

Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report
January 25, 2021
Mr. Dale Diaz, Chair

The Committee requested that an update on how red snapper dead discards are counted against the recreational and commercial ACLs be added in *Other Business*. With that addition, the Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab E, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab E, No. 2**) of the November-December 2020 meeting as written.

Final Action Amendment Reef Fish 48/Red Drum 5: Status Determination Criteria and Optimum Yield for Reef Fish and Red Drum (Tab E, No. 4)

The Council received a public hearing draft of the amendment at its November-December 2020 meeting but asked for further clarification regarding Action 1 which would define the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) using the fishing mortality at a spawning potential ratio (SPR) as an MSY proxy. The National Standard 1 guidelines require status determination criteria for each managed stock; however, defining an MSY using a proxy is particularly difficult for data-limited stocks. Council staff outlined the pros and cons of this approach for defining MSY and reviewed the historical decision processes of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The SSC had discussed using SPR as an MSY proxy for data poor stocks at several meetings and determined the approach was scientifically sound. The SSC also noted that the MSY definition for data-poor stocks could later be updated should a stock assessment or more data allow for a direct calculation of MSY. The SSC had considered using historical landings data to calculate MSY. However, many data poor stocks have not been updated/calibrated to the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey and there are no stock assessments scheduled for these species to make these updates. Given these considerations, the SSC ultimately recommended the use of SPR proxies for defining MSY. A technical guidance report to address reference points using a tiered approach from a Council Coordination Committee subgroup is in progress but has not been made available at this date and therefore could not be incorporated into the document.

Council staff also reviewed all the preferred alternatives for each action in the document. A Committee member asked why goliath grouper was managed under the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's jurisdiction. Council staff clarified that goliath grouper is considered to be a single stock throughout its range and that this document would define stock status determination criteria in the Gulf of Mexico to be consistent with what is defined in the South Atlantic. After a review of the previously selected preferred alternatives, the Committee unanimously approved the following motion:

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to approve **Reef Fish Amendment 48/Red Drum 5: Status Determination Criteria and Optimum Yield for Reef Fish and Red Drum** and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document.

SSC Recommendations on Interim Analyses Species and Timing (Tab E, No. 5)

Staff summarized the factors considered in creating the draft interim analysis schedule, including Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) workload, data availability, and management needs. Dr. Powers noted some concerns by the SSC, including the amount of time needed to process samples from some representative fishery-independent indices of abundance. He further clarified that the interim analysis process considers recent landings against a representative fishery-independent index of abundance to generate catch advice for subsequent years. The Committee generally agreed that the Council should try to streamline the approval process for accepting and implementing the results of an interim analysis. To that end, Mr. Strelcheck from the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) offered to investigate how this process operates in other regions, and will present those findings at a future Council meeting. Lastly, a Committee member thought that documents addressing the results of an interim analysis should focus only on the results of that analysis to the extent possible, in an effort to expedite decision-making.

Review of Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology for the Gulf of Mexico and Joint Fishery Management Plans (Tab E, No. 6)

Mr. Peter Hood from SERO presented an introduction and requirements of a standardized bycatch reporting methodology (SBRM) which was stipulated by a NMFS 2017 final rule and must be incorporated into each fishery management plan (FMP). The SBRM would establish consistent procedures for bycatch data collection and reporting. The rule stipulates that the Council should consider characteristics of bycatch occurring in the fishery, determine the feasibility of data collection approaches, estimate bycatch data uncertainty, and identify how these data can be used to inform stock assessments. Mr. Hood gave a progress timeline for document development to meet the rule implementation deadline of February 21, 2022. The Committee inquired how state or other fishery agency information would be vetted and included in the development of a SBRM. Mr. Hood indicated that a number of potentially relevant data streams, including those provided by state agencies, could be identified during the characterization portion of the SBRM development process and considered for inclusion. The Committee stated that focused examination should be given to aspects of a fishery where uncertainty in bycatch estimates is particularly high when considering any additional regulations associated with the SBRM development.

Other Business

Update on Red Snapper Dead Discards Counted Against Recreational and Commercial ACLs

The Committee inquired about the status of a request made during the October 2020 meeting relative to the inclusion of recreational and commercial discards when accounting for the annual catch limits (ACLs). Specifically, in the eastern states where federal surveys are conducted, the Committee inquired about how discards are tracked against the recreational and commercial ACLs and how these discards are considered during stock assessments.

Dr. Porch of the SEFSC indicated that for the recreational sector, B1 fish, which are fish that were kept but not observed by the NMFS¹ samplers, are combined with landed (A) fish in the assessment. Accordingly, the resulting ABC and ACL implicitly include the A+B1 category, and monitoring should be consistent with that. He further noted that a category similar to B1 does not exist for the commercial sector because the observer is on board during the harvesting process. Dr. Porch also stated that he would double check with his staff and provide more information during full Council.

Mr. Strelcheck confirmed that B1 fish, which are fish harvested but not observed, are used to monitor against the ACL. He then noted that B1 fish typically account for a very small amount of the landed catch. Mr. Strelcheck also noted that release mortality associated a proportion of B2 fish (released fish) are taken off the top when determining the ACL and they are not included in ACL monitoring.

Subsequently, Dr. Porch confirmed that there is no equivalent to B1 fish in the commercial fishery. All harvested fish on observed trips are seen. Fish that are reported as discarded dead are included with the overall discards because they were seen going over the side. Thus, for the commercial fishery, the ACL and monitoring consider only landings.

The Committee asked whether the update on discards would be available by the next meeting. Dr. Simmons indicated that staff is planning to provide this information during the April 2021 Council meeting.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

¹ After the Council finished discussing the report, Dr. Porch indicated that the reference to NMFS should be changed to Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP).