

**Reef Fish Committee Report
August 24, 2021
Ms. Martha Guyas – Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda with the addition of the SEDAR 74 Stock ID process to other business (**Tab B, No. 1**), and the minutes (**Tab B, No. 2**) from the June 2021 meeting were approved as written.

Review of Reef Fish Landings (Tab B, No. 4a) and Review of Reef Fish ACL Figures (Tab B, No. 4b)

Ms. Kelli O'Donnell (NMFS Southeast Regional Office [SERO]) reviewed Gulf reef fish landings so far in 2021. Red grouper recreational landings for waves 1 and 2 are greater than the average for the last three years. Gray triggerfish commercial landings are below the average for the last three years; the commercial sector did not have a quota closure in 2019 or 2020. Greater amberjack, gray snapper, lane snapper, vermilion snapper, and yellowtail snapper commercial landings follow a similar pattern as gray triggerfish. Ms. O'Donnell stated that additional recreational landings would be available at the October 2021 Council meeting.

Mr. Andy Strelcheck (SERO Regional Administrator) noted that quota closures are expected for recreational red grouper and gray triggerfish, pending verification of recreational catch and effort data from wave 3 from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). A Committee member asked for a presentation at a future Council meeting by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) detailing the data imputation methods used to account for gaps in sample coverage during 2020 due to COVID-19. Another Committee member asked whether the five Gulf states had resumed in-person dockside angler intercepts, to which the state directors replied that they had all resumed normal operations.

Draft Framework Action: Modification of Gulf of Mexico Red Grouper Catch Limits (Tab B, No. 5)

Dr. Jim Nance (Scientific and Statistical Committee [SSC] Chair) reviewed the SSC's discussion of the SEFSC presentation of red grouper interim analysis (IA) in August 2021. Dr. Nance explained that the SEFSC has begun exploring discrepancies between modeled weight estimates and those reported in the SERO Annual Catch Limit (ACL) Monitoring Dataset in the recreational landings. The stock assessment model has underestimated red grouper mean weight landed by the recreational sector. The SEFSC employed a mean weight scalar to produce assessment-adjusted weights. With the weight adjustment, the overfishing limit (OFL) would increase from 4.66 million pounds (mp) gutted weight (gw) to 5.99 mp gw. The SSC recommended the new mean weight estimation methodology to estimate the weight of recreationally caught red grouper.

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The SEFSC found it to be advantageous to inform new projections for red grouper through an index-based harvest control rather than the forecasted index generated based on SEDAR 61. The SEFSC proposed the NMFS Bottom Longline Survey (BLL) as the index of abundance, noting that the index estimates had been spatially adjusted in 2020 due to reduced sampling effort due to COVID-19. The approach of using an index-based harvest control rule considers a buffer in observed and reference index value using a three- or five-year moving average.

The SSC recognized that an average using more years of data provides more stability in catch advice, but that a shorter temporal focus would allow for a more ‘real time’ approach to management. Given the annual red grouper IA report from the SEFSC, using a shorter time series could more accurately address management objectives for red grouper. The SSC recommended an OFL of 5.99 mp gw and an acceptable biological catch (ABC) of 4.96 mp gw.

Ms. Bosarge asked how in-depth the presentation and discussion the SSC had regarding the new mean weight estimation methodology. Dr. Nance replied that the modeled weight estimates were underestimated, and so the SSC found that multiplication by a scalar would correct for that. Ms. Bosarge commented that it was possible MRIP has been overestimating weight, rather than the modeled weight estimates being underestimated. Dr. Porch stated that this approach accommodates the fact that as the population grows, the average weight should increase. If fixed weights are used, population growth is not considered.

Dr. Freeman presented draft purpose and need statements, followed by a draft action to modify the OFL, ABC, ACLs, and annual catch targets (ACTs) for red grouper. He commented that all of the values from Alternative 2 would be an increase from Alternative 1 of 700,000 pounds gutted weight.

