

Reef Fish Committee Report January 25, 2022 Dr. Thomas Frazer – Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab B, No. 1**) with the addition of two discussion items: (1) timeline for the red snapper data calibration framework action, and (2) settlement agreement between the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the State of Texas with regard to the state's private recreational red snapper season in 2019. The minutes (**Tab B, No. 2**) from the October 2021 meeting were approved as written. Committee members asked that more time be provided to the Committee to review materials whenever possible.

Review of Reef Fish Landings (Tab B, No. 4a) and Review of Reef Fish ACL Figures (Tab B, No. 4b)

Ms. Kelli O'Donnell (NMFS Southeast Regional Office [SERO]) reviewed commercial and recreational Gulf reef fish landings for 2021, which are preliminary. A Committee member asked about the private recreational landings for red snapper, and when those data would be available for review by the Committee. Dr. Michael Larkin (SERO) replied that the recreational for-hire landings are on the SERO ACL Monitoring webpage. The private recreational landings are provided by the states, and are typically made available to the Council in April 2022. A Committee member asked that current private recreational landings for red snapper be updated by the states at every Council meeting.

FINAL ACTION: Framework Action: Modification of Gulf of Mexico Vermilion Snapper Catch Limits (Tab B, No. 5)

Council staff summarized public comments received. Comments in support of no action indicated that the vermilion snapper stock may not be healthy enough to support a quota increase and that the decline in commercial landings suggests there is no need to increase the annual catch limit (ACL). Comments supporting an ACL increase noted that vermilion snapper is one of the few fish that can be harvested year-round by private anglers.

Council staff summarized recommendations made by the Reef Fish Advisory Panel (AP) during its January 5-6, 2022 meeting. Ed Walker, chair of the AP, noted that AP members discussed the conversion of recreational data from MRIP-CHTS to MRIP-FES units and expressed their concern relative to the magnitude of the proposed ACL increase. The AP approved a motion to recommend the Council create an Alternative 4 to set the ACL at 75% of the ABC (5.45 million pounds whole weight) monitored in MRIP-FES.

Council Staff discussed management alternatives included in the framework action to modify the overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), and ACL for vermilion snapper. Staff indicated that Alternative 1 is not viable because the catch levels do not represent the best scientific information available. Staff noted that the Council's Preferred Alternative 2 would

modify the OFL, ABC, and ACL based on the recommendation of the SSC for a constant catch yield for 2021 to 2025. The OFL, ABC, and ACL under consideration are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. OFL, ABC, and ACL included in the framework action or proposed by the Reef Fish AP (pounds whole weight).

Alternative/Option	OFL	ABC	ACL
Alternative 1 (MRIP-CHTS) Not Viable	3,580,000	3,110,000	3,110,000
Preferred Alternative 2 (MRIP-FES)	8,600,000	7,270,000	7,270,000
Alternative 3 (MRIP-FES)	8,600,000	7,270,000	6,615,700
AP Motion (MRIP-FES)	8,600,000	7,270,000	5,452,500

Committee members inquired about the magnitude of the difference between the status quo ACL and the other alternatives. Staff indicated that the difference can be explained by the conversion of recreational landings from MRIP-CHTS to MRIP-FES and of the exceptionally high recruitment recorded in recent years. Committee members noted that public comments and AP recommendations would suggest a more conservative approach to setting the ACL. The Committee made the following motion:

The Committee recommends, and I so move, in **Action 1, to add an Alternative 4. Alternative 4: to set the ACL at 75% of the ABC (5.45 mp ww) monitored in MRIP-FES.**

Motion carried without opposition.

Committee members asked whether the addition of a new alternative would preclude the Council from taking final action. Ms. Katherine Zamboni indicated that the Council could proceed and take final action, but recommended giving the public an opportunity to provide comments on a revised document. Committee members noted that the Council has set aside time for public comment later this week.

Ms. Zamboni reviewed the codified text and noted that it would be modified if the Council changes its preferred alternative. Dr. Frazer indicated the vermilion snapper issue will be revisited during full Council. The Council will then have the opportunity to reconsider its preferred alternative and recommend the framework action to be transmitted for approval, if warranted.

