

**Reef Fish Committee Report
April 17-18, 2018
John Greene – Chair**

The agenda was adopted as written. However, agenda items XI (Amendment 42) and XII (Amendment 41) were reversed so that they would be taken up in numerical order. The minutes of the January 30, 2018 Committee meeting were approved with the correction of a typo on page 51.

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

NMFS staff reviewed commercial and recreational reef fish landings for 2017 and preliminary commercial landings for 2018. For the recreational sector, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, for-hire red snapper, and private angler red snapper all had ACL closures in 2017. Gag and red grouper both remained open (other than for fixed closed seasons), with 44.3% of the gag ACL and 32.26% of the red grouper ACL caught. Commercial and recreational king mackerel preliminary landings to date for the 2017/2018 fishing year were also presented. For 2018, with landings available through April 2, 2018, commercial gray triggerfish remains open with 34.24% of the ACL harvested. The commercial greater amberjack closed on April 2, 2018 with 93.79% of the ACL harvested.

Update on State Management of Recreational Red Snapper EFPs (Tab B, No. 5)

Dr. Crabtree informed the Committee that all five state EFPs have been approved and signed. All five EFPs include private anglers; for-hire vessels are not included in any of the EFPs. Federal waters will be closed to private angling vessels with exemptions from the closure made for private anglers during their respective state's season. There will be a 51-day season for federal for-hire vessels, beginning June 1.

Public Hearing Draft – Reef Fish Amendment 48/Red Drum 5 – Status Determination Criteria and Optimum Yield (Tab B, No. 6)

Staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in the amendment.

Action 1 assigns MSY proxies to red snapper, all other reef fish that don't currently have an MSY proxy, plus red drum. It's divided into 4 sub-actions.

Sub-action 1.1 – MSY proxy for red snapper. Dr. Clay Porch stated that a paper recently published by Science Center staff, "Establishing Stock Status Determination Criteria for Fisheries with High Discards and Uncertain Recruitment", concluded that the spawning potential ratio (SPR) level most closely associated with achieving global MSY (highest theoretical MSY under ideal selectivity) for red snapper was 24% SPR. Given that the current red snapper MSY proxy is the yield at $F_{26\% SPR}$, there seemed to be little rationale to change it. A suggestion was made to have the SSC review the published paper.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move, that Action 1.1 be moved to Considered but Rejected.

Sub-action 1.2 – MSY proxy for assessed stocks where the proxy has not been formally adopted. This sub-action proposes to formally adopt the MSY proxy used unofficially in 5 recent assessments (black grouper, yellowedge grouper, mutton snapper, yellowtail snapper, and tilefish) for status determination. In each case, the MSY proxy used was the yield at $F_{30\% SPR}$. The Committee had no comments and took no action.

Sub-action 1.3 – MSY for stock complexes. This sub-action proposes to set an MSY proxy for groups of stocks rather than individually, based on the stock complexes created in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment for setting group ACLs. Dr. Porch stated that, to the extent that stocks are exploited together, it makes sense to use a group with an indicator species, but if the stocks are harvested separate, the complex should be reconsidered. The Committee took no action.

Sub-action 1.4 – MSY proxy for unassessed stocks. Staff noted that an MSY proxy based on SPR for these stocks would be a placeholder since SPR cannot currently be calculated. Committee members asked about the process to change an MSY proxy. General Counsel responded that changes would have to be made by a plan amendment, but ACLs and other management actions based on the new MSY proxy could be implemented in the same amendment as the one that changes the proxy. However, implementing changes through a plan amendment takes longer than with a framework action.

Action 2 – Minimum stock size threshold (MSST). The action would not change any of the MSSTs recently set in Amendment 44. Some Committee members suggested that those MSSTs should be reconsidered given that payback provisions are no longer in effect for some stocks such as red snapper. Dr. Crabtree responded that it would be better to reconsider the accountability measures rather than the MSSTs. He noted that with payback provisions, if a stock is recovering faster than projected, overruns could occur because of the rapid recovery, unnecessarily triggering payback accountability measures (AMs).

Action 3 – Maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT). The action contains alternative to assure that both MFMT and MSST are related to the same MSY proxy, and to consider setting MFMT equal to $F_{REBUILD}$ rather than F_{MSY} for rebuilding stock. The Committee had no comments.