Ms. Bosarge asked about the timeline for implementation of Amendment 53 and this framework action. Mr. Strelcheck stated that Amendment 53 would need to be in place for sector allocations before implementation of the draft framework action. He noted that the holdback provision requires, by June 1, release of any excess quota that had been held back; he commented that quota release would be anticipated by late spring or early summer 2022. Ms. Guyas asked if it was possible for Amendment 53 and the draft framework action to be implemented together. Ms. Levy stated that, prior to January 1, 2022, the agency would be required to hold back quota needed for implementation of Amendment 53, even if both documents are implemented relatively close to one another in 2022. Ms. Guyas noted the standing request for an updated IA every January and asked how an updated IA in January 2022 would be incorporated into management with Amendment 53 and the draft framework action. Dr. Simmons stated that an updated IA could be considered a ‘health check’ by the SSC. Dr. Porch recognized that fishermen have commented on red grouper stocks increasing, but he also noted the uncertainty of the impacts from the 2021 red tide event, and that the NMFS BLL survey would be completed this fall and should provide information on the impacts of the recent red tide event.

Mr. Diaz stated that, for catch advice, the Council should rely on the SSC’s recommendation. Mr. Gill replied that it was premature to selected a preferred, given that there is no analysis in the draft framework action.

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The Committee recommends, and I so move, in **Action 1**, to make **Alternative 2** the preferred.

Alternative 2: Modify the red grouper OFL, ABC, ACLs, and ACTs based on the recommendation of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), as determined from the 2021 red grouper stock analyses provided by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and using the sector allocations as well as the ACL and ACT buffers for red grouper set forth in Reef Fish Amendment 53.

OFL	ABC	Total ACL	Comm ACL	Rec ACL	Comm ACT/Quota	Rec ACT
5.99	4.96	4.96	2.94	2.02	2.79	1.84

* Values are in millions of pounds, gutted weight.

Motion carried with one opposed.

Mr. Anson inquired about the IA being used as a ‘health check’ rather than a management tool. He stated that it would be helpful to have additional conversation on how to use an IA. Dr. Simmons noted that a draft IA schedule was reviewed by the SSC during its August meeting, and that staffs from the Council and SERO should continue to work on a schedule for requesting, and potential automation of catch advice from, the IAs in the future. Mr. Strelcheck agreed that an automated process would be ideal for implementing catch advice from IAs.

Presentation on Greater Amberjack Calibrated Landings and Catch Limits, and Proposed Management Alternatives (Tab B, No. 6)

This item will be reviewed at a subsequent Reef Fish Committee meeting.

Discussion of Implementation of the DESCEND Act of 2020 (Tab B, No. 7)

Mr. Peter Hood (SERO) reviewed the rules for practices and equipment required for reducing the post-release mortality rate of fish through the implementation of the DESCEND Act of 2020 (DESCEND Act). The implementation of regulations and definitions of the terms in the DESCEND Act are based on feedback provided by the Gulf Council’s policy document on venting and descending devices, and additional feedback will be collected before final rulemaking to implement the measures detailed in the DESCEND Act in January 2022. The DESCEND Act will sunset in January 2026. A Committee member asked about how the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation funding will be made available to help fishermen get access to the requisite venting and descending devices, and how outreach for the DESCEND Act would be facilitated. Mr. Dave Donaldson (Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission) replied that the *Return ‘Em Right* program is designed to facilitate both the distribution of venting and descending devices, and the outreach and education associated with the new regulations in the

DESCEND Act. Council staff added that targeted outreach will be sent to for-hire operators to educate them on the requirements of the DESCEND Act, including the tools they will need to comply, in September 2021. The same outreach will be sent to private recreational anglers by September 2022.

