. Crabtree will provide a letter to the Council including this determination.

#### **SSC Summary Reports (Tab B, No. 11a,b)**

Dr. Lorenzen summarized SSC activities that were not reviewed under other agenda items. A scheduled SSC meeting in September 2017 was cancelled due to Hurricane Irma. As a result, two SSC meetings held between the October and January Council meetings.

At a webinar on October 31, 2017, the SSC:

- Discussed recent legislative approaches to recreational red snapper management.
- SEDAR Activities
- A comparison of assessment results using Stock Synthesis 3 vs. the Data Limited Methods Toolkit for gray triggerfish and greater amberjack..
- The SSC reviewed a draft framework action to modify the ACT for red snapper federal for-

hire and private angling components and did not recommend modifications.

At a January 9-10, 2018, meeting the SSC:

- Reviewed a survey on deep seas coral and a public hearing draft of Coral Amendment 9 to consider establishing additional HAPCs to protect deep-sea corals. This amendment will be reviewed by the new Coral Committee and public hearings will be postponed by one Council meeting.
- Reviewed two presentations related to the grouper/tilefish IFQ program 5-year review. The first presentation was on the effect of the IFQ program on improving safety at sea. The second presentation summarized three stakeholder surveys. The SSC will discuss these and the 5-year review in greater detail at the next SSC meeting.
- Reviewed an options paper for a status determination criteria and optimum yield amendment. For MSY proxies, the SSC recommended that a wider range of alternatives be provided. For OY, the SSC felt that using maximum economic yield (MEY) made sense for large scale commercial fishing, but not for recreational fishing. The SSC also felt that using a fixed OY buffer, such as the yield at 75% of  $F_{MSY}$  did not explicitly account for social and economic considerations and could be an uncertain buffer, given uncertainties about the stock.
- Reviewed SEDAR activities.
- Reviewed two summaries of work under the RESTORE Act Science Program to identify and characterize reef fish spawning aggregations in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Reviewed a presentation on the use of management strategy evaluation to evaluate the performance of the Council's ABC control rule to events that cause fluctuation in the stock, such as the 2005 red tide event's impact on red grouper. In a series of 25-year simulations, the analysis found that the Council's existing status quo reactive approach performed better than a fixed interval approach.

### **Presentation - Greater Amberjack Commercial Fishing Year and Trip Limits, and Recreational Vessel Limits and Split Quotas (Tab B, No. 12)**

Staff presented the potential options to modify recreational and commercial management measures for greater amberjack, reviewed recent management actions, and summarized analyses completed for four potential alternatives that were requested at the October 2017 meeting. Staff described options to modify recreational bag limits, implement a recreational split quota, and measures to modify the commercial fishing year and trip limits. The Committee discussed the merits of these options and directed staff to continue developing these management actions for review at a future meeting.

### **Other Business – Historical captain charter vessel/headboat reef fish permits**

When the for-hire vessel permit moratorium was created, a historical captain endorsement was also created for captains who were long-time participants, but did not own the boats they operated. There are currently 32 reef fish for-hire permits with historical captain endorsements. A Committee member asked the Council to consider converting these endorsements to fully transferable for-hire vessel permits in order to allow the operator greater flexibility. Staff noted

that there are similar endorsements for coastal migratory pelagic vessel permits.

**The Committee recommends and I so move: To instruct staff to begin development of an action in the appropriate document that considers removing the historical captain endorsement to reef fish and CMP permits and allow those permits to be fully transferable.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

**Other Business – Red snapper research review off Alabama**

Kevin Anson notified the Committee that Alabama Department of Marine Resources will be hosting a workshop to review red snapper research conducted off Alabama during the last 10 years. The workshop will be held on March 22 in Mobile. If anyone is interested but cannot make it in person, the meeting will be streamed over the internet by the GSMFC.

Madam chair, this concludes my report.