Presentation on SEDAR 70: Greater Amberjack Revised Projections (Tab B, No. 6)

Dr. Jim Nance (Chair, Scientific and Statistical Committee [SSC]) described the SSC's review of the revised projections for Gulf greater amberjack, which are based on a revised projections code. This revision improves forecasting and allows for the consideration of a variety of sector allocation scenarios. At its November 2021 meeting, the SSC reviewed two model corrections, followed by projections considerate of the allocation scenarios proposed by the Council. These sector allocation-specific projections still aim to rebuild the greater amberjack stock by 2027, commensurate with the current rebuilding plan. Dr. Nance reminded the Committee that the recent recruitment (2009 – 2018) is approximately half that of the long-term average. Collectively, the differences between the Council's proposed allocation scenarios resulted in yield projections that differed from one another by 5% or less. The SSC ultimately determined that the new projection method used to determine the sector allocation-specific projections was in keeping with the best scientific information available, and that the stock was still overfished and undergoing overfishing. The SSC also recommended that the OFL be set as the yield at the fishing mortality rate corresponding to the spawning potential ratio of 30% ($F_{30\%SPR}$), and the ABC be set as the yield at the fishing mortality rate to rebuild the stock by 2027 ($F_{Rebuild}$).

Council staff reviewed the Reef Fish AP's recommendations with respect to greater amberjack. The Reef Fish AP was concerned about the differences in discards between sectors, and between the fleets within those sectors, for all mixed-use fisheries. Further, the Reef Fish AP recommended adopting the recommendations from the SSC, and thought it best to not change anything else about the management of greater amberjack for at least three years. Captain Walker noted that the Reef Fish AP agreed that the greater amberjack stock was depleted, and that measures were necessary to constrain fishing mortality to help rebuild the stock. A Committee member asked whether the Reef Fish AP thought there was less of a problem with the stock in the western Gulf than in the eastern Gulf. Captain Walker replied that he could not recall the AP identifying such a difference between the eastern and western Gulf.

A Committee member recalled the current commercial trip limit and step down for greater amberjack, and thought it worthwhile to reconsider that management measure as a function of the proposed modifications to the greater amberjack rebuilding plan. Another Committee member noted the value in analyzing and discussing the discard data by fleet, and recalled the same discussion by the Reef Fish AP.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to request that the SEFSC compile and present discard data (including dead discards) by species and sector and year for red grouper, gag grouper, greater amberjack, and red snapper in the Gulf. Commercial data should be broken down by gear type (longline, vertical line) and recreational sector data should be broken down by subsector (charter for-hire, headboat, private angler+shore), as feasible. Include data sources where available.

Motion carried without opposition.

A Committee member recalled that the current fishing season for greater amberjack begins on August 1, which occurs in the middle of MRIP wave 4 (July and August). They asked that any modifications to fishing seasons considered in the document account for how the recreational data are collected.

A Committee member discussed adopting the Reef Fish AP's recommendation for revising the rebuilding plan for greater amberjack. Council staff reminded the Committee that there were significant reductions in catch proposed, and that other management measures were likely necessary to constrain fishing mortality. A Committee member thought that discussions would be necessary to evaluate whether it would be appropriate or not to retain the current sector allocation. Captain Walker replied that the Reef Fish AP thought it best to avoid changing management of greater amberjack, which has been subject to considerable management bias due to several changes over the last several years.

A Committee member asked why the Committee was not discussing the proposed allocation scenarios as part of a plan amendment to amend the current rebuilding plan. Another Committee member recounted the change in the projection code between the SSC's January and November 2021 meetings; the projections from the latter use the updated code, and reflect the SSC's determination of BSIA. Staff were directed to revise the current rebuilding plan in January 2021; however, work was delayed on that plan amendment until model corrections could be completed by the SEFSC and new projections generated and reviewed by the SSC in November 2021. Thus, the data the Council had available to it in January 2021 to start the work on amending the rebuilding plan are no longer valid. In effect, the data reviewed by the SSC in November 2021 and by the Committee at this meeting constitute a new starting point on the information available to the Council to revise the greater amberjack rebuilding plan. A Committee member thought that, based on the new data provided to the SSC and the Committee, that work could restart on amending the rebuilding plan. Another Committee member commented on the time likely required to deliberate multiple allocation scenarios, considerate of the stock's present depleted condition.

Presentation on SEDAR 72: Gag Grouper Stock Assessment Report (Tab B, No. 7)

Dr. Nance provided an overview of SSC deliberations about the SEDAR 72 projections for gag grouper. SEDAR 72 incorporated MRIP-FES recreational landings, updated data inclusions, adjustments to fleet selectivities, red tide analyses, and model variability. The SSC reviewed the assessment at its September 2021 meeting, and evaluated the projections at its November 2021 meeting, at which time it determined that the stock was overfished and undergoing overfishing as of 2019. The SSC also reviewed the proxy for F_{MSY} , which is currently set at maximum fishing mortality (F_{MAX}). Dr. Nance commented that this proxy is more appropriate when no sperm limitation is assumed in the spawning stock; however, this assumption is not supported by contemporary science for gag grouper due to the low proportion of males in the stock. Thus, the SSC is recommending the adoption of a revised F_{MSY} proxy of $F_{30\%SPR}$. This is also in part due to the F_{MAX} proxy corresponding to a SPR of approximately 13%, well below the proposed alternative of 30%, and likely not to the long-term benefit of the gag grouper stock.

Dr. Nance also discussed the application of the Ecospace model, which considered variable red tide severity levels for gag grouper due to the 2021 red tide episodic mortality event on the west Florida shelf. The SSC determined that the medium severity estimate from Ecospace for the 2021 red tide event was most appropriate for gag grouper.

Altogether, the SSC determined that F_{MAX} for gag grouper is no longer appropriate for use as a proxy for MSY, and recommended that $F_{30\%SPR}$ be the MSY proxy and the basis for status determination criteria. The SSC also recommended that projections based on $F_{30\%SPR}$, and the “medium” red tide scenario, be used to establish OFL, ABC, and rebuilding schedules.

Dr. Nance walked the Committee through the different rebuilding schedules under $F_{30\%SPR}$, based on the options for the amount of time used to rebuild the gag grouper stock. Because the minimum time to rebuild the stock under zero fishing pressure (T_{MIN}) is greater than 10 years (12 years), there are three options available to the Council for determining the time to rebuild, respective of biological, social, and economic considerations: $F_{Rebuild}$ at 75% of the maximum fishing mortality threshold (18 years), T_{MIN} plus one generation time (21 years), and $T_{MIN} * 2$ (23 years). Council staff noted that the Reef Fish AP recommended using the Florida State Reef Fish Survey data in SEDAR 72 before making any management changes to gag grouper, and not closing the fishery to preserve the collection of fishery-dependent data. The Reef Fish AP also recommended adoption of the longest rebuilding timeline, or $T_{MIN} * 2$, and agreed with the estimation of the medium red tide severity level from the Ecospace model. SERO stated that when the Council is notified that a stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing, the Council has two years to implement measures to end overfishing, and a rebuilding plan to rebuild the stock. The Council has a pending request to the SEFSC to use the State of Florida’s State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS) in a complete model run with diagnostics for SEDAR 72, in place of MRIP-FES, for recreational landings; however, that request does not offset this two-year requirement. Thus, the Council will need to end overfishing with a rebuilding plan to rebuild the stock in the interim.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, that the Council direct staff to begin work on a plan amendment to establish a rebuilding plan for gag grouper to end overfishing of the stock. Actions in this plan amendment should include revising the F_{MSY} proxy, catch limits, accountability measures, and other management measures.

Motion carried without opposition.

A Committee member noted the immediate need to end overfishing, and discussed requesting an interim emergency rule to end overfishing effective January 1, 2023. SERO staff replied that there was still time in 2022 for the Council to act, and that an emergency rule may not be needed at this time. The Committee member recounted that the commercial gag grouper fishery was managed under an individual fishing quota (IFQ) program, and it was imperative to have measures in place before the start of the 2023 fishing season. SERO questioned the types of management measures that would be considered as part of such a rule to constrain fishing mortality. A Committee member noted that the catch limits would be higher under the longer

rebuilding timeline ($T_{\text{MIN}} * 2$), and asked whether using that approach as part of an emergency or interim rule would thereby predetermine that timeline for use in the rebuilding plan.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, **to recommend that the Council recommend that NMFS implement an emergency rule for gag grouper starting on January 1, 2023, based on the yield stream corresponding to $F_{30\%SPR}$ and the medium red tide severity determination, in keeping with the SSC's recommendations from SEDAR 72 and using the current sector allocation. Further, the Council recommends that the catch limits for this emergency rule for gag grouper be based on the rebuilding timeline of $T_{\text{MIN}} * 2$, to ensure the Council is able to end overfishing while it works to develop a comprehensive rebuilding plan.**

Motion carried with one opposed.

A Committee member discussed the likelihood that MRIP would be sufficient to manage recreational landings, and the sorts of measures necessary to constrain fishing mortality to prevent exceeding the catch limits. Another Committee member described the brief and urgent nature of emergency rules, and thought that more novel management approaches may be best explored as part of a plan amendment. A Committee member agreed with respect to keeping any interim or emergency rule as streamlined as possible to expedite its implementation. With respect to accountability measures, NMFS would close the fishery (recreational or commercial) when the sector ACL is projected to be met.

A Committee member recalled the Council's previous motion from October 2021 to request a complete model run for SEDAR 72 using SRFS, and noted the Reef Fish AP's agreement with this approach at its January 2022 meeting. A Committee member was concerned about the precedent set by using a state-specific data collection program in place of the federal data collection program, and suggested establishing requirements for the use of state survey data for federal management advice. SEFSC outlined the timeline for evaluating the SRFS calibration, which is expected to occur after the February 2022 meeting of the MRIP Transition Team. SEFSC thought this process could take 4 – 6 months after that meeting after which, if the calibration is approved, SEFSC's work on the SRFS run of SEDAR 72 could begin and would be expected to take approximately two months.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, **that the Council requests that the calibration of the Florida State Reef Fish Survey with MRIP-FES for gag grouper be a priority for NMFS and all associated parties to that process.**

Motion carried without opposition.

Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Programs (Tab B, No. 8)

Staff reviewed the application process and membership positions for the IFQ Focus Group. The Committee discussed the process for returning recommendations from the IFQ Focus Group and

indicated that recommendations should be brought to the Council first. The Council would then decide whether or not to forward the recommendations for further review by other groups such as the IFQ Advisory Panel or SSC. Committee members also indicated support for an initial meeting of two full days duration, and for the IFQ Focus Group to be convened for two meetings. Committee members indicated general approval of the proposed timeline, while recognizing the need for flexibility. A Committee member reminded the Committee of the plan for the IFQ Focus Group to address changes to the programs more broadly, such as by identifying pros and cons of potential modifications to program features, rather than providing prescriptive changes that are approved through motions.

Discussion: Draft Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 and Reef Fish Amendment 55: Modifications to Southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper Jurisdictional Allocations, Catch Limits, and South Atlantic Sector Annual Catch Limits (Tab B, No. 9)

Council staff reviewed the status of Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 / Reef Fish Amendment 55, which is a joint amendment to both fishery management plans for the Councils' management of southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper. The yellowtail snapper stock was found to be healthy during the Councils' SSC review of SEDAR 64, which used data through 2017 and incorporated recreational catch and effort data from MRIP-FES. At its December 2021 meeting, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) discussed the age of the projections, acknowledging that the proposed catch limits would likely not take effect until 2023, or when the projections were six years old. The SSCs of both Councils routinely recommend against using projections beyond five years. Considerate of this, the South Atlantic Council requested that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) update the SEDAR 64 stock assessment with data through 2020. Updating the SEDAR 64 stock assessment is expected to result in some delays to the southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and West Florida hogfish stock assessments, as the same analyst is responsible for all three assessments. Council staff clarified that they were developing terms of reference for the proposed update stock assessment with South Atlantic Council staff and FWRI in preparation for an update.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, **to suspend work on this amendment and request that Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission conduct an update to the assessment to incorporate three additional years of data and a constant catch projection to set the ABC.**

Motion carried without opposition.

Discussion: Wenchman in the Gulf of Mexico (Tab B, No. 10)

SERO staff presented the landings history of wenchman in the Gulf for the last 20 years, and reviewed the management history for the stock from the Council's Generic Annual Catch Limits (ACL) and Accountability Measures Amendment (2011). In October 2021, the Council learned of substantial commercial landings of wenchman from the northern Gulf, which may have contributed to the mid-water snapper stock ACL being exceeded. Also, at its October 2021

meeting, the Council requested that Council and SERO staff begin work on an amendment to update the catch limits for data-poor species; work is expected to begin on this amendment as Council priorities allow.

SERO staff noted that wenchman are part of the Council's midwater snappers complex with silk snapper, blackfin snapper, and queen snapper. Most landings for the complex are attributable to the commercial sector. Combined sector landings exceeded the stock ACL in 2020; a quota closure was implemented in 2021, during which the ACL was also exceeded. The 2021 midwater snapper complex landings were primarily composed of commercial wenchman landings from the northern Gulf. Recreational landings of wenchman are generally less than 300 lbs ww annually. Most commercial landings generally occur in summer months, and can be landed with longline, handline, bandit gear, rod and reel, buoy gear, spear, powerhead, cast nets, and trawls.