A Committee member asked how the regulations would apply to spearfishers. NOAA General Counsel replied that the DESCEND Act does not distinguish between type of fishing gear used by anglers, and said that all vessels fishing for reef fish in the Gulf of Mexico will be required to possess aboard the requisite venting and descending equipment. A Committee member noted that a report on research projects on descending devices funded through RESTORE would be informative to the Council in the future. The Committee also heard from Dr. Greg Stunz on a component study of the Great Red Snapper Count (GRSC) project which examined release mortality; the results of this component of the GRSC will be shared with the SSC and the Council at a later date.

Updates of 2021 Red Snapper State Management Programs (Tab B, No. 8)

Mr. Robin Riechers with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department reported on the private angling component's fishing for red snapper in Texas. The state-water season for private recreational anglers and state-water guides started on January 1, followed by the opening of federal waters off Texas on June 1 through August 4. At present, Texas anglers have landed 30,730 fish, equivalent to approximately 226,000 lbs or 81.5% of the Texas ACL.

Mr. Chris Schieble with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries detailed the differences in the data collected between 2020 and 2021 by LA Creel, with intercepts in 2021 thought to be somewhat lower than in 2020 due to COVID-19 precautions by anglers. Generally, fishing effort was observed to be higher in 2020 than in 2021. The 2021 private angling season off Louisiana began on May 28, and runs on weekends only (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, including the Mondays of Memorial Day and Labor Day). Landings to date are approximately 556,000 lbs (about 66.8% of the Louisiana ACL), and the Louisiana season is expected to close after Labor Day to examine the remaining proportion of the Louisiana ACL. A Committee member asked about the accounting of unpermitted anglers, to which Mr. Schieble replied that compliance estimates are adjusted as unpermitted anglers are intercepted. Another Committee member asked about the reporting requirements for anglers under LA Creel, to which Mr. Schieble replied that compliance was not mandatory.

General Joe Spraggins from the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources reported on the private angling fishing season for Mississippi, which initially opened on May 28 for 7 days/week, before closing on July 5, 2021. The season was re-opened on August 5, 2021, and closed on August 8, 2021. Again, the season was re-opened August 13, 2021 for 7 days a week, and to date, the season has been open for 54 days. Reporting through Tails 'N Scales is mandatory, with greater than 95% compliance observed by law enforcement. To date, Mississippi has landed approximately 110,000 lbs, or approximately 80.6% of its ACL. A Committee member noted that the largest recorded effort during the 2021 season was 256 vessels per day.

Mr. Kevin Anson from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources reported on the private angling fishing season for Alabama, which opened on May 28 for four-day weekends only (Friday – Monday). Landings are updated weekly on the Department’s website. Alabama’s Snapper Check is mandatory for red snapper, and now also for gray triggerfish and greater amberjack. Thus far in 2021, Alabama private anglers have landed approximately 845,000 lbs, or about 75% of the Alabama ACL. Landings thus far lag behind the pace of landings observed in 2019 and 2020. Mr. Anson briefly reviewed the methods by which landings are recorded and validated.

Ms. Martha Guyas from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission reported on the private angling fishing season for Florida, which opened on June 4 and closed on July 28, for a 55-day season. Preliminarily, for June, Florida estimates its private anglers harvested just under 1,200,000 lbs. In the last two years, Florida has used a season duration projection model to estimate its total landings based on the rate of landings data collected thus far, and expects to be under its state ACL once landings are finalized. If enough of the ACL remains, Florida will examine reopening the fishing season for private anglers in the fall.

A Committee member asked about observations of lower catch rates, combined with reports from some anglers of difficulty in finding red snapper. Ms. Guyas replied that bad weather days were reported, and that landings per day typically do trail off as the season progresses. Mr. Anson reported seeing similar trends in Alabama. Another Committee member asked whether reporting was mandatory in Florida, to which Ms. Guyas replied that it was not. She added that Florida’s dockside intercepts are combined with a mail survey to estimate landings and effort, respectively.

