

Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report April 5, 2023 Dr. CJ Sweetman, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab E, No. 1**), and approved the minutes (**Tab E, No. 2**) of the January 2023 meeting as written.

A brief introduction on how management strategy evaluation can address key challenges before the Council (Tab E, No. 4)

Dr. John Walter (SEFSC) presented a brief introduction on how management strategy evaluations (MSEs) can address key issues before the Council. MSEs may allow the Council to test management decisions before implementing them to better understand how those decisions may affect stocks managed by the Council. Dr. Walter discussed the possible roles of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), stakeholders, modelers, and the Council. He further noted that this collaborative process can be time consuming, but if approached deliberatively and objectively, can yield substantial gains in efficiency and efficacy of management decisions. Dr. Walter reiterated the need to apply the right tool for the job, and recommended consideration of MSE as part of the upcoming Fisheries Ecosystem Initiatives.

A Committee member asked about the incorporation of human behavior into the development and testing of MSEs and management procedures. Dr. Walter described the need for consideration of social and economic sciences when evaluating the performance of these products, and thought there was definitely room for these disciplines to be involved in the development of these products. Another Committee member asked how Dr. Walter envisioned regulatory streamlining working in concert with management procedures to modify catch advice. Dr. Walter replied that the regulatory streamlining would set the "recipe" for the consideration of the updated catch advice, and then the management procedure would be applied at a predetermined interval followed by SSC review. The Southeast Regional Office (SERO) added that there are authorities that can be delegated or specified for the Regional Administrator to proceed with implementing such advice, so long as it follows the management procedure as defined for that fishery management plan. A Committee member asked whether the individual fishing quota (IFQ) program, or the recreational management initiatives, could benefit from the MSE approach. Dr. Walter replied that intended outcome of either process needs to be clearly defined. In situations where either the conceptual or operational management objectives are unclear or undefined, this can be part of the initial phases of MSE. For the recreational management initiatives, Dr. Walter referenced the ongoing SAFMC reef fish MSE as a process which is developing a structured framework to evaluate management actions that affect a multispecies reef fish complex. He also noted that there will be a presentation on a Gulf of Mexico multispecies framework case study at the full day devoted to MSE in the upcoming May SSC meeting.

Overview of Potential Options for Regulatory Streamlining (Tab E, No. 5)

Council staff presented a draft white paper on potential options for regulatory streamlining and synthesized recent regulatory actions from 2017 through 2021. Staff proposed that the Committee consider developing a Reef Fish FMP amendment that includes a framework for establishing catch advice for a limited number of species that have a successful interim analysis with proposed catch advice vetted by the SEFSC and reviewed and approved by the Council's SSC. NOAA General Counsel clarified that some of the estimated times to implement these types of framework actions after the amendment is implemented need to be modified to represent the agency's clearance process. A Committee member requested that the document include more than just catch advice. After discussion the Committee made the following motion.

The Committee recommends, and I so **move**, to direct staff to begin development on a plan amendment within the reef fish FMP to streamline regulatory procedures.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Factors to Consider for the Inclusion of Species in Federal Management (Tab E, No. 6)

Council staff presented factors to consider when determining whether a species is in need of federal conservation and management. Staff presented the criteria listed in the National Standard guidelines and reviewed current state regulations for tripletail and African pompano. Tripletail are predominantly caught in state waters while African pompano are mainly caught in federal waters. Florida private anglers account for most tripletail and African pompano landed in the Gulf. Staff noted that a formal process for evaluating whether species need federal conservation and management was not found among regional fishery management councils. The evaluations could follow the usual Council deliberative process. Key considerations while examining factors for including species in federal management include the evaluation of landings by state, area, and mode, and the coordination with states where most landings occur.

The Committee noted that consistency between the approaches followed for African pompano and tripletail would be helpful. The Committee inquired about state-specific total allowable catch (TAC) for African pompano or tripletail. Florida and Alabama representatives indicated that their states have no TAC for these species. The Committee asked about the management perspectives from Florida and Alabama, which land most tripletail and African pompano in the Gulf. Alabama doesn't have additional information outside of landings, and Florida has implemented conservation-oriented regulations. Committee members indicated that there is no strong need to include tripletail in federal management and approved the following motion:

The Committee recommends, and I so **move**, to remove tripletail from further consideration for conservation and management.

Motion carried with no opposition.

SSC Recommendations SSC Report on Allocation Approaches Presentation (Tab E, No. 8a)

Dr. Jim Nance (SSC Chair) summarized comments and recommendations provided by the SSC following Dr. John Ward's presentation on an allocation approach based on a simulation model that could include economic, biological, social, and ecological factors. Dr. Nance noted that the SSC thought that more information, including model documentation, was needed to develop a clearer understanding of the approach presented. A Committee member suggested that the approach presented could be further explored. Dr. Nance concurred and noted that the model needs further development and more information is required to fully evaluate the model. The Committee noted that the transition from the theoretical model presented to real-world applications would be challenging. A Committee member stated that Dr. Ward would plan a real-world application of the model using a Gulf species.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.