

**Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report**  
**November 30, 2020**  
**Mr. Dale Diaz, Chair**

The Committee Chair proposed a reordering of agenda items to ensure that Amendment Reef Fish 48/Red Drum 5 will be discussed. The Chair also noted that, following the aquaculture presentation, staff will discuss a motion made by the Shrimp AP. With modifications, the Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab E, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab E, No. 2**) of the October 2020 meeting as written.

***NOAA Update on Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (Tab E, No. 4)***

Drs. Jess Beck-Stimpert and Ken Riley of NOAA Fisheries gave a presentation on aquaculture opportunity areas (AOAs). Dr. Beck-Stimpert indicated that federal waters off Southern California and in the Gulf of Mexico were selected for the evaluation and development of the first AOAs. She discussed the steps planned during the first year and discussed the public process for AOAs. She reiterated that AOAs do not exempt aquaculture operations from applicable regulations and permitting requirements.

Dr. Ken Riley discussed spatial planning for AOAs and the preliminary data, tools and, technology used in planning and siting analyses of AOA. He provided a suitability model example and discussed the scoring of various site attributes. He discussed the overall suitability of the four study areas within the Gulf of Mexico. He indicated that the final step would include the publication of an atlas of potential AOAs. Dr. Beck-Stimpert discussed an ongoing request for information and noted that a listening session is scheduled December 3<sup>rd</sup> at noon eastern time. She also indicated that the public comment period ends December 22, 2020.

Committee members noted that more information on how reef fish VMS and shrimp effort data are used and how scores are developed would be helpful. Dr. Riley indicated they are working closely with the Galveston lab and that shrimp effort data from 2004 to present are included in suitability analyses. In response to a Committee question, Dr. Beck-Stimpert noted that AOAs do not prevent other activities. Staff noted that the Shrimp AP unanimously approved a motion requesting to be engaged in the AOA process. The Committee recommended that the Shrimp AP receive a presentation on AOAs.

***Final Action Amendment Reef Fish 48/Red Drum 5: Status Determination Criteria and Optimum Yield for Reef Fish and Red Drum (Tab E, No. 6)***

Council staff reviewed the public comments received for the Reef Fish48/Red Drum 5 Amendment. Some comments indicated that additional approaches to estimate maximum sustainable yield (MSY) or serve as an MSY proxy should be investigated, other than spawning potential ratio for unassessed stocks. Other comments indicated a preference for biologically conservative reference points. Council staff reviewed the preferred alternatives for each action and reviewed the Scientific and Statistical Committee's recommendations and the Council's rationale for the preferred alternatives including previous deliberations about earlier versions of the document.

For Action 1, setting the MSY proxy at  $F_{30\%SPR}$  for all stock complexes (Preferred Alternative 2) and  $F_{40\%SPR}$  for goliath grouper (Preferred Alternative 3) was consistent for assessed species. Defining an escapement based MSY for red drum in Preferred Option 4a would remain consistent with current red drum management practices. The Council reviewed Preferred Alternative 5 which would allow the Council to modify the MSY or MSY proxy for a stock in the future based on a Scientific and Statistical Committee recommendation by noting the change in a plan amendment. The Committee reviewed Action 2 including preferred Alternative 2 that would set the maximum fishing mortality threshold equal to the fishing mortality at the MSY proxy for each stock or stock complex as determined in Action 1. Next, the Committee reviewed Action 3 including preferred Alternative 3 which defines minimum stock size threshold (MSST) as  $0.75 * B_{MSY}$  (or proxy). The Committee reviewed preferred Alternative 5 that would establish the MSST in the Gulf for four jointly managed stocks across the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils' jurisdictions. Action 4.1 defines optimum yield (OY) for reef fish stocks included in Action 1 and hogfish, while Action 4.2 would retain the OY definition for red drum. The Committee reviewed the preferred alternatives but made no changes to the document.

Council staff explained that implementation of this document will not require rulemaking and thus, codified text is not necessary. Ms. Mara Levy pointed out that if the document was approved at this meeting, it would define status determination criteria which could serve as a placeholder until an assessment could be completed for unassessed stocks. Several Committee members indicated that the document was complicated, affected most managed species, and advocated for continued discussion at the January Council meeting. The Committee decided to postpone further discussion of the document until full Council.

***Treatment of Dead Discards by the SEFSC in Stock Assessments (Tab E, No. 5)***

The Committee deferred discussion of this agenda item until full Council.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.