Management of the midwater snapper was established in 2011 as part of the Generic ACL/AM Amendment, with the catch limits (OFL = 209,000 lbs ww; ABC/ACL = 166,000 lbs ww; ACT = 136,000 lbs ww) established using the average landings from 2000 – 2008. Staff described what age and length composition data are known for the stock; however, wenchman are considered data-poor, and were not able to be assessed as part of the last data-poor stock assessment (SEDAR 49 2016).

Council staff asked about the plans by NMFS and NOAA Office of Science and Technology for calibrating recreational landings data for the midwater snapper and jacks complexes. SEFSC replied that it would need to confer with the NOAA Office of Science and Technology about that process, and added that it had no viable fishery-independent data for wenchman. All available data are directly from the fisheries, meaning that there are only limited analyses of the stock that can be performed. A Committee member thought it important to learn as much as possible about the stock, given the magnitude of landings attributed to the commercial sector and requested the SSC examine the landings and effort for wenchman and provide a recommendation to the Council about potential future yields for the stock.

Review of Revised Great Red Snapper Count Estimates and SSC Recommendations for Re-evaluating Red Snapper Catch Advice (Tab B, No. 11)

Dr. Nance reviewed the SSC's deliberations of the new data relevant to red snapper and the GRSC, including revised estimates of absolute abundance, a framework for post-stratification of Florida nearshore depth stratum, updated fishery-independent indices of relative abundance, and a review of fishing effort over uncharacterized bottom (UCB). The initial estimate presented to the SSC in March/April 2021 was 110 million age-2+ red snapper. This estimate was revised in June 2021 following the removal of the random forest sample selection for Florida and the addressing of peer-review comments, resulting in an estimate of 118 million fish. In September 2021, a third estimate of 96.7 million fish was presented, which included the random forest sample selection for Florida and the peer-reviewer comments. Concurrently, a validation analysis of 92 million fish was also presented in September 2021. The SSC ultimately recommended that the SEFSC use the 96.7 million fish estimate for catch analyses to be

considered at the SSC's March 2022 meeting to enable the SSC to consider new management advice for OFL and ABC. Dr. Greg Stunz (principal investigator for the GRSC) added that the GRSC study is completed, and cautioned against deviations from the original study design at the risk of violating statistical design assumptions. He added that the 92 million fish estimate is not an official estimate; rather, that estimate was simply a validation run from the 96.7 million fish estimate to ensure the results converged near the base estimate under the conditions for that run. Dr. Stunz noted that further estimates of absolute abundance using the GRSC data would require an analytical team to be identified to complete that future work, if any.

Dr. Nance discussed work by the SEFSC, FWC, and some GRSC principal investigators on the post-stratification of Florida nearshore depth stratum. The GRSC estimated that a large proportion of red snapper in Florida occur in the Big Bend region, between 10-40 meters; however, SEFSC and FWC surveys and landings data do not estimate the same abundance of red snapper therein. SEFSC and others are interested in re-analyzing those data in smaller depth bins (e.g., 10-25m, 25-40m). The SSC requested that the SEFSC proceed with the post-stratification analysis of the Gulf shallow water stratum (10-40 meters, per the GRSC) where possible, and present the results at the March 2022 SSC meeting along with a second catch analysis incorporating these post-stratification results.

