

**Reef Fish Committee Report
October 23, 2018
Martha Guyas – Chair**

Reef Fish Landings Update

Ms. Gerhart reviewed the commercial and recreational landings for various reef fish stocks. The commercial landings of greater amberjack have exceeded the ACL and will be subject to a payback in 2019. Recreational landings were available through wave 2 only; waves 3 and 4 are expected to be available soon. Private recreational red snapper landings were provided for each Gulf state. Landings from Texas are preliminary as Texas state waters remain open. Landings in Florida exceeded its portion of the ACL by 13% and will be subject to an overage adjustment in 2019.

Revised Draft Amendment 50: State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper and Individual State Amendments (Tab B, Nos. 5a-f)

Staff provided the LETC’s comments pertaining to the use of JEA funds for enforcing recreational red snapper under state management. LETC members will request that their state directors communicate with the appropriations staff regarding this priority. The Committee requested an update on the outcome of this issue.

Staff reviewed the actions and preferred alternatives in the state management amendments. In the Program Amendment, staff reviewed a new action considering a mechanism to implement optional state management of federal for-hire vessels. Because this action would only be applicable if Alternative 4 in Action 1 is selected as preferred, a preferred alternative is not needed at this time.

The Committee discussed Action 2 for apportioning the recreational red snapper ACL among the states. Mr. Anson informed the Committee that the state directors met to discuss allocation, and made a motion to add this proposed allocation to the document.

By a vote of 10 to 2, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 2, to add a new alternative for allocation used for apportioning the private angling ACL:

<u>AL</u>	<u>FL</u>	<u>LA</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>TX</u>	<u>Total</u>
28.00%	42.74%	18.50%	3.55%	7.21%	100.00%

In Action 1 in the individual state amendments, staff reviewed the options under delegation. For Option 2g, staff noted that this option cannot be included in delegation as written. Ms. Levy suggested the creation of a new action to establish a process for NMFS to implement closures in the EEZ off a state under state management. The states would need to provide sufficient detail of any potential closures so that they may be analyzed in the amendments. The Committee then passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 1 of each state amendment, to remove Option 2g and create a new action to allow NMFS to implement

closures in the EEZ through a framework.

Option 2g: use of area or depth-specific regulations.

If the Council approves the preceding motion, the Council could review the draft new action and discuss the information needed from the states on the potential closures.

For Options 2e and 2f, staff noted that delegation for live release devices and harvest gear is not needed, as the states could require possession of such devices and gear, and enforce the requirements dockside. The Committee then passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 1, of each state amendment, to remove Options 2e and 2f.

Option 2e: requirements for live release devices (e.g., descending devices)

Option 2f: requirements for harvest gear

A motion was then made to add a preferred alternative and options to Florida's amendment.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 1 of Florida's amendment, to make Alternative 2, Options 2a, 2c, and 2d the preferred.

Alternative 2: Establish a management program that delegates management authority for recreational red snapper fishing in federal waters to Florida. If Florida'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 Florida would be subject to the default federal regulations for red snapper. Florida must establish the red snapper season structure for the harvest of its assigned portion of the recreational sector annual catch limit (ACL), monitor landings, and prohibit further landings of red snapper when the ACL is reached or projected to be reached. In addition, delegated authority for managing the recreational harvest of red snapper may include establishing or modifying the:

Option 2a: bag limit

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

Option 2d: maximum size limit.

Action 2 addresses post-season quota adjustments. Staff noted that Option 2b could be removed as it could be considered unfair to apply overage or underage adjustments equally to both components. The Committee then passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 2, to move Option 2b to Considered but Rejected in all five state amendments.

Option 2b: If a state has both a private-angling ACL and a federal for-hire ACL, the adjustment will be applied equally to both components.

Staff noted that if Option 2b is removed, Option 2a would be incorporated into Alternative 2.