Discussion of Final Document – Framework Action: Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper Recreational Data Calibration and Recreational Catch Limits (Tab B, No. 9)

In its review of the framework action as using the best scientific information available, the SEFSC provided three comments for edits to be made to the document; staff quickly addressed the first and third comments. However, the second comment referred to the implementation date established in Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1, stating that not implementing Preferred Alternative 2 until January 1, 2023, would continue to allow catch overages for the private angling component of the recreational sector. The SEFSC recommended revising the implementation date for Preferred Alternative 2 to January 1, 2022. Because this edit is outside the scope of the Council’s stated intent during discussions about its selection of a preferred alternative, the interdisciplinary planning team could not address the edit without additional input from the Council. Currently, with an implementation date of January 1, 2023, the SEFSC and NMFS have determined that Preferred Alternative 2 is “inconsistent with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).”

A Committee member asked to clarify the SSC’s position regarding the calibration ratios detailed in Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1. The Committee member proffered that although the SSC found the calibration ratios to be appropriate for the purpose of monitoring the catch limits, that to say the calibration ratios were recommended by the SSC is not accurate. To better

reflect the record as established during the August 2020 SSC meeting, staff detailed changes to the language in two places in the document. The Committee found these changes to be acceptable.

Council staff identified the portions of the memo (Tab B, No. 9b) detailing the issue of the implementation date in Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1. Mr. Strelcheck asked that more rationale be added to the document about why the Council selected the January 1, 2023, implementation date. He noted that NMFS recommends changing the implementation date to January 1, 2022, or to as soon as practical to ensure that the framework action is consistent with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. A Committee member noted that MRIP has a historically poor record of data collection in small states, including Mississippi and Alabama. He noted that the implementation date of January 1, 2023, was proposed to allow additional time for the Gulf states to work with the NOAA Office of Science and Technology (OST) to resolve outstanding data issues. Another Committee member agreed, noting that the data generated by MRIP's Fishing Effort Survey (FES) are thought by some to overestimate the harvest of recreational red snapper in the Gulf. Further, the Committee member noted that the absolute abundance estimate of red snapper from the GRSC, specifically the cryptic biomass found over the uncharacterized bottom has been under-surveyed in federal fishery-independent sampling programs. The Committee member contended that the calibration ratios do not represent the best scientific information available because an appropriate review of the data now available has not been conducted; further review of these new data are expected to result in more accurate calibration ratios. The review of the state data collection programs, a commitment made by the NOAA OST, has not yet occurred, and would be expected to be quite useful in resolving differences in the state and federal survey methods. The Committee member agreed that the delayed implementation date was intended to allow for progress to be made on these fronts; changing this implementation date from January 1, 2023, to January 1, 2022, would make seeking resolution on these differences impossible.

A Committee member noted that considerable discussion was had by the Committee and the Council at its April 2021 meeting, adding that numerous data issues had been identified with the calibration ratios that as of yet have not been resolved. Considering this, the Committee member contended that the calibration ratios do not constitute the best scientific information available. Specifically, the number of MRIP Access Point Angler Intercept Surveys (APAIS) recorded during an MRIP wave, especially for small states like Mississippi, when combined with FES and extrapolated out across the wave, are resulting in improbable estimates of landings and effort. Current estimates of the number of trips taken per day during peak fishing effort for Mississippi exceed the number of vessels registered to fish offshore in Mississippi, creating an impossible estimate of effort. The SEFSC replied that no "incorrect" data are being used, adding that NMFS and NOAA OST are actively working to resolve discrepancies in the state and federal data collection programs.