Dr. Nance then reviewed the updated fishery-independent indices of relative abundance, including the SEAMAP and FWRI video survey catch-per-unit-effort data, and the NMFS Bottom Longline survey data. These indices are suggestive of decreases in estimates of relative abundance of red snapper in the last few years in the eastern Gulf, with the NMFS Bottom Longline survey showing an increase in the western Gulf. The SSC's review of fishing effort over UCB was also evaluated, which used a spatial mapping study, VMS data, and recreational effort data from the Gulf states to estimate fishing effort over UCB. The SSC thought the spatial mapping study may be too dated; red snapper distribution and abundance has likely changed since 2011, and the spatial mapping study is likely not directly comparable to the GRSC. Commercial harvest was estimated to be split 54% over natural bottom and 46% from artificial structures. Recreational effort was measured using distance from the nearest pass, depth, and region for all Gulf states for 2019. Less than 50% of total biomass was estimated as vulnerable to fishing off Florida, Louisiana, and Texas, while over 80% was estimated as vulnerable off Alabama and Mississippi. SEFSC estimates the total proportion of red snapper biomass vulnerable to fishing to be 37.6%. The SSC encouraged the SEFSC to analyze how catch level increases could impact different fishing sectors, with respect to the ability to redistribute fishing effort according to localized abundance and depletion patterns. If sufficient social and economic data are not available for these analyses, the SSC encouraged the SEFSC to identify specific data gaps and needs for assessing the impacts of changes in catch limits. Lastly, the SSC requested the SEFSC catch analysis of the OFL look at the following scenarios: all structure; all structure +10% UCB; all structure +15% UCB; and, incorporation of two key uncertainties regarding (A) the total biomass that might be accessible to the fishery, and (B) potential impacts to the stock from localized fishing.

A Committee member asked about the SSC's request for SEFSC to analyze how catch level increases could impact different fishing sectors, with respect to the ability to redistribute fishing effort according to localized abundance and depletion patterns. Dr. Nance replied that the SSC

was interested in the effects of redistributed fishing effort as the stock is exploited. Council staff added that the SSC was also interested in the effects of redistributed fishing effort as areas of known exploitation are fished and fish densities in those areas are potentially depleted, and the possible concurrent social and economic effects related to that exploitation. A Committee member asked about the intended use of the GRSC data with respect to establishing future red snapper catch limits. Another Committee member noted that the GRSC was used in the establishment of a revised OFL in a framework action transmitted to NMFS in 2021, and will be considered again for revising catch limits by the SSC in March 2022.

A Committee member asked who requested the post-stratification work for Florida and convened the group of scientists working on that question. SEFSC replied that such analyses were germane to the continued investigation of the data and analyses for scientific research. The Committee member asked whether the work performed by SEFSC undergoes the same level of scrutiny. SEFSC replied that the stock assessment products, and especially the red snapper stock assessment, undergo similar levels of scrutiny. A Committee member commended the GRSC team on their completion of a rigorous peer-review, and for their continued dedication to furthering the understanding of red snapper in the Gulf, which will aid in creating reliable management advice.

Discussion of Remaining SSC Recommendations from the November 2021 & January 2022 SSC Meetings (Tab B, No. 12)

Dr. Nance noted that the last item from the SSC's January 2022 meeting, a discussion of the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology, will be covered during the Sustainable Fisheries Committee meeting on Wednesday, January 26, 2022.

Discussion of Remaining Reef Fish AP Recommendations from the January 2022 Reef Fish AP Meeting (Tab B, No. 13)

In discussing the SEFHIER program, the Reef Fish AP, in agreement with the Data Collection AP, recommended the Council take whatever necessary action to work with NMFS to revise the SEFHIER program to allow vessels to move within a predefined demarcation line without declaring. This recommendation was discussed by the Data Collection Committee.

With regard to leasing federal commercial fishing permits, the Reef Fish AP recommended that the Council initiate an action to allow the leasing of federal commercial fishery permits from one entity/vessel owner, directly to another entity/vessel owner. The Reef Fish AP also discussed the modification of the commercial gray triggerfish trip limit, and recommended increasing the federal commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to between 32 and 40 fish per trip to increase the probability of the commercial sector catching the commercial ACL. Lastly, considerate of advances in mobile application-based data collection systems, the Reef Fish AP recommended the Council establish a real-time data collection system for the private recreational sector and have it implemented in a mandatory way within the next three years.

Other Business

Discussion about the Timeline for the 2021 Red Snapper Data Calibration Framework Action

Discussion of this item was moved to Full Council.

Discussion about the Settlement between NMFS and the State of Texas on Texas' Private Angling Red Snapper Season in 2019

The SERO provided a summary of a recent settlement agreement between NMFS and the State of Texas related to a complaint filed by Texas with regard to the NMFS estimation of the overage of its private angling component red snapper ACL. In brief, NMFS agreed to use Texas' 2019 and 2020 private angling component landings estimates to determine paybacks for its 2020 and 2021 seasons. Also, Texas agreed to dismiss its complaint, provide more timely landings estimates to NMFS, close its state waters to red snapper harvest when its portion of the private angling component ACL is met, and to use a revised estimation method for determining Texas' private recreational red snapper landings for 2021 and subsequent fishing years.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.