Some states had not yet selected a preferred alternative in Action 2 for a post-season quota adjustment. The Committee then passed the following motion.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 2, to make Alternative 2, as modified, the preferred in all five state plan amendments.

Alternative 2: Add a state-specific overage and underage adjustment to the existing post-season AM for the recreational sector red snapper ACL. If the combined state recreational landings exceed or are less than the state combined recreational ACLs (if applicable), then in the following year reduce or increase the total recreational quota and the state's component ACL(s) as outlined in Option a or b, in accordance with Council procedures, by the amount of the ACL overage or underage in the prior fishing year, unless the best scientific information available determines that a greater, lesser, or no adjustment is necessary. If appropriate, the state's component ACTs will be adjusted to reflect the established percent buffer.

Option 2a: If a state has both a private-angling ACL and a federal for-hire ACL, the adjustment will be applied only to the component(s) that exceeded or were under the applicable ACL.

Staff noted that public hearings have been set up for the dates and locations provided in the Action Guide. Dr. Simmons informed the Committee that since Hurricane Michael, the office has not been able to contact the hotel in Panama City at which that meeting is scheduled. As an update, the meeting will now be held in Pensacola on the same date, December 3, 2018.

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to take Amendment 50: State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper and Individual State Amendments out for public hearings.

Review of Reef Fish Management Objectives (Tab B, Nos. 5a-c)

Staff presented a review of the objectives of the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan with background information and relevant amendments. Staff noted that changes to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan objectives would need to be included in a plan amendment. The Committee discussed the extent to which the objectives had been met and whether the current objectives should be retained, modified, or removed. The Committee then made the following motions:

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Objective 1 to reword as follows, "To prevent overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks."

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to combine Objectives 2 and 7 to read: "To maintain robust fishery reporting and data collection systems for monitoring the reef fish fishery."

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to reword Objective 3, as follows, “To conserve and protect reef fish habitats.”

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to reword Objective 4, as follows, “To minimize conflicts between user groups”, add a new objective “To minimize and reduce dead discards,” and to eliminate Objective 6.

- **Objective 6:** To reduce user conflicts and near shore fishing mortality.

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to remove Objectives 5, 9, 11, and 16 and replace with an Objective that defines OY. Objective: “To manage Gulf stocks at OY as defined in MSA.”

- **Objective 5:** The primary objective and definition of Optimum Yield for the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan is to stabilize long term population levels of all reef fish species by establishing a certain survival rate of biomass into the stock of spawning age to achieve at least 20 percent spawning potential ratio.
- **Objective 9:** To revise the definition of optimum yield to allow specification at the species level.
- **Objective 11:** To maximize net socioeconomic benefits from the reef fish fishery.
- **Objective 16:** To optimize, to the extent practicable and allowed by law, net benefits from the fishery.

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to reword Objective 10 as follows, “To encourage and periodically review research on the efficacy of artificial reefs for management purposes.”

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to remove Objectives 14 and 18 and reword Objective 12, as follows, “To promote stability in the fishery by allowing for enhanced fisher flexibility and increasing fishing opportunities to the extent practicable.”

- **Objective 14:** To promote flexibility for the fishermen in their fishing operations.
- **Objective 18:** To maximize the available days to recreational fishermen.

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to remove Objective 17.

- **Objective 17:** To reduce the harvesting capacity of the red snapper fleet in an equitable manner utilizing demonstrated historical dependence on the red snapper resource as a criterion.

The overall goal of the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan is:

To manage the reef fish fishery of the United States within the waters of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council jurisdiction to attain the greatest overall benefit to the nation with particular reference to food production and recreational opportunities on the basis of the maximum sustainable yield as reduced by relevant ecological, economic, or social factors.

If the Reef Fish Committee motions are approved, the new Reef Fish FMP objectives would be stated as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico.