The SEFSC clarified that the ACLs for the states are set in the MRIP-Coastal Household Telephone Survey data currency. Landings and effort must be monitored in a commensurate currency to facilitate accurate quota monitoring. A Committee member asked whether the SEFSC was confident in its landings and effort estimations for Mississippi as being accurate. The SEFSC replied that the determination of the most accurate data is not yet resolved,

remarking on the differences in precision and accuracy. Mr. Strelcheck interjected, stating that the issue at hand is the creation of a common data currency for quota monitoring of the combined private angling component ACL across the Gulf states. The Committee member replied that the frequency of MRIP-FES data collection is too low, and is not representative of landings and effort, especially for small states. Mr. Strelcheck added that Mississippi's Tails 'N Scales program is consistently reporting lower estimated landings and effort compared to MRIP-FES. Further, he reiterated that the issue is about ensuring the action proposed by the Council is consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

A Committee member stated that the lack of precision in MRIP-FES for small states has never been addressed. He thought that without a meaningful review of these state data collection programs compared to the federal program, resolution on this front is incomplete. Citing the recent National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study on MRIP, the Committee member noted that differences between the surveys should be determined and communicated to the public. Further, the report noted that the presence and influence of outliers in the MRIP-FES survey should be investigated and addressed. The Committee member continued with several other points of improvement in the MRIP-FES program recommended in the NAS report. Detailing data from wave 5 from 2018, 2019, and 2020, he demonstrated the degree to which the few data points collected by MRIP-FES for Mississippi were extrapolated. In brief, and depending on the year being discussed, he showed that the estimates of daily fishing effort were either improbable or impossible, based on the number of vessels registered to fish offshore in Mississippi versus the number of trips estimated by MRIP-FES. The maximum number of trips in a single day, ever recorded by Mississippi's Tails 'N Scales is 513 trips, with an observed 95% compliance rate. The Committee member also identified other waves for specific fishing years with questionable estimates of landings and effort. Summarizing, he stated that the MRIP-FES data are too variable to make management decisions, and noted that Mississippi has found NOAA OST to be unhelpful and uncooperative in resolving differences between the state and federal data collection programs.

A Committee member recalled the recent Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2021, which stated (on page 27¹), "...before making any related regulatory changes, NMFS is directed to address the question of which data collection system (i.e., MRIP or the catch data programs administered by the Gulf States) are providing the best estimates of recreational red snapper catch in the Gulf of Mexico." Further, the Appropriations Act states that \$2 million will be appropriated, "for NMFS to contract with a non-governmental entity with expertise in statistics and fisheries-dependent data collection to provide the following: (1) an independent assessment of the accuracy and precision of both the Federal and State recreational catch data programs in the Gulf of Mexico; (2) recommended improvements to be made to the Federal and State recreational catch data programs in the Gulf of Mexico to improve accuracy and precision; and (3) an independent assessment, based on the results of the two prior items, of how best to calibrate the Federal and State recreational catch data programs in the Gulf of Mexico to a common currency." The Committee member did not think these directives had yet been satisfied.

¹ <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20201221/BILLS-116RCP68-JES-DIVISION-B.pdf>

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A Committee member agreed with the comments made with respect to the NAS report, noting that a simple ratio calibration was not recommended for use therein. He continued that the data being considered for the SEDAR 74 research track assessment of red snapper are expected to demonstrate a much larger stock of red snapper than previously estimated, which would be expected to mitigate any expectation of negative biological effects from the private angling component ACL being exceeded. Another Committee member stated that the issue before the Committee is that until the new data can be incorporated into a new stock assessment, the calibration ratios are the only data available for use in creating a common data currency. Because these data are the only data available at this time, they are by default the best scientific information available. In building a record of effects, he added that if a state was being disadvantaged by the action before the Council, then that state should establish that record during discussion.

The Committee discussed the application of National Standard 6, and the ability to explore alternative methods of management under circumstances necessitating a more flexible approach. A Committee member said that the Gulf states and the Council have not been afforded the opportunity to properly evaluate the science available to determine the best approach for creating a common data currency between the state and federal survey programs. He added that the negative social and economic effects to the State of Alabama were expected to be significant under Preferred Alternative 2. The Committee member thought further exploration into managing to an exploitation rate should be considered for red snapper. A motion to remove the implementation date under Preferred Alternative 2 failed.