Action 4 – Optimum yield (OY). There was considerable discussion about what OY was and what its relation is to other reference points such as MSY or ACL. However, a Committee member noted that the discussion was mostly between NMFS and Council staff, indicating that this issue was still unclear to Committee members. A suggestion was made that staff create a “cheat sheet” with brief definitions of the reference points so that Committee members could refer to it during discussions. The Committee did not select any preferred alternatives or approve the amendment for public hearing. Committee members suggested that the SSC review the amendment and provide guidance.

State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper (Tab B, No. 7)

Staff reviewed the state management program amendment. Action 1 addresses the components to include in state management programs. The Committee discussed the preferred alternative, which would allow each state to decide whether to manage its private angling component, only, or to manage both its private angling and federal for-hire components.

Action 2 addresses how to allocate the recreational ACL among the states. Staff presented the alternatives and asked if the Committee would be interested in reducing the number of alternatives. The Committee then passed the following two motions.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 2, to move Alternative 2, Option 2e to Considered but Rejected.

Alternative 2: 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 the average of historical landings for the years (excluding 2010):

Option 2e: 2006-2009

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 2, to move Alternative 5, Option 5c to Considered but Rejected.

Alternative 5: 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 (Options 5a-5f), excluding 2010, and using one of the weightings from Options 5g-5i:

Option 5c: 2006-2009.

In the individual state amendments, staff reviewed the revised alternative with options for regulations the states may want to select for delegation. The options for live release devices, harvest gear, and area or depth-specific regulations would require lines demarcating federal waters off each state, as these regulations would need offshore enforcement. The option for area or depth-specific regulations requires additional information about how the states would use this authority before it may be selected.

Staff reviewed Action 2, post-season accountability measures. Because red snapper is no longer classified as overfished, the alternative as currently written would not apply a quota overage adjustment in the event that a state exceeds its portion of the ACL. The Committee discussed whether to require an overage adjustment for approved state management programs. While discussing Mississippi's individual state amendment, the Committee passed the following motion.

By a vote of 10 to 5, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 2, in all five individual state amendments, to modify the language in (Preferred) Alternative 2 to read:

Preferred Alternative 2: If the combined Mississippi recreational landings exceed the Mississippi recreational ACL, then in the following year reduce the total recreational quota and Mississippi's ACL by the amount of the ACL overage in the prior fishing year, unless the best scientific information available determines that a greater, lesser, or no overage adjustment is necessary. If appropriate, the Mississippi recreational ACT (or component ACTs) will be adjusted to reflect the previously established percent buffer.

Currently, the Louisiana and Mississippi individual state amendments have preferred alternatives selected while the remaining three states' amendments do not. In reviewing the Alabama state management amendment, the Committee passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Alabama's Action 1, make Alternative 2, Options 2a-2d preferred.

Alternative 2: Establish a management program that delegates management authority in federal waters to Alabama. If Alabama's red snapper harvest plan is determined to be inconsistent with the requirements of delegation, the recreational harvest of red snapper in the federal waters adjacent to Alabama would be subject to the default federal regulations for red snapper. Alabama must establish the red snapper season structure for the harvest of its assigned portion of the recreational sector annual catch limit (ACL). In addition, delegated authority for managing the recreational harvest of red snapper may include establishing or modifying the:

Option 2a: bag limit

Option 2b: prohibition on for-hire vessel captains and crew from retaining a bag limit.

Option 2c: minimum size limit within the range of 14 to 18 inches total length (TL)

Option 2d: maximum size limit

Recreational data challenges and potential SAFMC responses (Tab B, No. 8)

John Carmichael gave a presentation on actions being taken by the South Atlantic Council to improve recreational catch data collection. In addition to the improvements being made in MRIP, the South Atlantic Council is implementing for-hire reporting, a "Myfishcount" voluntary reporting system, and, in Snapper-Grouper Amendment 46, is considering snapper grouper recreational permits and reporting requirements tied to the permit.

Following the presentation, one Committee member recommended that any recreational reporting be vessel-based rather than individual-based. A Committee member suggested that a similar recreational permit and reporting system be considered for the Gulf. Mr. Carmichael was asked how long it would take the South Atlantic Council to set up their permit system. He responded that the Council hoped to be ready for approval by early next year, but it might take longer. Mr. Carmichael was asked if any projects were being planned under the South Atlantic Council's Citizen-Science program. He responded that they are developing an app for fishermen

to report discards, primarily scamp. The Council has partnered with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) and hopes to be ready this summer. In response to a question on why the South Atlantic Council chose to collect data on its own, Mr. Carmichael responded that it was intended to be a cooperative program facilitated by the Council. Committee members asked if a presentation could be given to the Council once the program was in place. Mr. Carmichael suggested that Amber Von Harten would be the appropriate staff person to ask.

Following the presentation, Dr. Luiz Barbieri gave an update on plans to coordinate state collections of recreational data. A steering committee will meet on April 30 to begin the process of determining how to move forward with integrating the different surveys. Chair Leann Bosarge asked Dr. Barbieri to provide the Council with another update after the meeting.

Commercial IFQ Programs

Grouper/Tilefish IFQ program 5-year review (Tab B, No. 9a)

Staff presented the grouper-tilefish IFQ program 5-year review. Issues discussed included goals and objectives of the IFQ program, data collection, participation changes, IFQ shares and allocation transfers and prices, changes in fishing capacity and technical efficiency, market power, and safety-at sea. The presentation also covered participants, dealers, and captain and crew surveys. Dr. Luis Barbieri summarized the recommendations provided by the SSC. Dr. Barbieri stated that the SSC approved a motion noting that expected outcomes following the implementation of the IFQ program are being achieved and the program is meeting its objectives. Staff summarized the recommendations provided by the AP and noted that the AP approved the review and concluded the program is meeting its objectives. The Committee passed the following motion:

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move: To accept the Grouper-Tilefish IFQ 5-year program review report.

Committee members discussed the reasons provided for IFQ share and allocation transfers. The Committee recommended that in the online drop down menu for transfer reasons, that the “No Comment” option be eliminated. Consistent with SSC recommendations, the Committee recommended that, for future reviews, a joint review of the red snapper and grouper tilefish IFQ programs be considered. Committee members discussed the effectiveness of gag and red grouper multi-use shares and recommended multi-use shares be eliminated. Committee members inquired about loan programs. Dr. Jessica Stephen indicated that a national IFQ loan program is in development. Committee members discussed shareholders’ access to information on share and allocation transfers. Dr. Stephen indicated that NMFS would evaluate the feasibility of an exchange message board to facilitate share and allocation transfers.

White Paper – Discussion of Rents and Royalties for Commercial Red Snapper Fishing
(Tab B, No. 9d)

Staff presented a paper on rents and royalties prepared in response to a January 2018 Council motion. The paper included a definition for resource rent and provided an estimate for the rent that could be derived from the amount of commercial red snapper quota in excess of 4.65 million pounds. Issues discussed included auctions and other royalty payment methods in fisheries and other natural resources. Committee members discussed the destination of funds collected through auctions and royalties. Staff noted that revenues generated by royalty programs are subject to annual appropriations and may not come back to the Gulf region.

Revised Options Paper – Amendment 36B – Modifications to Commercial IFQ Programs
(Tab B, No. 9e)

Staff reviewed the options paper for Amendment 36B alongside the AP's recommendations. For program participation, staff noted that the Council had not yet identified an intent for the action. The Committee discussed potential issues and unintended consequences with reinstating a requirement for shareholders to have a commercial reef fish permit. The Committee then passed the following motion.

With 1 opposed, the Committee recommends and I so move, to accept the Ad Hoc Red Snapper and Grouper/Tilefish IFQ AP's recommendation for program participation, to not require a reef fish permit to be a shareholder thereby retaining the current regulations.

The Committee discussed the potential alternatives for a quota redistribution or set-aside. The AP recommended that shares which will be reclaimed from non-activated accounts be used to help new entrants to the fishery. Mara Levy noted that a Council AP would be the appropriate group for advising the Council on the administration of a quota bank. The Committee then passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to create a quota set-aside from non-activated accounts to run a NOAA quota bank for addressing commercial discards. The Council shall create an industry steering committee to provide advice in the administration of the program.