Number	Objective
1	To prevent overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks.
2	To maintain robust fishery reporting and data collection systems for monitoring the reef fish fishery.
3	To conserve and protect reef fish habitat.
4	To minimize conflicts between user groups.
5	To minimize and reduce dead discards.
6	To manage Gulf stocks at OY as defined in MSA.
7	To revise the definitions of the fishery management unit and fishery to reflect the current species composition of the reef fish fishery.
8	To encourage and periodically review research on the efficacy of artificial reefs for management purposes.
9	To promote stability in the fishery by allowing for enhanced fisher flexibility and increasing fishing opportunities to the extent practicable.
10	To avoid to the extent practicable the "derby" type fishing season.
11	To provide for cost-effective and enforceable management of the fishery.

Establish Gray Snapper Status Determination Criteria and Modify ACLs (Tab B, Nos. 7a-d)

Staff provided a presentation summarizing the components of status determination criteria and the requirement to define reference points for managed fish stocks. Staff also prepared and presented an infographic with a list of common definitions used that can be used as reference materials when evaluating options to establish status determination criteria. Staff also reviewed a gray snapper “hot sheet,” which is a one-page summary of the biology and fishery for gray snapper.

Staff then reviewed draft Reef Fish Amendment 51 that would establish status determination criteria and modify the ACLs for Gulf gray snapper. The Committee reviewed the purpose and need and the range of alternatives in each of the five actions of the document. The Committee was satisfied with the range of alternatives in Actions 1 through 4. In Action 5, the Committee discussed that Alternatives 4 and 5 would specify both an ACL and ACT. However, staff noted the accountability measures for gray snapper are associated with the ACL, while the ACT serves no purpose for managing gray snapper. Based on this discussion, the Committee determined that the alternatives with ACTs were unnecessary.

With no opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, in Action 5 to move Alternatives 4 and 5 to Considered but Rejected.

Alternative 4: The ACL for gray snapper for the years 2019 through 2021 and beyond will be equal to the ABC yield stream using the MSY proxy F30%SPR selected in Action 1. Apply the ACL/ACT Control Rule (landings from 2014 through 2017) to establish an

11% buffer between the ACL and the ACT.

Year	OFL (mp ww)	ABC (mp ww)	ACL (mp ww)	ACT (mp ww)
2019	2.31	2.27	2.27	2.03
2020	2.33	2.29	2.29	2.04
2021+	2.36	2.32	2.32	2.07

Alternative 5: The ACL for gray snapper for the years 2019 through 2021 and beyond will be equal to the ABC yield stream using the MSY proxy $F_{40\%SPR}$ selected in Action

1. Apply the ACL/ACT Control Rule (landings from 2014 through 2017) to establish an 11% buffer between the ACL and the ACT.

Year	OFL (mp ww)	ABC (mp ww)	ACL (mp ww)	ACT (mp ww)
2019	1.83	1.80	1.80	1.61
2020	1.90	1.86	1.86	1.66
2021+	1.95	1.92	1.92	1.71

Staff will revise the draft amendment and bring it back for Committee review at the next Council meeting.

The Great Red Snapper Count (Tab B, No. 8)

Dr. Drymon gave a presentation summarizing the status, preliminary findings, and timeline for a comprehensive effort to estimate absolute red snapper abundance in the Gulf. He described five components of the study: 1) Data mining and habitat mapping, 2) Calibration and validation, 3) Sampling, 4) Results, and 5) Conclusions. He stated that the objective of the data mining and habitat mapping was to predict the probability of the presence of red snapper to inform sample selection protocols for red snapper sampling. The study uses multiple gear types, and calibration efforts are ongoing to ensure accurate estimates of fish density and abundance. Data collected during the spring and summer of 2018 are currently being analyzed, and the project will be completed in summer 2019. Stakeholder engagement is a large part of this effort. Investigators are working closely with key partners to provide background information about the project and results as they become available.

The Committee asked if this project could be expanded for other stocks and if cost-savings could be achieved in future efforts. Dr. Drymon stated that the methods used are appropriate for other species and some data, such as video surveys, are being collected for multiple species. He stated that considerable cost savings could be realized to complete similar projects for other reef fish species.