Dr. Richard Cody (NOAA OST) stated that NOAA has provided \$1.2 million to improve the state survey programs by way of funding the availability of independent consultants. A Committee member asked whether any of the funds had been applied to resolve the differences between the surveys. Dr. Cody replied that the funding for the current year had been exhausted; however, the MRIP Transition Team Working Group (including the aforementioned independent consultants) has been formed to assist the states in improvements in their respective programs. Another Committee member replied that the language in the congressional appropriations directive appears to direct NMFS to determine which of the data collection programs is most accurate before the data are used for management. To that point, Mr. Strelcheck replied that the funds were being used to that end, and that he expected far more to ultimately be necessary to resolve differences in the data collection programs. Mr. Strelcheck reiterated the need to implement a common currency in the short-term, in order to ensure that the fishery management plan complied with the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

A Committee member stated a desire to have NOAA OST and NMFS start working with small states like Mississippi to resolve the aforementioned issues prevalent in the MRIP-FES data in that state. He added that the issues he presented are only some of those requiring clarification and resolution. Dr. Cody replied that the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission had the infrastructure to facilitate this work between the states, and added that he would begin working with leadership therein to begin coordinating a workshop to explore the differences between the state and federal survey programs. Mr. Strelcheck added that other, larger states, like Florida, have also reported data discrepancies with MRIP-FES, and between their survey and MRIP.

The Committee Chair recommended giving the Committee time to contemplate the discussions had thus far, with continued discussions to resume during full Council. NOAA General Counsel detailed the options before the Council, including adding the implementation date of January 1, 2023, to Alternatives 3 – 5 in Action 1, with accompanying rationale for that implementation date included therein; or, the Council could alter the implementation date to January 1, 2022. However, delaying implementation for all alternatives does not resolve the issue of the proposed action's incompatibility with the Magnuson-Stevens Act. A Committee member asked about the projected implementation with the proposed changes, and asked whether it would be near or in 2023 by the time the framework action is implemented. Implementation timing was cited as uncertain, and dependent on the progress made on the issue by the Council.

A Committee member asked whether NMFS could select a different preferred alternative within the document than the Council's current preferred alternative. NOAA General Counsel stated that NOAA/NMFS must determine the consistency of the proposed action with the Magnuson-Stevens Act in its recommendation to the Secretary of Commerce. If the proposed action is inconsistent, then NMFS must notify the Council of the inconsistency, and request the Council to modify its recommended action as appropriate. Ultimately, the Secretary of Commerce may act to ensure that the fishery management plan is consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act. A Committee member asked for clarification on whether the Council or NOAA/NMFS were responsible for developing the record of the Council's intent. Mr. Strelcheck replied that the Council could include additional rationale for its recommendation in its cover letter when transmitting the framework action for implementation; however, the record is also developed within the document and in the Council's verbatim minutes.

Reef Fish Amendments 36B and 36C: Modifications to Individual Fishing Quota (Tab B, No. 10)

Staff explained the plan for covering this agenda item, noting that the presentation would be paused to allow for committee discussion of the purpose statements for Amendments 36B and 36C together. The Committee considered a motion to form a small, facilitated focus group to develop a plan to address changes to the IFQ programs, but the motion was ultimately withdrawn.

Staff reviewed the recommendations from the Red Snapper and Grouper-Tilefish IFQ Advisory Panel and the actions in Amendment 36B. The Committee discussed the alternatives in Action 1 that would make all shareholder accounts permit-required and those that would establish both permit-required and permit-exempt shareholder accounts. With the intent to gauge Committee support for establishing permit-exempt accounts, a Committee member moved to select as preferred the alternative that would require all shareholder accounts to have a permit; the motion failed 6 to 7.

Staff reviewed the new Action 3, which addresses permit-exempt accounts, only. After withdrawing a motion to move Action 3.2 (Closed Accounts) to considered but rejected, the Committee moved to select preferred alternatives for each sub-action.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in **Action 3.1, to make Alternative 1 the preferred.**

Alternative 1: No Action. There is no share limit for permit-exempt shareholder accounts that do not have a permit. The existing share cap for each share category that applies to any U.S. citizen or permanent resident remains in place.