Staff reviewed the background of the proposed lease-to-own provision, noting that existing shareholders would be unlikely to participate. The AP also recommended removal of this provision. The Committee then passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to move Section 2.3.1, the lease-to-own provision, to Considered but Rejected.

Staff reviewed the law enforcement Committee discussion regarding concerns that commercial vessels were underestimating landings on advanced landing notifications. The law enforcement concern is that some commercial red snapper landings may be going unreported, or reported and

sold as a different species, such as vermilion snapper. The Committee then passed the following motion.

By a vote of 10 to 5, the Committee recommends and I so move, to add an action to Amendment 36B regarding the LEC/LETC's concerns with the accuracy of landing estimates provided in advance landing notifications in the commercial IFQ programs due to law enforcement observations of under-reporting.

Options Paper – Framework Action – Greater Amberjack Recreational Bag Limits, Seasonal Quotas, and Commercial Trip Limits (Tab B, No. 10)

Staff reviewed a draft options paper (Tab B, No. 10) that considers options to modify the recreational bag limit, establish seasonal quotas for the recreational sector, and considers reductions to the commercial trip limit. The Committee reviewed the draft document and considered the range of options within each action. The committee was satisfied with the range of options but requested additional analyses that combine potential changes in bag limits and split quotas relative to the season length required to harvest the recreational quota. Staff will complete the additional analyses to be reviewed at the next Council meeting.

Amendment 41 – Allocation-based Management for Federally Permitted Charter Vessels (Tab B, No. 12) and

Amendment 42 – Reef Fish Management for Headboat Survey Vessels (Tab B, No. 11)

Staff presented Actions 4 and 6 in Amendment 41 to provide context for the NMFS decision tools on quota distribution. Dr. Jessica Stephen presented the red snapper decision tool for Amendment 41 and the decision tool for Amendment 42. For Amendment 41, Dr. Stephen presented scenarios from Actions 4 and 6 and the resulting quota distributions for red snapper, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish, gag, and red grouper. For Amendment 42, Dr. Stephen presented scenarios from Actions 5 and 7 and the resulting quota distributions for red snapper, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish, gag, and red grouper. The Committee requested that the decision tools for Amendments 41 and 42 be presented to the advisory panels.

SSC Summary Report (Tab B, No. 13)

Dr. Barbieri summarized items reviewed by the SSC that have not been discussed elsewhere on the agenda.

NMFS Science Center staff reviewed the current status of a stock prioritization spreadsheet, which ranks stocks based on 12 prioritization factors. The spreadsheet is still under development. The SSC recommended that shrimp be excluded from the spreadsheet because shrimp is an annual stock. Ms. Leann Bosarge added that the economic value of the shrimp fishery is so large that it dwarfs other stocks.

The SSC received a presentation on the status of the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey (FES), which has replaced the telephone survey as the effort gathering portion of MRIP. Effort estimates from the FES are 3 to 6 times higher than with the telephone survey. Recalibrated catch estimates will

be available by July 1 for use in stock assessments. Dr. Barbieri noted that the precision of the FES is much tighter than for the telephone survey which should lead to more accurate estimates. Robin Riechers added that although Texas does not participate in MRIP, it had been asked to participate in a recalibration survey. However, he did not have any information on the methodology or results.

The SSC received a presentation from Dr. Steve Murawski on a program to map and characterize the sea bottom habitat on the west Florida shelf. This survey makes use of underwater camera arrays plus scientific echo sounders. The SSC felt that the presentation was very interesting and helpful in sharing new techniques.

Steven Atran added that, under Other Business, the SSC was presented with a paper written by Jakob Tetzlaff. The paper evaluated changes in assumptions about selectivity and recreational discard mortality on projections and found that the projections were sensitive to those assumptions. The SSC requested that those changes in assumptions be evaluated as sensitivity runs in the upcoming SEDAR 52 red snapper assessment. Mr. Atran indicated that the assessment scientist, Jeff Isely, was at the SSC meeting and received the request verbally, but he would follow up with a written request. A Committee member asked that the request include information on discard mortality rates with venting and descending tools discussed during the Sustainable Fisheries Committee.

Madam chair, this concludes my report.