SSC Summary Report (Tab B, No. 9)

The Great Red Snapper Count

The SSC received a summary presentation on the Great Red Snapper Count. The SSC was interested in the research project and was satisfied that the methods and protocols being used are appropriate to estimate the abundance of Gulf red snapper. The SSC requested to receive

additional updates about the progress of this project as they become available.

Best Scientific Information Available

The SSC discussed the concept of Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA) as it relates to the scientific advice they provide to the Council, and they also discussed best practices and policies to improve communication between the SSC and the Council. NOAA General Counsel instructed the SSC to be explicit when making determinations about BSIA and in identifying the scope of this recommendation. For example, the SSC should note if they thought a stock assessment was suitable for stock status determination, but not for harvest advice.

Red Grouper Interim Analysis

The SEFSC conducted an interim analysis that could be used to provide updated harvest recommendations for red grouper in a period between operational stock assessments. This type of analysis could allow for a yield stream of a species to be updated on an annual basis. This process could allow for better resolution on the status of a stock and may improve the advice conveyed to the Council. The interim analysis uses indices of abundance, or a specific representative index of abundance, and a harvest control rule used to provide some continuity in the catch advice provided from the previous assessment. The responsiveness of the harvest control rule to the data is determined by a scalar, which can be manipulated to better track the previous management advice or the representative index of abundance. A lower scalar value will track the index, while a higher scalar value will track the previous catch advice from the harvest control rule.

For red grouper, the inclusion of the catch advice from SEDAR 42 had an impact on the subsequent advice generated by the interim analysis. By including the SEDAR 42 data, the catch advice was much more optimistic; however, the SSC did not necessarily think the SEDAR 42 catch advice was appropriate to use for future catch advice, given the recent red grouper landings in the Gulf.

The SSC endorsed the interim analysis approach, and recommended the exclusion of the SEDAR 42 data, and a scalar value of 1 (out of 10), to more closely track the representative index of abundance. However, given the preliminary nature of the interim analysis approach, the SSC did not think the methodology was yet robust enough to change the existing ABC recommendation. Instead, the SSC recommended that the interim analysis approach could be used to generate a revised ACL value for 2019. Based on this analysis, the SSC recommended an updated ACL for red grouper of 4.6 million pounds gutted weight for 2019.

The Committee determined that it would not be able to implement a change in the 2019 ACL for red grouper through the current open framework action process. As an alternative, the Committee asked whether the issues described with red grouper would qualify as an emergency, allowing the implementation of an emergency rule to reduce the red grouper ACL. NOAA General Counsel questioned whether the situation qualified as an emergency rule. An emergency Council meeting could be held to vote on a framework action, which would facilitate the withholding of IFQ allocation to the commercial fishery; however, the timing of such an effort makes its full implementation in time to be effective in 2019 unlikely.

Other Topics

Staff reviewed the Council's monitoring and research priorities with the SSC. The SSC plans to review a draft of a new plan by the middle of 2019, with goals of expanding upon outreach and education and socio-economics. The SSC also reviewed the "Something's Fishy" tool, which is designed to query stakeholders in a general manner about a particular species or issue. The SSC strongly supported the continued development of the "Something's Fishy" tool, and thought it represented a valuable avenue for the consideration of stakeholder viewpoints.

Status of Convening the Ad Hoc Reef Fish Headboat and Red Snapper Charter For-Hire APs

Dr. Simmons informed the Committee that the AP meetings have been scheduled. The Ad Hoc Reef Fish Headboat AP will meet Tuesday, December 11 and the Ad Hoc Red Snapper Charter for-hire AP will meet Wednesday, December 12. In addition, the Ad Hoc Red Snapper – Grouper Tilefish IFQ AP will meet on Wednesday, November 7. All three meetings will be held in the Council office.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.