Motion carried with one in opposition.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in **Action 3.2, to make Alternative 2 the preferred.**

Alternative 2: Shareholder accounts that have been closed may be reopened, but a reopened account becomes a permit-required account and must be associated with a commercial reef fish permit to hold shares. The time periods provided under Action 2 to bring an account into compliance following implementation of this amendment would apply to reopened accounts, if selected.

Motion carried with no opposition.

The Committee returned to Action 2, which provides options for the amount of time permit-required accounts would have to ensure their account complies the permit requirement. The Committee discussed the additional alternative that addresses shares that are transferred as a result of a legal proceeding.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in **Amendment 36B, Action 2, to make Alternative 4 and Option 4b an additional preferred.**

Alternative 4: If shares are acquired from an inheritance or other legal proceeding (e.g., divorce) and the shares are transferred to a permit-required shareholder account, the shareholder must divest of the account's shares as needed to meet the requirements set in Action 1 or the shares will be reclaimed by NMFS:

Option 4b: 3 years following the date the shares were transferred into the account.

Motion carried with no opposition.

The Committee did not have time to review the actions in Amendment 36C, but broadly discussed the relevance of the actions to one another and to the purpose of the amendment.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in **Draft Amendment 36C, to move Action 3 to Considered but Rejected.**

Action 3 – Accuracy of estimated weights in advance landing notifications

Motion carried with no opposition.

Staff intends to update the document and bring a revised public hearing draft back to the Council at a future meeting.

Discussion: Draft Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 and Reef Fish Amendment 55: Modifications to Southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper Jurisdictional Allocations, Catch Limits, and South Atlantic Sector Annual Catch Limits (Tab B, No. 11)

Council staff briefed the Committee on the joint document that will be developed between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils to address modifications to management measures for the southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper stock in response to the results of the SEDAR 64 stock assessment. SEDAR 64 found yellowtail snapper to be healthy; however, the model estimated the stock to be smaller than previously thought. Because the Councils share management of the stock, a joint document to amend both the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the South Atlantic Council, and the Reef Fish FMP for the Gulf Council, will expedite the development of management alternatives. The Committee will first review proposed options at the Council's October 2021 meeting in Orange Beach, Alabama.

Presentation on Sector Separation for Four Reef Fish Species (Tab B, No. 12)

Staff gave a presentation on sector separation for four reef fish species (red grouper, gag, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish). Sector separation, as previously defined in Reef Fish Amendment 40, entails the partition of the recreational sector into a federal for-hire component and a private angling component. For each species, staff discussed landings and effort trends and provided averages for various time intervals. Management actions that could be considered if the Council elects to develop a sector separation amendment were presented. Potential actions would include the establishment of separate federal for-hire and private angling components for some or all the species considered, the apportionment of resources between the components, and separate accountability measures. The Committee noted that public testimony could highlight benefits expected from sector separation and contribute to the purpose and need for action. Committee members also noted that public comments would help determine the species most suitable for sector separation.

Other Business

SEDAR 74 Stock Identification Workshop

A Committee member discussed the stock identification process for the SEDAR 74 research track assessment of Gulf red snapper. The Stock ID Workgroup consisted of life history,

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genetics, landings and effort, and movement subgroups. The data analyzed by the Stock ID Workgroup resulted in a recommendation of a three-area stock structure, divided at the mouth of the Mississippi River and near Cape San Blas in the Florida Panhandle. However, though consensus was recorded, some workgroup members thought that another plausible stock structure could see the stock divided into eastern and western components at the Florida/Alabama state line. These workgroup members have since encouraged the development of this stock structure also; however, the data compilation and modeling efforts necessary to create two separate models using separate stock structures was noted by the SEFSC as very labor and time intensive. Staff will provide a review of the research track assessment process and the SEDAR schedule during Full Council.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.