

Reef Fish Committee Report
April 2, 2019
Ms. Martha Guyas – Chair

The agenda was adopted (Tab B, No. 1), along with the minutes from the January 2019 Committee meeting (Tab B, No. 2).

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

SERO staff reviewed 2018 and preliminary 2019 commercial landings for Gulf greater amberjack and gray triggerfish. Slight overages for both species will result in a payback of the overages. Gray triggerfish is still open, while greater amberjack is closed. Recreational landings of greater amberjack in the fall season harvested 101.8% of the annual catch target and the recreational sector will not reopen for its spring season. Gag and red grouper landings for 2018 were under their annual catch limits (ACLs), while gray triggerfish exceeded the ACL by 89.1%. Because gray triggerfish is not overfished, there is no recreational payback for 2019; however, the fishery will close May 11, 2019 to prevent an overage. The 2018 landings of hogfish were 49.7% of the ACL, lane snapper were at 111.1%, mutton snapper were at 113%, and vermilion snapper were at 101%. Because lane snapper landings exceeded the overfishing limit in 2018, in-season monitoring and subsequent projections will determine if the fishing season should be closed early in 2019 to prevent an ACL overage. In-season monitoring and projections will also be for mutton snapper in 2019.

Presentation on 2019 For-Hire Red Snapper Season (Tab B, No. 5)

The for-hire component landed 101% of its ACT in 2018 with a 20% buffer between the ACT and ACL. For 2019 only, the buffer for the for-hire component will be reduced to 9%, corresponding to a 2019 fishing season of June 1 – August 2. The private angling component remains managed under the exempted fishing permits for 2019, with paybacks for Alabama and Florida for overages in 2018. The ACLs for both recreational components increased in 2019 with the quota increase resulting from the SEDAR 52 stock assessment.

Committee members expressed interest in reducing the buffer on the for-hire component permanently, and asked about a path forward for that action. The SERO noted that the recreational components are linked by Section 407(D) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and the recreational sector must stay under the recreational ACL. Keeping the private angling component under its portion of the ACL is key to meeting that requirement.

Final Action: Draft Amendment 50: State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper and Individual State Amendments (Tab B, Nos. 6a-f)

Staff reviewed the actions and preferred alternatives in the program amendment for state management. Prior to transmitting the amendment for Secretarial review, NMFS staff noted that the coordinates for the 20- and 35-fathom federal water closures off Alabama and Florida, and additional information about the state data collection programs will be added.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to recommend the Council approve Amendment 50A: State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper, and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation.

The Committee reviewed the actions and preferred alternatives in the individual state amendments.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to recommend the Council approve the Amendment 50B: Louisiana State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper, and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to recommend the Council approve the Amendment 50F: Texas State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper, and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to recommend the Council approve the Amendment 50E: Florida State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper, and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to recommend the Council approve the Amendment 50D: Alabama State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper, and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to recommend the Council approve Amendment 50C: Mississippi State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper, and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation.

Ms. Levy reviewed the codified text reflecting the actions of all six amendments.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to recommend the Council deem the codified text for the state management amendments (50A-50F) as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document. The Council Chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate.

Final Action: Red Grouper Framework Action to Modify Annual Catch Limits and Annual Catch Targets (Tab B, Nos. 7a-c)

Staff reviewed the action and the Council's preferred alternative, which is identical to that specified in the emergency rule being finalized by NMFS. The preferred alternative reduces the

ACLs and ACTs for recreational and commercial red grouper based on the 2017 combined landings, and amounts to approximately a 61% reduction in the stock ACL. This reduction would remain in place until a future action by the Council; the results of the SEDAR 61 stock assessment on red grouper will be available for review by the Council at its October meeting in Galveston. Public comments were generally in favor of the Council's preferred alternative, but there were some dissenting opinions.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, **to recommend the Council approve the Red Grouper Framework Action to Modify Annual Catch Limits and Annual Catch Targets, and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation, and deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document. The Council Chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate.**

Draft Framework Action to Modify Greater Amberjack Commercial Trip Limits (Tab B, Nos. 8a-b)

Council staff reviewed the draft framework action to modify the Gulf greater amberjack commercial trip limit. Of the five alternatives presented, the Committee selected Alternative 4 as preferred:

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, **in Action 1, to make Alternative 4 the preferred alternative.**

Alternative 4: Reduce the commercial trip limit to 500 lbs gw (520 lbs ww).

The Committee then tasked staff to include west Florida harvest-per-trip data from 2016 through 2018 in the document and to convene the Reef Fish Advisory Panel to provide feedback on this document before presenting the final draft at the June 2019 Council meeting.

Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission Update

The Western and Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC) is one of the regional fisheries bodies established under the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which serves only in an advisory role. At its last biennial meeting in 2016, WECAFC agreed to revise its framework to enable it to develop binding conservation and management measures, and its members met last week to discuss this strategic reorientation. Members recommended addressing core issues including: scientific functions, data collection and information systems, technology transfer, capacity building, trade-related issues such as traceability and catch certification of fisheries products, conservation and management measures, co-management, and combatting illegal and underreported fishing in the region, while having flexibility to respond to new and emerging needs. A broad convention area and a regulatory area outside national EEZs where binding measures can be implemented was recommended, including selected straddling, highly migratory, or transboundary stocks within the EEZ without prejudice of the sovereign rights of Member States. Members agreed that duplicate regulations should be avoided. Regional cooperation should continue through existing regional fishery bodies. Discussions will continue to

flesh out these recommendations and a roadmap at the next WECAFC meeting, which the United States is planning to host in July in Miami or Fort Lauderdale. The SERO will look into the procedure for Council attendance at the meeting in July.

Draft Reef Fish Amendment 52: Red Snapper Reallocation (Tab B, No. 9)

Staff presented the revised purpose and need.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, **to amend the Purpose and Need to read “to review, evaluate, and modify, as appropriate.”**

Staff then reviewed the alternatives in Action 1 and discussed why red snapper landings data from 1979-1980 had not been included in Alternative 2. Red snapper landings data prior to 1986 are inconsistent with post-1986 landings data, due to a shift the assignment of commercial landings between the Gulf and South Atlantic from the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line to US1 in the Florida Keys. The Committee discussed overages in red snapper landings and how inclusion of historical landings when overages occurred may be viewed as rewarding a particular sector. The Committee stated that reallocation considerations need not be limited to historical landings since the sectors operate and have been managed differently. The Committee then noted that, given the number of ongoing developments related to reallocation of red snapper such as the Modern Fish Act and data recalibration issues, they may have better insight later in the year regarding the alternatives and how to proceed.

By a vote of 9 to 4, the Committee recommends and I so move, **to postpone further consideration on Amendment 52 until August 2019.**

Draft Amendment 36B: Modifications to Commercial IFQ Programs (Tab B, Nos. 10a-b)

Staff reviewed the amendment’s purpose and need and the goals of the IFQ programs, including those added by the Council at previous meetings. Discussing the current program goals, the Committee noted that the IFQ programs provide the opportunity for a year-round fishery.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, **to add a statement in Draft Amendment 36B that indicates the elimination of derby fishing as a program goal has been met.**

Staff reviewed the actions in the amendment. The Committee expressed interest in receiving presentations on industry-led quota banks. Staff presented data on the differences between estimated and actual landed weights. Agent Tyre indicated that from NOAA OLE’s perspective, discrepancies between the estimated and actual landed weights were not a significant issue. The Committee discussed the accuracy of estimated weights in advanced landing notifications.

By a vote of 9 to 6, the Committee recommends and I so move, **to move Action 4 to Considered but Rejected.**

Action 4 – Accuracy of estimated weights in advance landing notifications

SSC Summary Report (Tab B, Nos. 11, 11a)

The SSC reviewed the gray snapper projections update, which evaluated projections at $F_{26\%SPR}$, $F_{30\%SPR}$, and $F_{40\%SPR}$. Because the SEDAR 51 stock assessment could not freely estimate F_{MSY} , the SSC previously recommended $F_{30\%SPR}$. Based on the updated projections, which use the actual 2016 and 2017 landings, and assume the ACL was caught in 2018, each F_{MSY} proxy did not result in a stock that was overfished or experiencing overfishing as of 2018. The SSC limited the projections time period for each proxy to three years, due to the uncertainty inherent in projections. The SSC affirmed that the projections for each proxy were done appropriately, and in accordance with the best scientific information available. The SSC still recommended an F_{MSY} proxy of $F_{30\%SPR}$ for gray snapper. NOAA General Counsel clarified that the resultant respective OFL and ABC corresponding to the F_{MSY} proxies reviewed by the SSC would become the codified OFL and ABC once an F_{MSY} proxy is specified in Amendment 51.

The SSC discussed new operating procedures, which would see the SSC Chair assign topics to members who would serve as discussion leaders, resulting in more efficient discussions. The SEFSC and Council staff will be working on a stock assessment summary report with the critical information from the stock assessment for rapid digestion of information by most readers, an effort lauded by the SSC. The SSC provided feedback and suggested edits on the Fishery Management Plan Objectives for the six FMPs. The SSC will begin reviewing an alternative ABC Control Rule. Updates on NOAA RESTORE work were provided to the SSC, covering ecosystem modeling for fishery management and a red snapper management strategy evaluation tool, and it may be valuable for the Council to review also.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.